
Fall 2025 | Dr. Melissa McKay

PSCI 2306 NTN US & Texas Constitutions and Institutions



Course Description

The purpose of this course is to enhance students' current understanding of the roles of the United States and Texas governments in the American political system.

We will study the institutions, processes, and decisions of political actors that define American and Texas government.

We focus particular attention on the United States and Texas constitutions, civil rights and liberties, federalism, and the institutions that comprise the three branches of government.



COURSE DESCRIPTION

Learning Objectives

Having successfully completed this course, students will:

- Explain philosophical traditions that inform the U.S. and Texas constitutions
- Evaluate the balance of power between the branches of government, state and national governments, and the people and the state
- Evaluate constitutional and extra-constitutional powers of the three branches of government at both the Texas and national levels
- Interpret the role of minority groups in U.S. politics
- Evaluate the democratic nature and effectiveness of the U.S. and Texas institutions of government (including their constitutions)

Course Details

Instructor Information

Dr. Melissa M. McKay, Ph.D.

melissa.mckay@unt.edu

You can call me Dr. McKay

Meeting Times:

Tuesday and Thursday

10:30 - 11:50 am (AM cohort)

2:30 - 3:50 pm (PM cohort)

Frisco Landing Room #206



Class Communication:

Instructor email:

Melissa.mckay@unt.edu

Sending me a message through "Inbox" in Canvas will reach my email as well

- **Important:** Only send me email from your official UNT email address or using Canvas messages. Messages from other platforms may not be seen or answered.

During busy times, my inbox becomes rather full, so if you contact me and do not receive a response within two business days, please send a follow-up email. A gentle nudge is always appreciated.

Course Details

Instructor Information

Dr. Melissa M. McKay, Ph.D.

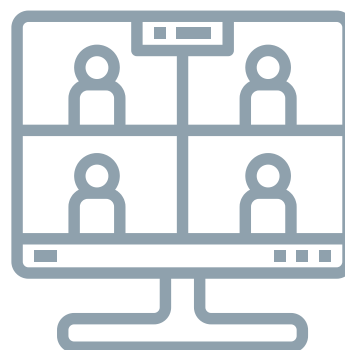
melissa.mckay@unt.edu

Student Office Hours

Weekly student support hours (office hours)

<https://unt.zoom.us/my/melissamckay>

- Monday 7 pm - 8 pm via Zoom
- Most Tuesdays 12pm - 1pm in person
- By appointment as needed



Student Requests

Please do not stop me before or after class to ask about a grade or something other than class that day - I am focused on prepping for that day's class and probably won't be able to address your issue. Sending it through email lets me track and prioritize student requests.

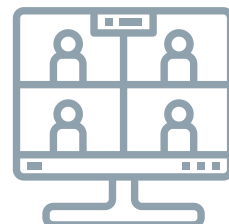


Email

**must be from your
UNT.EDU email address*



Canvas Inbox



Student support hours

meet via Zoom

COURSE DETAILS

Materials Needed

There are two required texts for this class:

American Government 4e – OpenStax publishing

- \$10 perpetual license to access the content and assignments through Perusall.



The Texas Constitution: The People, History, and Government of the Lone Star State by Terry B. Davis and James P. Nelson

- There is no requirement to purchase a new copy of this textbook. Used copies are plentiful online for under \$10



There are two specific apps/technology accounts to create:

1. iClicker (free for UNT students)
2. Perusall (access via Canvas)



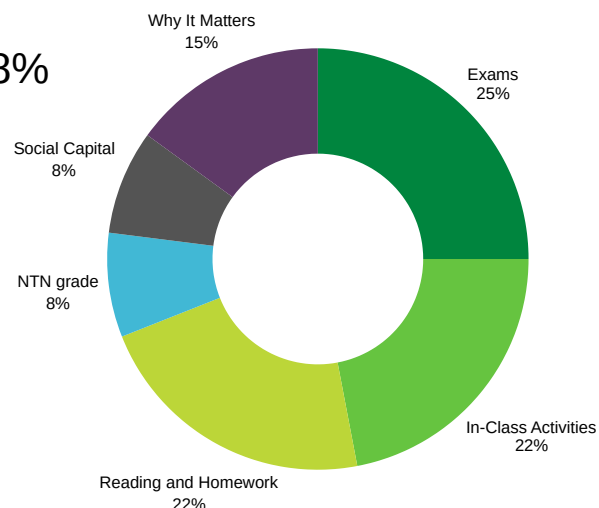
Assessment Overview

This course provides various ways for students to learn including discussions, quizzes, group projects, reflective writing, readings, and videos.

