Hi U.S. & Texas Constitutions and Institutions

PSCI 2306 – Summer 2025

**Instructor:** Michael Elwell

**Contact:** MichaelElwell@my.unt.edu

 Messages received M – Th will receive a response within 24 hours.

 Messages received F – Sunday may take additional time.

**Office Hours:** Remote (via Zoom): Email me to set up an Appointment

**Teaching Assistants:**

Elise Jones

*Email*: EliseJones@my.unt.edu.

*Office hours*: remote, by appointment M-F (email me in advance!)

Shyami Jayawickrama

*Email*: shyamijayawickrama@my.unt.edu

*Office hours*: remote, by appointment M-F

# 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 level; 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 or 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:

*UNT 2306 Basic Bundle*, Soomo Publishing, ISBN 13: 8220133754737.

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:

This course is 100% online. There are no required in-person class meetings or other synchronous events. This is a summer course, and as such content is condensed into a 5 week schedule, this means that we will be going over the same amount of work as a traditional 16 week class, but in a third of the time. The estimates below are for a normal class, but instead of per week, think of this as per chapter.

Every week, you will do the following:

1. Watch/listen/read course content that I have prepared.  These are 1 - 2 short lectures that last anywhere from 10 - 20 minutes each.  TOTAL ESTIMATED TIME:  1 hour
2. Read a chapter of our webtext and answer the questions embedded in that chapter.  TOTAL ESTIMATED TIME:  1 hour
3. Consolidate, synthesize, and rewrite your notes on this content.  TOTAL ESTIMATED TIME:  1 hour
4. Compose a Packback discussion question and reply to three of your colleagues’ questions.  TOTAL ESTIMATED TIME:  1 hour
5. Review your notes and complete the weekly quiz.  TOTAL ESTIMATED TIME:  1 hour

That totals approximately 5 hours of work per week, which is comparable to spending 3 hours per week in a classroom and spending 2 hours per week on homework. If you know you read more slowly, or if you need to listen to lecture content more than once in order to take good notes, or if you need extra time to formulate ideas before you craft a discussion board post, allow yourself an extra hour per week.

With this course, there are only two due dates, and you should be aware of them during this summer. The first big due date is halfway through the summer on July 9th; this is when your first set of work is due. This includes the relevant Packbacks, Workbooks chapters, and Unit Quizzes. This means that roughly 45% of your final grade’s worth of work is due halfway through the semester. The second is the day before the final exam for this course, July 24th. At this point all assignments close for credit, and you will no longer be able to complete work for this course outside of taking the final.

# Grading:

Your grade will be based on the following components:

Webtext Chapters (19) 30%

Packback Assignments (8) 30%

Quizzes (15) 30%

Final Exam 10%

 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. Requests to round your grade will be ignored. There is no extra credit in this class.

# Course Assignments

## Webtext Chapters

Your textbook (webtext) 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.

There are 19 webtext chapters which are collectively worth 30% of your grade.

## Packback Assignments

For our discussion this term, we will use the Packback discussion board platform. Packback is free for you to use.

Packback gives you the opportunity to ask questions rather than simply answering them. Your “initial post” in Packback starts with a question that is open-ended (not a yes/no question) relevant to the week’s content. Was there something you read about that piqued your interest? Are you wondering if there is a connection between what we are learning in political science and your own field of study? Do you see a way that you might use what we have learned in your life, either now or in the future? Be curious!

As you craft your question (a simple sentence to open the post followed by an explanation of your own thoughts, why the question matters to you, and/or what the various possible answers might be), Packback will prompt you on ways to make your question more engaging: add headings, add images (with appropriate alt text), add links to resources, etc. As you edit, Packback will continuously update your “curiosity score” (a measure of your curiosity, communication, and content). The same thing happens when you post a response to one of your colleagues. As a result, you can keep working on your post and responses until you get them polished.

Each week you are expected to draft a post with a minimum curiosity score of 50 (worth 25 points) and three responses with minimum curiosity scores of at least 50 (worth 25 points each). If you post but fail to achieve the minimum curiosity score, you will receive 50% credit for that portion of your assignment. So, for example, if you craft an original question with a curiosity score of 70 (70 > 60), a response with a curiosity score of 50 (50 = 50), and two responses with curiosity scores of 30 (30 < 50), your total score for the assignment will be 75/100 (25+25+(.5\*25)+(.5\*25)).

PLEASE NOTE: We are aware that students will try to “game” Packback by posting questions or responses that are about irrelevant topics or by adding links to websites that have nothing to do with course content. We try to read every question and response on Packback, but we will be selecting a random number of questions and responses each week for a “closer look.” If we find that you are posting about football (without somehow tying it to political science topic we are covering) or if we find that you are adding links to Rick Astley videos, you will lose credit for your week’s assignment.

