PSCI 2306
The US and Texas Constitutions and Institutions

Dr. Melissa McKay

Fall 2023 Syllabus
This syllabus subject to change at Dr. McKay's discretion
Course description

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to 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 Objectives

Students who master the content of this course will be able to:

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

Class Meeting Days - Tuesday and Thursday

PSCI 2306.571 meets 10:30 - 11:50 am - Frisco Landing Room #310
PSCI 2306.575 meets 2:30 - 3:50 pm - Frisco Landing Room #206

Online classroom - http://unt.instructure.com

Course Structure
This is a college course, therefore all the rigor of a college course is to be expected. Students are required to read and complete assigned materials (as found in Canvas) prior to our class meeting times, and most graded assignments and engagement activities will take place together in the classroom, for which it is the student's responsibility to prepare.

This course relies heavily on the individual taking responsibility for their own learning and being accountable to oneself and their classmates.

About your instructor
I am Dr. Melissa McKay (she/her), Ph.D. and I have been teaching domestic and international government and politics since 2017 and in this program since it began in 2020. I am an alumna of University of North Texas - three times over - and focus my research on international criminal law, human rights, and justice.

Contact your instructor
Email: melissa.mckay@unt.edu or through Canvas "Inbox" messaging. Please note, I will only communicate with you via Canvas or your UNT.edu email, so please make sure you check that frequently.
Student Support and Communications

How to reach out to your instructor and TA

Email
*must be from your UNT.EDU email address

Canvas Inbox

Student support hours
meet via Zoom

Weekly student support hours
https://unt.zoom.us/my/melissamckay
- Monday 7pm - 8pm via Zoom
- Friday 10-11am via Zoom
- By appointment as needed

- Please do not stop me before or after class to ask about a grade or anything other than class that day - I am focused on prepping for that day's class and don't have grades memorized

- I will only email you at your UNT email address, so make sure you either check it daily or have your email forwarded to an Inbox you check often

- Allow me at least 24 hours to respond to correspondence and if you send an email Friday after noon - Sunday, please expect a response no earlier than the following Monday

- Panic emails sent in the middle of the night won't be seen or responded to
# Required Materials

You need to have these materials to succeed in this class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Where to find it</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Ideas in American Government 2306 + Texas 14e (Soomo Publishing)</td>
<td>Purchase through our Canvas class link</td>
<td>$78ish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable podcast app</td>
<td>Apple App Store, Spotify, or Google Play</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iClicker Student app + account</td>
<td>iClicker website</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Measuring Success
Your final semester grade will be based on the following weighted assignment types:

- Exams: 25%
- In-Class Activities: 20%
- Investigations: 15%
- Discussions: 10%
- Homework & Reading: 10%
- NTN Collective Grade: 10%
- Attendance/Participation: 10%

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

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

Exams - 25%
Exams will be collaborative with assigned groups, assessing your understanding of the unit topics and ability to properly apply those concepts to real situations or scenarios. Individual grades will be the product of the group’s exam grade X peer evaluation of the individual's collaborative efforts.

Important note:
There will be no make-up exams offered, regardless of reason for missing class on the day of the exam. Instead, students will 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.

In-Class Activities and Assignments - 20%
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.

Investigations - 15%
In the CIAG chapters, you will also find breakout assignments called “Investigations.” These assignments provide a deeper dive into the topic and help you apply what you’ve learned to different problems.

There are a total of 22 available investigations, the lowest five grades will be dropped from your final grade and are indicated in real-time in your Canvas grade.
Assessment Types

Discussions and Reflections - 10%
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 by using discussion posts throughout the semester.

Students will be provided a prompt and explicit instruction for each discussion assignment. To receive full credit students are expected to post a well-thought-out response to the prompts as well as two (2) responses to classmates.

North Texas Now! Collective Grade - 10%
All of the 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 10% 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

Assigned Reading and Other Homework - 10%
In the CIAG chapters you will find multiple choice questions embedded in the assigned reading that are crafted to confirm your understanding of the material, in addition to polls and other open-ended questions designed to challenge your application of these concepts. The multiple choice questions are open to keep trying for the correct response, however the poll and open ended questions are not.

From time to time, there may be assigned reading or other homework outside of the Soomo webtext, these assignments will make up a part of this grade.
Assessment Types

Attendance and Participation - 10%
This is an interactive class and it requires commitment and engagement from everyone involved. Your class attendance as well as in-class participation will be noted and contribute to your overall grade. Attendance will be recorded by utilizing the iClicker app to answer kick-off questions.

- Students begin the semester with 100% for participation grade. Points will be deducted when the student fails to meet expectations for participation in this class. This includes but is not limited to the following: participating in class discussions, arriving to class on time, remaining in class for the entire class period, abiding by classroom policies, treating others with respect, approaching assignments with a serious effort, etc.

Notes about grading

- Please do not request extra credit. If there is an activity that I feel would be relevant I will offer it to the entire class. I cannot and definitely will not provide extra credit opportunities for individual students.

- If you miss class with a university-excused absence, contact me as soon as possible to work out an extension – do not assume an extension is inherent. *High school activities or events are not considered university-excused reasons to miss class*

- If you have any questions about the way an assignment was graded, a potential error in grading or any other question regarding a recorded grade on an assignment or exam, you have 14 calendar days to raise the question or dispute a grade in writing via Canvas “Inbox” communications. After 14 days, I will not return to an older, closed assignment to re-grade or reconsider.
Due Dates

All assignments are due by 11:59 pm on the assigned due date.