Discussion is essential to the course. You will be asked to share your ideas, opinions, and experiences with others in the class. While no one is forced to talk about issues that create discomfort, all students are expected to participate in the discussions by sharing ideas and comments that help the class consider the topics deeply.

There are six (6) types of assignments that will be the basis of your overall grade, each type are weighted to total to 100%.

1. Exams - 25%
2. Annotated Reading and Homework - 22%
3. In-Class Activities/Simulations - 22%
4. NTN Semester Project grade- 8%
5. Why It Matters - 15%
6. Attendance & Engagement - 8%



Assessment Types

Unit Exams – 25% of total grade

There are four (4) applied exams intended to assess your understanding of the unit topics and your ability to properly apply those concepts to real situations or scenarios.

Important note:

- There are no make-up exams offered, regardless of the reason for missing class on the day of the exam. Instead, students have the option to take a comprehensive final exam at the end of the semester to replace a missed exam. The final exam may also be taken by students who want to try to replace a low exam score. ***(Always speak with me if you know you'll be missing an exam ahead of time).***

Final Exam - Tuesday, December 7 (time and place TBD)

The final exam is optional - students can select to take this comprehensive final exam to replace a missed exam or as an attempt to replace a low score earned on an earlier exam.

Reading and other assigned homework – 22 % of total grade

Being able to articulate thoughts and perspectives, as well as being capable of applying concepts to real-world events is a vital skill. We'll develop and focus on this skill through the use of social learning in Perusall.

Students are expected to have all assigned reading activities completed before class in order to participate in discussions and activities. There will be additional homework assignments that students are expected to complete outside of the scheduled class meeting time, all of which will be clearly marked and available in Canvas.

Important note:

- Late reading assignments will be accepted with a penalty of 5% per calendar day for up to 10 days. No credit will be given for late work after 10 days.

Assessment Types

In-Class Activities and Simulations - 22% of total grade

During class meetings, students are expected to participate in simulations, polls, discussions, topical activities, and other active engagement collaborations as introduced by the instructor. These activities may be collected, monitored, and/or reported through mobile apps or other interactive tools (iClicker), or as activities submitted to the instructor in class.

Important note:

- Because these are not stand-alone or individually assigned activities, there is no mechanism to make up missed in-class activities or assignments.

Why This Matters Discussions - 15% of total grade

For each unit covered this semester there is a discussion forum to discuss in our own words why these topics matter. The instructor will start the conversation or ask a prompting question each week and students are expected to submit, in their own words, a summary of why the topic is important for us to know, to study, to apply, or to be able to understand in general.

Assessment Types

NTN Semester Project Grade - 8% of total grade

All North Texas Now dual credit courses are integrated around a themed 'wicked problem' project. This class has assignments that tie directly into the project, as well as support concepts and skills from other classes.

The weighted grades on NTN wicked problem assignments and the final project contribute to 8% of the student's grade in this class. *this grade will not be updated in real-time in PSCI Canvas grades, please always check the NTN Canvas course for that specific grade.

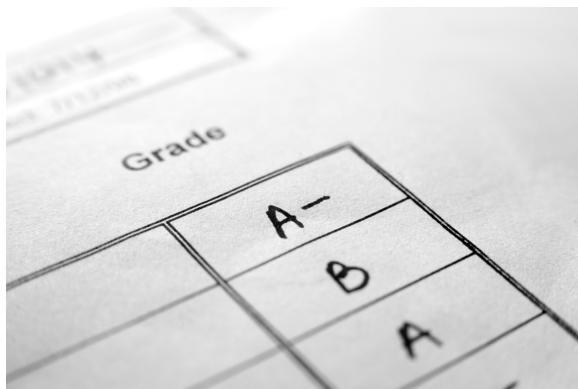
Attendance and Engagement- 8% of total grade

This assignment assesses your stewardship of time spent learning, an excellent gauge in success in the program. Examples of what makes up this assessment are attendance, type of engagement, academic integrity, classroom respect, etc. An overview of these expectations will be reviewed on the first day of class.

