
Spring 2026

PSCI 2305 NTN

US Policies and Political

Behaviors

Dr. Melissa McKay



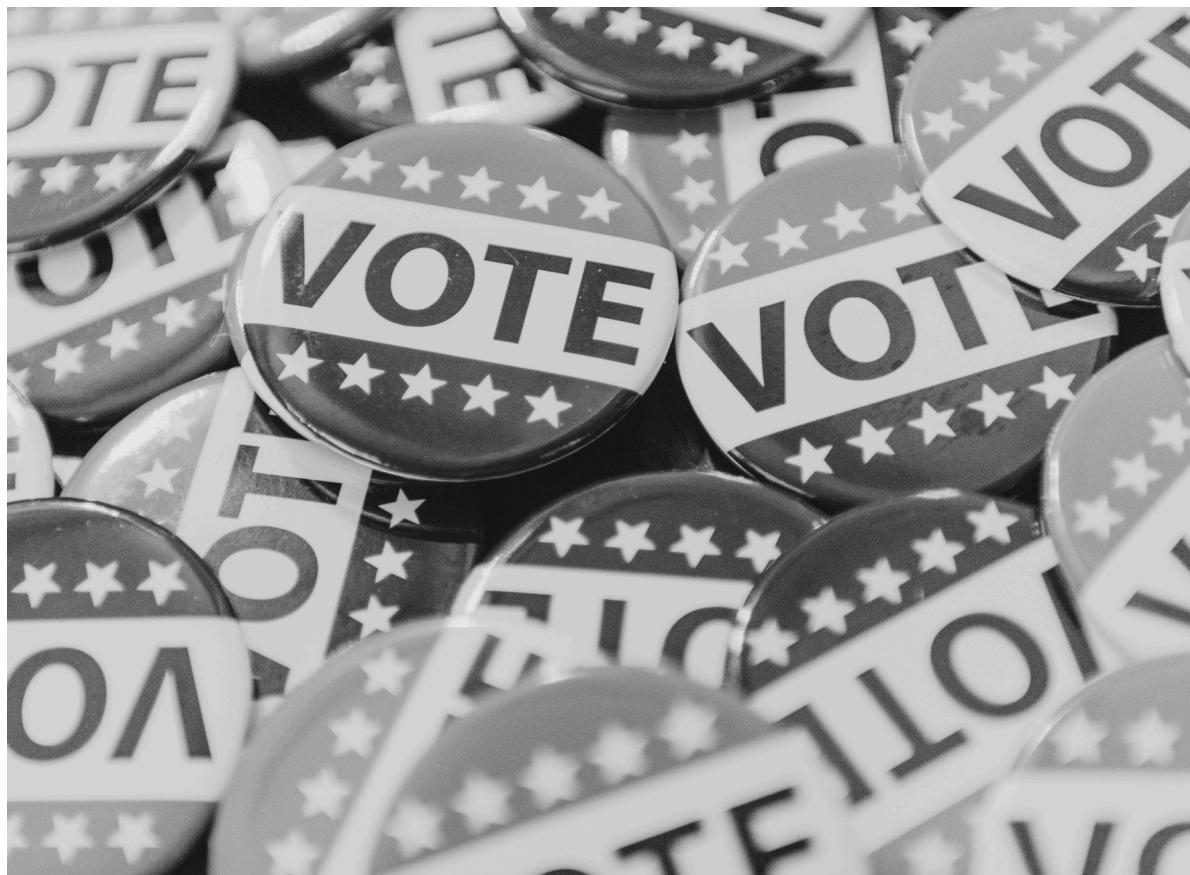
Spring 2026 Syllabus v1

This syllabus subject to change at Dr. McKay's discretion

Course Description

This course explores how the will of the people shapes government policies by focusing on individual political values, attitudes, and civic responsibilities. It examines the civic mechanisms that connect personal beliefs to government action—including elections, political parties, interest groups, and the media—and how these processes influence public policy outcomes.

This is a course about action. In the political science world, we call it “political behavior”: how individuals and groups’ behavior (actions) come together to form the political landscape. It’s exciting, but it can sometimes be complex.



Learning Objectives

Having successfully completed this course, students will:

- Explain the development and measurement of individual values, attitudes, and opinions about politics (critical thinking)
- Interpret the role of individuals in the political process (social responsibility, critical thinking)
- Explain the roles of linkage institutions (parties, interest groups, and media) in connecting individuals to institutions of government (critical thinking, communication)
- Demonstrate the relationship between electoral rules/institutions and outcomes (critical thinking)
- Explain the connection between the political process and the policies generated by that process (critical thinking, social responsibility)

Course Details

Instructor Information

Dr. Melissa M. McKay, Ph.D.
melissa.mckay@unt.edu



Meeting Times:

Tuesday and Thursday
9:00 - 10:20 am (AM cohort)
1:00 - 2:20 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 - 8:30 pm via Zoom
- By appointment as needed

Student Requests

Please do not stop me before or after class to ask about anything 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 at that moment. Sending it through email lets me track and prioritize student requests.



Materials Needed

There are two (2) required texts for this class:

American Government 4e – OpenStax publishing

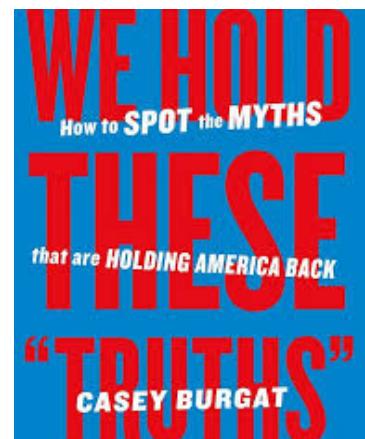
- (\$10 perpetual license for Perusall access was paid last semester, so there should be no fee this semester)



Burgat, Casey. 2025. **We Hold These Truths: How to Spot the Myths that are Holding America Back**. Authors Equity, New York, NY.

