

U.S. & Texas Constitutions and Institutions

PSCI 2306.404 – Spring 2026

- Instructor:** Dr. Gabriela Okundaye
Last name pronounced (“oh-kun-die”)
- Contact:** Please use Canvas Messaging (Use this method only)
Messages received M – Th will receive a response within 24 hours.
Messages received F – Sunday may take additional time.
- Teaching Assistant(s)
(Contact first)** Rose Benton - Use Canvas Messaging (Use this method only)
- Office Hours:** By appointment (Use link below to sign up)
<https://calendly.com/gabriela-okundaye-unt/30min>
- Class Meets:** Online and asynchronous format.

Course Summary and Objectives:

This course, one of two required American politics courses required by the State of Texas, considers the origins and content of the U.S. and Texas Constitutions; the structure and function of the branches of government at the national and state levels; and some of the foundational principles that define U.S. politics, namely federalism, separation of powers, civil rights, and civil liberties.

As you begin this course, you should keep two things in mind:

1. Government matters to you. Regardless of your age, citizenship, race, religion, or gender identity, you value something in this world (your family, your education, money, faith ... whatever!). Chances are very good that government policy affects those things you value in some way. For example, if you value education, government policy helps determine how you are educated in K-12, the availability and accessibility of higher education, and what rights you have as a student. If you want to protect the things you value, you need to understand what the government does, why the government does what it does, and what you (as a member of this community) can do to affect government policy.

2. Rules matter. Institutional structure and the rules by which they operate shape the outcomes of the governmental process. This class will introduce you to the institutions of government, the logic behind their structure and operation, and the rules that constrain their behavior (with particular emphasis on the U.S. and Texas constitutions).

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to

1. Describe the structure and powers of the three branches of government (both national and Texas);
2. Explain the division of power between those branches (separation of powers) as well as the division of power between the national and state governments (federalism);
3. Explain the limits placed on the powers of the government;
4. Describe the role of compromise in creating our system of laws and institutions; and
5. Identify both strengths and weaknesses in the U.S. and Texas systems of government.

Required Course Materials:

The text required for this course is an electronic text:

U.S. and Texas Politics with 2306 Workbook
ISBN: 978-1-954890-94-7

There are two ways to purchase this textbook:

1. You can purchase an access code from the UNT Bookstore (either in person or via mail). The cost for purchase via the UNT Bookstore is \$112.50.
2. You can purchase the textbook directly from the publisher via a link in our Canvas shell. The cost for purchase via Soomo Publishing is \$78.75.

Class Format:

Every week, you will do the following:

1. Read a chapter of our webtext and answer the questions embedded in that chapter. TOTAL ESTIMATED TIME: 1 hour
2. Consolidate, synthesize, and rewrite your notes on this content. TOTAL ESTIMATED TIME: 1 hour
3. Review your notes and complete the weekly quiz. TOTAL ESTIMATED TIME: 1 hour

That totals approximately 3 hours of work per week. If you know you read more slowly, or if you need to listen to lecture content/lecture from the webtext more than once to take good notes, allow yourself an extra hour per week.

Grading:

Your grade will be based on the following components:

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| Webtext Chapters (19) | 40% |
| Chapter/Module Quizzes (13) | 30% |
| Syllabus Quiz | 15% |
| Final Exam | 15% |
| | 100% total |

Grades will be based on the usual scale (90% += A, 80% += B, 70% += C, 60% += D, below 60% = F). I use standard mathematical rounding with respect to your final point total, but will not otherwise manipulate grades. **There is no extra credit in this class, as assignments give you multiple attempts to complete them to a grade of your satisfaction.**

Course Assignments

Syllabus Quiz

The first assignment that will be due during the first two weeks and second Friday of class is the syllabus quiz. It is imperative that you read through the syllabus thoroughly a few times before you take the syllabus quiz as you can only take the syllabus quiz one time and I will not reopen it if you do not take it by the designated Friday.

This quiz will count for 15% of your total grade.

Webtext Chapters

Your textbook (web text) has questions embedded within the chapters. Most of these questions can be repeated if you get them wrong the first time; the goal is for you to learn from these assignments, so if you miss a question, think about *why* you missed it and try again. Note, however, that some questions can only be answered once. **Please pay attention as you complete the chapters. Investigations can be completed twice, and the rest can be completed multiple times until you are satisfied with the grade.**

There are 19 web text chapters (the lowest three grades are dropped at the end of the semester) that are collectively worth 40% of your grade.

Quizzes

The applicable chapters will have a quiz that covers the web text. All questions are “objective” questions (multiple-choice, multiple-answer, fill-in-the-blank, matching, etc.). Each quiz has 15 questions, and you have 15 minutes to complete it. Please note that you can only move forward within the quiz; after you move from Question 1 to Question 2, you cannot return to Question 1.

You are welcome to use your notes as you take the quizzes. However, you will not have time to look up every answer. That means you have to have notes, and you have to review them before you take the quiz. Do **NOT** just wing it, you will be disappointed.

