

US Political Behavior and Policy

PSCI 2305.001

Spring 2026

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Class: TR 9:30-10:50a, Lyceum

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Course Overview

This course focuses on an introduction to the political behavior and public policies of American and Texas governments. We will examine policymaking within the American constitutional and federalist system, noting the important stages of policymaking. We will pay particular attention to the behavior of parties, interest groups, and the media as they connect the public and their policy preferences to policymakers in both American and Texas governments. We will also apply our understanding of American and Texas government to current events, topics, and public policies.

Course Learning Objectives and Outcomes

By the end of this course, students should be able to do each of the following:

- 1) Evaluate the role of public opinion, interest groups, and political parties in American and Texas politics.
- 2) Analyze national, state, and local election processes.
- 3) Analyze issues and policies in US and Texas politics.
- 4) Think critically and communicate effectively about the course topics.
- 5) Describe how course topics affect social and personal responsibility.

Required Reading: Soomo Webtext (The Workbook)

Course Grade Distribution

1. Syllabus quiz	5%
2. Letter to the Editor	10%
3. Workbook assignments	35%
4. Three exams	50%

Course Policies, Procedures, and Assignments

Grading: Grading will follow a standard scale: 90% is an A, 80% is a B, 70% is a C, and 60% is a D. *I do not change grades unless I make a computational error.* Moreover, I do not reveal grades via e-mail or phone and there are no opportunities for extra credit, except those announced by me in class. We often curve exam grades, and that grade is typically posted on Canvas within 48 hours after exam time. I will submit your final grades, for view at my.unt.edu, during finals week.

Communications: If you have any questions about the class, please see me during my office hours or schedule an appointment to see me. **E-mail directly to the address listed on the syllabus for the fastest response.** If you choose to message me in Canvas, please keep in mind that I do not check Canvas as often as email and my response will be delayed. You must see me in person to discuss any makeup exam.

If you do poorly on any of the assignments or exams, I advise you to see me or your TA as soon as possible. It is your responsibility to seek my help if you need it. Pleading for a higher grade after you complete all assignments and exams will not avail you!

Syllabus Quiz: The course syllabus contains information vital to your success in this class. To encourage you to learn it, your first assignment will be a syllabus quiz of 10 questions. You have until **January 22** to complete the syllabus quiz. **No late quizzes will be accepted.**

Exams: There are three exams for this course, and no comprehensive final exam. These exams will test your understanding of assigned workbook readings and lecture material. **Each exam is in-person** and is worth 16.67% of your grade. Each exam will ask 40 multiple-choice questions and cover only material since the previous exam. We will provide a scantron.

Exam Rules and Procedures:

- You have the entire class period to complete your exam.
- The exam will begin promptly at 9:30am. **Do not be late.** The first exam is finished in about 15 minutes. If you arrive after an exam is turned in, you will not be allowed to take the exam.
- All notes, phones, laptops, tablets, ear buds, and the like must not be accessible to you once you receive your exam. If these are accessible to you, this is grounds for academic misconduct.
- The exams will be graded and scores posted on Canvas by the following day.

Makeup Exams: The opportunity to take a makeup exam will be limited. **You must see me in person and in my office to request a makeup exam opportunity.** Although there is no guarantee of a makeup exam, all makeup exams (whether for exam 1, 2, or 3), will be given on one day only: April 30, 2026 at 9:30am in the Lyceum. This is a paper exam, with no notes allowed. It may be an essay exam. You will not be allowed to take more than one makeup exam. In addition, a makeup exam is not an exam “retake,” meaning that you are allowed only one attempt per exam. The score you earn on an exam you take is the score you receive.

Exam Preparation: The optimal way to succeed in this class is to attend class regularly, take good notes, and keep up with the workbook readings. The only assigned readings are in the workbook, and you will have access to these, your notes, and the powerpoints to help you study. Therefore, you

will have access to all possible questions that I may ask on the exam. It is up to you to take the time you need to be able to learn the material and demonstrate your mastery of it on the exams.

Workbook Assignments: The workbook chapters and exercises are designed to supplement the lecture notes. At times, we will discuss the material in class. To encourage you to work through the chapters before each exam, the assignments associated with each exam are due the day before each exam at 11:59p. Any chapters that you do not complete before this deadline will be considered late, and we will assign a 50 percent penalty for any assignments completed within one week after the due date (except for assignments associated with Exam 3). There are eight chapters and, therefore, eight grades. **We will drop your lowest chapter grade.** You will benefit by completing the assignments as we progress through the semester and according to the dates associated with each topic and workbook chapter. **We will not accept any workbook assignments after April 30.**

To receive credit for your answers, you must save, submit, and post them. Please double check that you do so. **You have only TWO chances to answer each multiple-choice question, so be sure you confirm your selection before you submit.**

You may purchase an access code from the bookstore, or you may buy access to the workbook online through the workbook 2305 course link on Canvas. There is a trial that will last for 30 days or 3 chapters. If you have any questions or issues, please contact your TA.