ISBN 979-889-3310184

**It is NOT necessary to purchase this book new, but you will need a physical copy - audiobook won't be enough*



There are two specific apps/technology accounts to create:

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

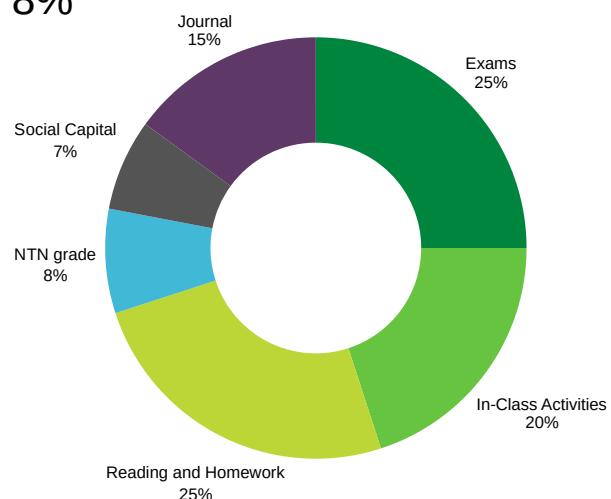
Assessment Overview

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, Reading Quizzes, Homework - 25%
3. In-Class Activities/Simulations - 20%
4. Learning Journal - 15%
5. NTN Semester Project grade- 8%
6. Social Capital - 7%



Assessment Types

Unit Exams – 25% of total grade

There are five (5) 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).

Reading & other assigned homework – 25 % 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.

There may 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 - 20% 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.

Learning Journal - 15% of total grade

Throughout the semester there are six (6) journal entry assignments based on the relevant unit topic. Students will select a category of entry (reflective, analytical, or applied) and create a fully-thought out journal entry discussing the assigned topic. Journal entries will be anonymously peer-graded (with oversight by Dr. McKay). More details and instructions are found in Canvas.

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*

Social Capital - 7% of total grade

Formally called “Attendance and Engagement,” this assignment assesses the level of social capital you earn throughout the semester.

Some examples of what comprises this assessment are a student’s 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.

Late Policy

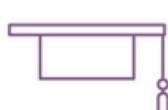
- Due dates and times are clearly marked in Canvas for each assignment, and allowing students to turn in homework late is not an equitable approach to learning. All students have the same number of days to complete the same work.
- All assignments are due by 11:59 pm on the assigned due date. **Not all 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.
- Late journal assignments will be accepted with a penalty of 10% per calendar day for up to 5 days. No credit will be given for late work after 5 days.
- There are no makeup opportunities for in-class activities or exams.
- If you miss an assignment, it will not be the end of the world. **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.

Career Readiness

One of the expectations of enrolling in higher education is the goal of learning to be career-ready in whichever path you choose in life. In this class, we place an emphasis on this objective by purposefully engaging in course activities to support the career-readiness competencies as outlined by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) which include:

Career Readiness Competencies

There are **eight career readiness competencies**, each of which can be demonstrated in a variety of ways.



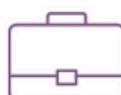
Career & Self-Development



Leadership



Communication



Professionalism



Critical Thinking



Teamwork



Equity & Inclusion



Technology

image from NACE

What is career readiness?

Career readiness is a foundation from which to demonstrate requisite core competencies that broadly prepare the college educated for success in the workplace and lifelong career management.

CAREER READINESS

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 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 case 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 and in class.

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 and doing the assigned coursework, and collaborate in a positive and valuable manner.

A few notes about attendance:

- Attendance will be recorded via iClicker at each class meeting or by in-class work turned in
- If you are absent, assigned homework 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. I am restricted from confirming that you are a student at UNT and/or are enrolled in my class, including responding to parent email.

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 the express written consent of the professor (i.e. Dr. McKay). Should it come to my attention that any part of this class has been shared on any online platform, the student who holds the offending social media 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

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.

AI Policy

The permissible use of GenAI tools is **limited and student use for course assignments is directed by the instructor**. Any other use requires explicit permission from Dr. McKay. In other words, unless I specifically instruct you to use GenAI for ANY work in this class, it is NOT ALLOWED.

Any attempt to represent GenAI output inappropriately as a student's own work will be considered plagiarism, fabrication, and/or cheating as determined on a case-by-case basis and will be subject to an academic integrity violation report.

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

Semester Schedule*

Week 1

Introductions/Expectations
Civil Discourse

Week 2

Letter from Birmingham Jail
Civil Discourse

Week 3

Public Opinion
Political Socialization

Week 4

**Dr. McKay will be out this week*
Political Participation *asynchronous*
Double History block

Week 5

Political Ideologies
Exam 1

Week 6

Political Parties

Week 7

Interest Groups
Lobbying

Week 8

Exam 2
Annotated Bibliography

Week 9

UNT Spring Break

Week 10

FISD Spring Break -
may have assigned work

Week 11

Media

Week 12

Exam 3 and Elections
Voting

Week 13

Campaigns + Financing
Exam 4

Week 14

Presentation Showcase

Week 15

Policymaking
Domestic Policy

Week 16

Foreign Policy
Exam 5

Finals

Optional Final

SPRING 2026

**Subject to change*