Grading

Letter grades are assigned based on standard grade scales, using standard mathematical rounding to the nearest tenth where necessary:

- A – 90-100%
- B – 80-89%
- C – 70-79%
- D – 60-69%
- F – 59 – under



Grading Policies

- Please do not request extra credit for yourself. If there is an activity that I feel would be relevant I will offer it to the entire class.
- If you have any questions about how an assignment was graded, see a potential error in grading, or any other question regarding a recorded grade, you have 14 calendar days to request a meeting with me to raise the question or dispute a grade. After 14 days, I will not return to an older, closed assignment to regrade or reconsider.
 - I expect that you will review the assignment details and reflect on the quality of the work you turned in. If you would like to meet, email me to set up a meeting (I cannot discuss grades over email). You should come to our scheduled meeting with specific examples that demonstrate that you earned a higher grade than you received. If you miss your scheduled meeting, you forfeit your right to the grade dispute.

Semester schedule Fall '25

This schedule is subject to change based on semester pacing and other unforeseen issues. Specific assignments and due dates are found in Canvas.

August

8/19 - Intro to class
8/21 - College skills
8/26 - Social Contract & Collective Action
8/28 - Political Cultures



September

9/2 - Founding of the US Government
9/4 - US Constitution & Bill of Rights
9/9 - Bill of Rights + Federalism
9/11 - Federalism
9/16 - Texas Constitution
9/18 - Exam 1
9/23 - Exam Review + Annotated Bib. intro
9/25 - US Congress
9/30 - US Congress

October

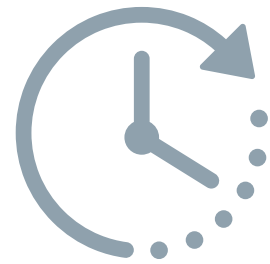
10/2 - Texas Legislature
10/7 - Exam 2
10/9 - Review Exam + Activity
10/14 - US Presidency
10/16 - US Bureaucracy
10/21 - Texas Executive Branch
10/23 - Exam 3
10/28 - Review Exam + Fed Courts intro
10/30 - Canon SCOTUS cases

November

11/4 - ELECTION DAY!
11/6 - Texas Court System
11/11 - Texas Court System
11/14 - Civil Liberties & Rights
11/15 - Civil Liberties & Rights
11/21 - Project Presentation
11/26 & 28 - Thanksgiving Break

December

12/3 - Exam 4
12/5 - Activity
12/7 or 9 - OPTIONAL Final Exam



Homework Policy

GRADING POLICIES

- Due dates and times are clearly marked in Canvas for each assignment, and allowing students to turn in homework late is not an equitable approach to learning. All students have the same number of days to complete the same work.
- All assignments are due by 11:59 pm on the assigned due date. **Not all homework is due on Sunday**, please follow the schedule in Canvas.
- Please be mindful of potential overlapping class due dates and plan accordingly. I am unable to reschedule our semester around your other courses' schedule.
- Late reading assignments will be accepted with a penalty of 5% per calendar day for up to 10 days. No credit will be given for late work after 10 days.
- There are no makeup opportunities for in-class activities, exams, or reading assignments past 10 days.
- If you miss an assignment, it will not be the end of the world. I drop the lowest grade of many of the assignment types, and there are several of each to balance out a consistent grade. **If you become ill for an extended time or another barrier presents itself, reach out to me immediately** so we can work out a plan to get caught up.

Course Policies

Use of Canvas

Copies of the syllabus, assignments, grades, instructor contact information, calendar, and other important course documents can be found on the course Canvas site. Assignments will be submitted via Canvas. Written work may be required to be submitted using a plagiarism detection software program.

Individual technical issues are the responsibility of the student.

Late assignments, retakes, and/or make-ups will not be granted due to electronic malfunctions. Plan ahead to ensure you have reliable internet service and have addressed any potential technical issues.

Syllabus Change Policy

Due dates for assignments can be found in the course schedule and in Canvas. In the rare cases that there is a date change for an assignment, exam, or any other syllabus change, the instructor will notify students through an announcement in Canvas.

Attendance and engagement are the biggest indicators of success.

Course Policies

Attendance Policy

Attendance at every class meeting is expected and is more than simply showing up and sitting in a seat. To do well in this class, you must show up for yourself by being present, doing the assigned coursework, and collaborating in a positive and valuable manner.

A few notes about attendance:

- High school activities or events are generally not considered university-excused reasons to miss class.
- There are very few university-excused reasons that automatically trigger “approved absences”.
- Attendance will be recorded via iClicker at each class meeting.
- If you are absent, assigned work is still due unless you have made arrangements with me prior.
- You do not need to let me know if you won’t be in class and please do not email me asking what you missed. Check the LMS, refer to the syllabus, and ask a classmate for any missed notes or other insight into what you missed. It is your responsibility to stay on top of your progress

FERPA and discussing your progress with anyone outside UNT

Federal law prohibits me from discussing your progress, grades, attendance – anything about your participation in my class – with anyone not involved in your education at UNT.