Your Packback discussions are worth a total of 30% of your total grade.

## Quizzes

In each module, there is a quiz that covers the webtext and the content in the Canvas modules (text and videos). All questions are “objective” questions (multiple choice, multiple answer, fill in the blank, matching, etc.). There are 15 questions on each quiz, and you have 15 minutes to complete the quiz. 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 actually have to have notes, and you have to review them before you take the quiz. I promise you, if you just wing it, you will be sorely disappointed.

There are 15 quizzes which are collectively worth 30% of your grade.

## Final

During the final exam day, you will take a cumulative final for this class. The cumulative final consists of 90 objective questions, with any content from throughout the course being fair game as part of it, this means there might be questions regarding discussions, workbook chapters, quizzes, or even lecture materials posted to Canvas. It must be completed within 90 minutes, and you may only move forward in the exam. The final exam is worth 10% 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. On Final exam day, the exam will open at midnight and be open for 24 hours for you to be able to take. It is your responsibility to find a 90-minute period during these 24 hours to be able to complete the exam. Please make sure that you have everything you need prior to starting the exam, because once the exam clock starts, it will not be extended.

# Important Policies:

## Late Policy and Dropped Assignments

Webtext chapters can be submitted up to one week late for 50% credit.

There are no extensions for the final exam. The final exam and all late work MUST be completed no later than 11:59 PM on Wednesday July 25th, in order for us to submit grades by the university deadline.

Additionally, I will be dropping 4 workbook assignments, 1 packback, and 2 weekly quizzes, in total that means there are 7 dropped assignments that will not count towards your grade.

## 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). Moreover, no tasks will be added to the syllabus unless they are for “extra credit”.

## 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.

## ADA 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](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 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](https://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](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cjdl0126%5CAppData%5CLocal%5CTemp%5COneNote%5C16.0%5CNT%5C0%5CSurvivorAdvocate%40unt.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](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cjdl0126%5CAppData%5CLocal%5CTemp%5COneNote%5C16.0%5CNT%5C0%5Coeo%40unt.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](http://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

| **Dates** | **Topic** | **Assignments** **(All work due at 11:59 PM Central)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| June 23rd to July 9th  | Module 1: Founding and the U.S. Constitution | Due on July 9th* Webtext Chapter 1
* Packback 1
* Module 1 Quiz
 |
| June 23rd to July 9th  | Module 2: Constitutions (Workbook Chapter) | Due on July 9th* Webtext Chapter 2
* Module 2 Quiz
 |
| June 23rd to July 9th  | Module 3: Texas Constitution | Due on July 9th* Webtext Chapter 3
* Packback 3
* Module 3 Quiz
 |
| June 23rd to July 9th  | Module 4: Federalism (Workbook Chapter) | Due on July 9th* Webtext Chapter 4
* Module 4 Quiz
 |
| June 23rd to July 9th  | Module 5: U.S. Congress | Due on July 9th* Webtext Chapter 5
* Packback 5
* Module 5 Quiz
 |
| June 23rd to July 9th  | Module 6: Congress (Workbook Chapter) | Due on July 9th* Webtext Chapter 6
* Module 6 Quiz
 |
| June 23rd to July 9th  | Module 7: The Presidency | Due on July 9th* Webtext Chapter 7
* Packback 7
* Module 7 Quiz
 |
| June 23rd to July 9th  | Module 8: The Presidency (Workbook Chapter) | Due on July 9th* Webtext Chapter 8
* Module 8 Quiz
 |
| July 9th to July 24th  | Module 9: The Bureaucracy (Workbook Chapter) | Due on July 24th* Webtext Chapter 9
* Packback 9

Module 9 Quiz |
| July 9th to July 24th  | Module 10: The Judiciary | Due on July 24th* Webtext Chapter 10
* Module 10 Quiz
 |
| July 9th to July 24th  | Module 11: The Judiciary (Workbook Chapter) | Due on July 24th* Webtext Chapter 11
* Packback 11
* Module 11 Quiz
 |
| July 9th to July 24th  | Module 12: Civil Liberties | Due on July 24th* Webtext Chapter 12
* Module 12 Quiz
 |
| July 9th to July 24th  | Module 13: Civil Liberties (Workbook Chapter) | Due on July 24th* Webtext Chapter 13
* Packback 13
* Module 13 Quiz
 |
| July 9th to July 24th  | Module 14: Civil Rights  | Due on July 24th* Webtext Chapter 14
* Module 14 Quiz
 |
| July 9th to July 24th  | Module 15: Civil Rights (Workbook Chapter) | Due on July 24th* Webtext Chapter 15
* Packback 15
* Module 15 Quiz
 |
| July 24th to July 25th  | FINAL EXAM | Due on July 25th* Final Exam
 |
|  |  |  |