• I expressly discourage you from completing assignments in the middle of the night. For your health, it is my wish that no assignments are turned in, or worked on, after midnight if possible.

Handing in your assignments on time is an essential part of your success as a student. Doing so allows the faculty to give you timely feedback on your work and helps you to stay on track for the semester. This semester, in all your classes, you will be held to the following late work policy:

• For all non-scaffolded assignments:
  ○ Late work will be accepted with a penalty of 5% off per calendar day for up to 10 days. No credit will be given for late work after that point
  ○ This does not apply to in-class activities or exams

• For scaffolded assignments (such as drafts):
  ○ Late work will be accepted with a 10% off per calendar day late up to 48 hrs. No credit given for late work after that point
Semester schedule

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week/Date</th>
<th>Topics to be covered</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Introduction to class, semester expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug 22 &amp; 24</td>
<td>Developing college skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>The Social Contract, Collective Action, and Common Good</td>
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<td>Aug 29 &amp; 31</td>
<td>Political cultures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Founding of US Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 5 &amp; 7</td>
<td>US Constitution</td>
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<td>Week/Date</td>
<td>Topics to be covered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>US Constitution &amp; Bill of Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 12 &amp; 14</td>
<td>NTN Project Topic Due in Class 9/12</td>
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<td>Dr. McKay out of town, guest speaker</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Texas Constitution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 19 &amp; 21</td>
<td>Federalism</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NTN Project Topic Proposal due</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Federalism, continued</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 26 &amp; 28</td>
<td>Exam 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>US Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 3 &amp; 5</td>
<td>NTN Project Check In</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Texas Legislature</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 10 &amp; 12</td>
<td>Exam 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 9</td>
<td>US Presidency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 17 &amp; 19</td>
<td>US Bureaucracy</td>
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<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Texas Governor &amp; Plural Executive</td>
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<td>Oct 24 &amp; 26</td>
<td>Exam 3</td>
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<td>Week 11</td>
<td>Federal Court Systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 31 &amp; Nov 2</td>
<td>Texas Courts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week/Date</td>
<td>Topics to be covered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 12</td>
<td>Exam 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov 7 &amp; 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 13</td>
<td>Texas Constitution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov 14 &amp; 16</td>
<td>Federalism</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NTN Project Topic Proposal due</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 14</td>
<td>THANKSGIVING WEEK (no classes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 15</td>
<td>Civil Liberties and Civil Rights</td>
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<td>Nov 28 &amp; 30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 16</td>
<td>Local Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec 5 &amp; 7</td>
<td>Wrap-up</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finals Week</td>
<td>Optional Comprehensive Final</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec 9</td>
<td>(at normal class times)</td>
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Class Policies

These policies can also be found in our Canvas course page under "Modules > Class Policies"

**Attendance**

Attendance at every class meeting is expected and is more than simply showing up and sitting in a seat.

*A few notes about attendance:*

- Attendance will be recorded via iClicker or another roll-call mechanism 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.
- **Schedule conflicts with high school events are not considered university-excused absences.** Life forces us to make choices and prioritize issues, and this is no different. I trust that you will decide your priority at any given time, and will not judge you for your choice.

**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 you are a student at UNT and/or are enrolled in my class. In most cases, I will not acknowledge an email sent by a family member, guardian, or any other person.

**Plagiarism and Cheating**

To offer clarity to the UNT policy described below:

- If I uncover any kind of cheating, plagiarism, or another 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.
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.
Class Policies

These policies can also be found in our Canvas course page under "Modules > Class 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:

- While the freedom to express yourself is a fundamental human right, any communication that 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 will not be tolerated.
- 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
Class Policies

When in doubt, don't guess or repeat something you've heard - be honest

The phrase that pays:

"I DON'T KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT THAT TO HAVE FORMED AN OPINION"
University Policies

These policies can also be found in our Canvas course page under "Modules > University Policies"

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.

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.

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.

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.
Federal Regulation: Important Notice for F-1 Students taking Distance Education Courses
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/). The specific portion concerning distance education courses is located at Title 8 CFR 214.2 Paragraph (f)(6)(i)(G).

Frisco Landing Food Pantry
We think about Frisco being a fairly affluent area, but statistics show with unemployment rates and inflation rising, housing and food are becoming more difficult to procure. Frisco Landing has a food pantry available to all students, no questions asked. It is stocked with non-perishable items donated by the community as well as stocked by UNT staff and faculty wherever possible. The food pantry also has personal hygiene items as well.
Final Notes

- This is a college course, not a high school course being taught on a college campus.
- You are tasked with identifying your own opportunities for learning - your instructors are your guide to helping you learn to learn.
- Nothing is assigned as "busy work" intended to simply add to your workload. Your instructors assign materials in a way that builds on to each idea and it's important you complete the tasks required of you.
- If you're unsure about something, it is your responsibility to ask questions.
  - Check the syllabus, search the Canvas course, ask a classmate, look for the answer to your problem online.
- College is a place for learning - learning what you don't know, and learning how to learn, and learning from each other.