The quizzes are located within the Soomo webtext chapters as marked, which are collectively worth 30% of your grade.

Final Exam

You will take a cumulative final for this class during the final exam week. This exam will be online and you will not have to come to class to complete it. The cumulative final consists of 100 objective questions. It must be completed within 90 minutes, and you may only move forward in the exam. The final exam is worth 100 points and 15% of your final course grade. As with the quizzes, you may use your notes as you take the final exam, but I strongly encourage you to study before you take the final.

Important Policies:

Webtext chapters can be submitted late (any time before 11:59 PM on Fridays) for credit but those late webtext assignments incur a 50% late penalty.

For all other late assignments, please be aware that the lowest scores of three grades for the web text, quizzes, and in-class assignments will be dropped.

No other exceptions to our course calendar will be allowed.

There are no extensions for the final exam. The final exam **MUST** be completed no later than **11:59 PM on 05/06/2026** in order for me to submit grades by the university deadline.

Syllabus Change Policy

Under rare circumstances, it may be necessary to alter due dates or requirements as they are spelled out on this syllabus. All changes to the syllabus will be announced via an e-mail through the Canvas inbox e-mail system. Due dates will never be changed to an earlier date (changes will always involve an extension of time).

Respect for Race, Religion, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation

My class should be a safe place for all students, regardless of race, religion, gender identity, or sexual orientation. If I (or a classmate) do or say something that makes you feel disrespected or fearful, please speak up. I will not retaliate. Furthermore, if I use inappropriate pronouns when addressing you, please let me know. I am striving to use less gendered speech, but I sometimes forget. At a minimum, I would like to use the pronouns with which you are most comfortable. Finally, the University's registration system is not great at accounting for dead names for the

trans community. If I mistakenly call you by your dead name, please know that I mean no disrespect and feel free to correct me.

Texas Senate Bill 17

Texas Senate Bill 17, the recent law that outlaws diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at public colleges and universities in Texas, does not in any way affect content, instruction or discussion in a course at public colleges and universities in Texas. Expectations regarding academic freedom for teaching and class discussion have not been altered post-SB 17, and students should not feel the need to censor their speech pertaining to topics pertaining to race and racism, structural inequality, LGBTQ+ issues, or diversity, equity, and inclusion.

ADA Statement

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodations for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the [ODA website \(https://disability.unt.edu/\)](https://disability.unt.edu/).

Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation

The University of North Texas (UNT) prohibits discrimination and harassment because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law in its application and admission processes; educational programs and activities; employment policies, procedures, and processes; and university facilities. The University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate.

Academic Integrity Standards and Sanctions for Violations

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University. I take academic integrity very seriously, and I do not want you to think for one instant that cheating is an acceptable risk. Accordingly, if I determine that you have cheated on an assignment in this course, you will fail the class.

NOTE: “Cheating” is defined as “the use of unauthorized assistance in an academic exercise, including but not limited to:

1. use of any unauthorized assistance to take exams, tests, quizzes, or other assessments;
2. use of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments;
3. use, without permission, of tests, notes, or other academic materials belonging to instructors, staff members, or other students of the University;
4. dual submission of a paper or project, or resubmission of a paper or project to a different class without express permission from the instructor;
5. any other act designed to give a student an unfair advantage on an academic assignment.”

University Policy 06.003(III)(F).

IN THIS CLASS, you are allowed to use your own notes for assignments and exams. However, you are NOT allowed to use another student’s notes on your exams. Moreover, while AI is an integral part of our lives, you may NOT use a generative AI resource (such as ChatGPT) for exams, papers, or discussion board responses, and you are not allowed to have other individuals complete those assignments for you (whether you pay them or not). This is not arbitrary. The goal of these assignments is to evaluate your ability to integrate the content of the course and to use your newfound knowledge to solve novel problems. If ChatGPT answers the discussion board prompt or an employee of writemypaper.com writes your paper, I cannot evaluate your comprehension of the course material.

Acceptable Student Behavior

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor’s ability to conduct a class or other students’ opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. In an online course, denigration of the instructor or other students—whether in the course environment or in an external platform such as GroupMe—interferes with the instructor’s ability to conduct the class and other students’ opportunity to learn. Accordingly, the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student’s conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University’s expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including the online environment. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct.

Sexual Assault Prevention

UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Federal laws (Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act) and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, and therefore prohibit sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking, and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. UNT’s Survivor Advocates can assist a student who has been impacted by violence by filing protective orders, completing crime victim’s compensation applications, contacting professors for absences related

to an assault, working with housing to facilitate a room change where appropriate, and connecting students to other resources available both on and off campus. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-565- 2648. Additionally, alleged sexual misconduct can be non-confidentially reported to the Title IX Coordinator at oeo@unt.edu or at (940) 565 2759.

Emergency Notification and Procedures

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Blackboard for contingency plans for covering course materials.