Letter to a Policymaker: This assignment encourages a practical form of writing whereby you identify an issue of importance to you and provide evidence in support of your position within the context of civic engagement in the U.S. political process. **Due by April 9**, you must:

1. Identify a current political issue that affects you and your community.
2. Educate yourself about the issue by reading and referencing three articles from reputable sources about the issue.
3. Draft a letter to a policymaker in your community, approximately 350 words, following the directions provided through this assignment on Canvas.

We will grade this essay according to the rubric associated with the assignment on Canvas, so please review it and the Letter FAQs before you begin. **We will only accept late work at a 50% penalty if turned in by April 16, 2026 at 11:59pm.**

Attendance: Attendance is expected but not required for this class. Attending class will help your course performance, just as *you are responsible for all materials covered in class.*

Course Schedule

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION I: THE PUBLIC, NEWS MEDIA, AND GROUPS

January 13	Course Introduction
January 15	Introduction to American Government
January 20-22	Public Opinion Read: Workbook, Chapter 1 February 16: Chapter 1 Exercises Due
January 22	Syllabus Quiz Due
January 27-	Media
February 5	Read: Workbook, Chapter 2 February 16: Chapter 2 Exercises Due
February 10-12	Interest Groups Read: Workbook, Chapter 3 February 16: Chapter 3 Exercises Due
February 17	EXAM 1, IN CLASS

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION II: PARTIES, NOMINATIONS, AND ELECTIONS

February 19-26	Political Parties Read: Workbook Chapter 4 March 30: Chapter 4 Exercises Due
March 3-19	Political Nominations and Campaigns Read: Workbook, Chapter 5 March 30: Chapter 5 Exercises Due

March 10-12 Spring Break, No Class

March 24-26	Elections and Voting Behavior Read: Read Workbook, Chapter 6 March 30: Chapter 6 Exercises Due
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March 31 EXAM 2, IN CLASS

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC POLICY

April 2-7	Constitutional Foundations of Public Policymaking Foreign Policy Read: Workbook, Chapter 7 April 27: Chapter 7 Exercises Due
April 9	Letter to Policymaker Due (NO CLASS)

April 14-23 Domestic Public Policy
Read: Workbook, Chapter 8
April 27: Chapter 8 Exercises Due

April 28 Exam 3, In Class

April 30 **Makeup Exam Day**
April 30 **Last Day to Complete Workbook Assignments**

University Policies and Procedures

Dropping Courses: Please link <https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/spring-academic-calendar.html> for information concerning drops, withdraws, and other administrative information.

Course Evaluation: Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT) is the student evaluation system for UNT and allows students the ability to confidentially provide constructive feedback to their instructor and department to improve the quality of student experiences in the course. **If over 75 percent of the class completes the SPOT**, each student will receive one percent extra credit.

Mobile Device Policy: Although I allow laptops and tablets in class, I do not recommend that you use them. Growing evidence indicates that taking notes by hand improves retention of materials and their understanding. The use of laptops and tablets often leads to checking email and social media or browsing the internet, which may distract you and others around you from achieving your goals for this class. For similar reasons, I strongly encourage you to silence and store all phones during class.

Academic Misconduct: 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.

Your first academic integrity violation is subject to a range of penalties, including failing the class. If you commit more than one academic integrity violation, your actions are subject to a review by the Academic Integrity officer. This may involve a hearing in which you are subject to expulsion.

AI Statement: So that you develop your own critical thinking, and writing skills, **AI use is prohibited in this course.** In other words, the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools like Claude, ChatGPT, and Gemini is not permitted. Although these tools can be helpful in some contexts, they do not align with our goal of fostering the development of your independent thinking. Using GenAI to complete any part of an assignment, exam, or coursework will be considered a violation of academic integrity, as it prevents the development of your own skills, and will be penalized. Additionally, tools like Grammarly are not allowed as they blur authorship and misrepresent your independent work. All work must be your own.

Americans with Disabilities Act Statement: UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation 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](#).

Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (Policy 16.004): 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.

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. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities 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 university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at www.unt.edu/csrr.

Emergency Notification & 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 Canvas 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 student's 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. See UNT Policy 10.10, Records Management and Retention for additional information.

Attendance: Students are expected to attend class meetings regularly and to abide by the attendance policy established for the course. It is important that you communicate with the professor and the instructional team prior to being absent, so you, the professor, and the instructional team can discuss and mitigate the impact of the absence on your attainment of course learning goals.

Course Materials and Copyright Statement: The handouts used in this course are copyrighted. By “handouts,” I mean all materials generated for this class, which include but are not limited to syllabi, quizzes, exams, in-class materials review sheets, and additional problem sets. Because these are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy the handouts, unless I expressly grant permission.