Course Policies

Sharing of Course Content

No part of this class (verbal or written format) shall be posted on any social media forum or elsewhere online without my express written consent (Dr. McKay). Should it come to my attention that any part of this class has been shared on any platform, the student who holds the offending account will be removed from class and will automatically receive an academic integrity violation.

My lectures are protected by state common law and federal copyright law. They are my own original expression. Whereas you are authorized to take notes in class thereby creating a derivative work from my lecture, the authorization extends only to making one set of notes for your own personal use and no other use.

You are not authorized to record my lectures, to provide your notes to anyone else, or to make any commercial use of them without express prior permission from me in writing. Class recordings are reserved for use only by students in this class for educational purposes. The recordings should not be shared outside the class in any form. Failing to follow this restriction is a violation of the UNT Code of Student Conduct and could lead to disciplinary action.

Students with official accommodations on file with the university to receive prior notes and/or to record my lecture are also bound by these non-dissemination policies as well. Materials used in connection with this course may be subject to copyright protection. Materials may include but are not limited to: documents, slides, images, audio, and video. Materials in this course are only for the use of students enrolled in this course, for purposes associated with this course, and may not be retained for longer than the class term.

Unauthorized retention, duplication, distribution, or modification of copyrighted materials is strictly prohibited by law.

Course Policies

Rules of Engagement

Rules of engagement refer to how students are expected to interact with each other and their instructors. Here are some general guidelines. These are also intended to help you maintain your social capital:

- It is to be expected that we will have many differences of opinions and interpretations – and that's ok! Differences are not inherently attacks. However: points will be deducted from any student's assignment or post that includes the following phrasing/intent:
 - "All democrats/republicans/group members...."
 - "Group members/political parties, etc.. should/should not"
 - "They are all the same"
 - "I hate it when..."
 - "I can't believe you think that way/believe that..."
 - other derogatory, inflammatory, or discriminatory language
- Treat your instructor and classmates with respect in any communication online or face-to-face, even when their opinion differs from your own.
- Speak from personal experiences. Use "I" statements to share thoughts and feelings. Try not to speak on behalf of groups or other individuals' experiences.
- Use your critical thinking skills to challenge other people's ideas as well as your own, instead of attacking individuals. Avoid using all caps while communicating digitally. This may be interpreted as "YELLING!"
- Be cautious when using humor or sarcasm in emails or discussion posts as tone can be difficult to interpret digitally.
- Avoid using "text-talk" or SMS language
- Proofread and fact-check your sources. Keep in mind that online posts can be permanent, so think first before you type

I'm not
your bro,
bruh.

Academic Integrity

The words “academic integrity,” entails a commitment to honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage.

- If work is found to be academically dishonest, I reserve the right to reassess past assignment submissions and regrade past assignments accordingly.
- If I discover any kind of cheating, plagiarism, or any other type of academic dishonesty, the assignment or exam will automatically receive a zero with no opportunity for resubmission.
- It is my discretion to file an academic dishonesty report with the university for the first violation, and I definitely will file a report if there is a second occurrence.
- This includes any uncited AI-generated content, AI-generated content submitted as the student's own, or any other unauthorized use of AI.

Dr. McKay's AI Policy

The permissible use of GenAI tools is limited and student use for course assignments is directed by the instructor. Any use of GenAI requires explicit permission from Dr. McKay, which will be clearly noted in the assignment instructions. In the instances where you are allowed to use AI, you must document that you have fact-checked the GenAI output with a resource from our class (lecture notes, reading, etc).

Any attempt to represent GenAI output inappropriately as a student's own work will be considered plagiarism, fabrication, and/or cheating and subject to being reported as an academic integrity violation to the Dean of Students.

University Policies

For a complete overview of university policies please see:

- [Code of Conduct](#)
- [Student Policy Manual](#)

ADA Accommodation 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 at disability.unt.edu.

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

University Policies

For a complete overview of university policies please see:

- [Code of Conduct](#)
- [Student Policy Manual](#)

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 the UNT Learning Management System (LMS) for contingency plans for covering course materials.

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 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 University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct.

Academic Integrity Standards and Consequences

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.