Retention of Student Records

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about students' records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the University's policy.

Class Recordings & Student Likenesses

Synchronous (live) sessions in this course will be recorded for students enrolled in this class section to refer to throughout the semester. Class recordings are the intellectual property of the university or instructor and are reserved for use only by students in this class and only for educational purposes. Students may not post or otherwise share the recordings outside the class, or outside the Canvas Learning Management System, in any form. Failing to follow this restriction is a violation of the UNT Code of Student Conduct and could lead to disciplinary action.

Student Perceptions of Teaching Effectiveness (SPOT)

Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. The student evaluation of instruction is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. Students will receive an email from "UNT SPOT Course Evaluations via *IASystem* Notification" (no-reply@iasystem.org) with the survey link. Students should look for the email in their UNT email inbox. Simply click on the link and complete the survey. Once students complete the survey they will receive a confirmation email that the survey has been submitted. For additional information, please visit the spot website at www.spot.unt.edu or email spot@unt.edu.

Important Notice for F-1 Students Taking Distance Education Courses

The Regulation: To read detailed Immigration and Customs Enforcement regulations for F-1 students taking online courses, please go to the [Electronic Code of Federal Regulations website](http://www.ecfr.gov/) (<http://www.ecfr.gov/>). The specific portion concerning distance education courses is located at Title 8 CFR 214.2 Paragraph (f)(6)(i)(G). The paragraph reads:

(G) For F-1 students enrolled in classes for credit or classroom hours, no more than the equivalent of one class or three credits per session, term, semester, trimester, or quarter may be counted toward the full course of study requirement if the class is taken on-line or through distance education and does not require the student's physical attendance for classes, examination or other purposes integral to completion of the class. An on-line or distance education course is a course that is offered principally through the use of television, audio, or computer transmission including open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, or satellite, audio conferencing, or computer conferencing. If the F-1 student's course of study is in a language study program, no on-line or distance education classes may be considered to count toward a student's full course of study requirement.

UNT Compliance: To comply with immigration regulations, an F-1 visa holder within the United States may need to engage in an on-campus experiential component for this course. This component (which must be approved in advance by the instructor) can include activities such as taking an on-campus exam, participating in an on-campus lecture or lab activity, or other on-campus experience integral to the completion of this course.

If such an on-campus activity is required, it is the student's responsibility to do the following:

(1) Submit a written request to the instructor for an on-campus experiential component within one week of the start of the course.

(2) Ensure that the activity on campus takes place and the instructor documents it in writing with a notice sent to the International Student and Scholar Services Office. ISSS has a form available that you may use for this purpose.

Because the decision may have serious immigration consequences, if an F-1 student is unsure about his or her need to participate in an on-campus experiential component for this course, s/he should contact the UNT International Student and Scholar Services Office (telephone 940-565-2195 or email internationaladvising@unt.edu) to get clarification before the one-week deadline.

Student Verification: UNT takes measures to protect the integrity of educational credentials awarded to students enrolled in distance education courses by verifying student identity, protecting student privacy, and notifying students of any special meeting times/locations or additional charges associated with student identity verification in distance education courses.

See [UNT Policy 07-002 Student Identity Verification, Privacy, and Notification and Distance Education Courses](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/07-002) (<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/07-002>).

Course Schedule

| Week | Topic | Due Date |
|-----------|--|-------------------|
| Module 1 | Introduction 1 The Founding and the Constitution Syllabus Quiz Quiz 1 | 01/30 at 11:59 PM |
| Module 2 | 2 Texas: The Constitution Quiz 2 | 02/06 at 11:59 PM |
| Module 3 | 3 Workbook: The U.S. Constitution Quiz 3 | 02/13 at 11:59 PM |
| Module 4 | 4 Federalism Quiz 4 | 02/20 at 11:59 PM |
| Module 5 | 5 Workbook: Federalism Quiz 5 | 02/27 at 11:59 PM |
| Module 6 | 6 Congress Quiz 6 | 03/06 at 11:59 PM |
| Module 7 | 7 Workbook: Legislatures Quiz 7 | 03/20 at 11:59 PM |
| Module 8 | 8 The Presidency 9 Workbook: The Presidency Quiz 8 | 03/27 at 11:59 PM |
| Module 9 | 10 Texas: The Legislature 11 Texas: The Executive Branch Quiz 9 | 04/03 at 11:59 PM |
| Module 10 | 12 Bureaucracy 13 Workbook: Bureaucracy Quiz 10 | 04/10 at 11:59 PM |
| Module 11 | 14 The Judiciary 15 Workbook: The Courts Quiz 11 | 04/17 at 11:59 PM |
| Module 12 | Civil Liberties Workbook: Civil Liberties Quiz 12 | 04/24 at 11:59 PM |
| Module 13 | Civil Rights Workbook: Civil Rights Quiz 13 | 05/01 at 11:59 PM |
| Module 14 | FINAL EXAM | 05/06 at 11:59 PM |