

PSCI 1041.001, American and Texas Government
TR 12:30-1:50 pm, Wooten Hall 316
Syllabus, Spring 2014

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Office: Wooten Hall 154/6
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2:00–5:00 pm

Course Description

This course explores the following topics: the U.S. and Texas constitutions, federalism, the establishment of civil rights and liberties, and the structure of American and Texas government. Pursuant to the Undergraduate Catalog, this course “must be taken to satisfy the requirement of a course emphasizing U.S. and Texas constitutions.” Because this is an Honors course, the reading requirements and assignments are informed by the Honors College course objectives, as enumerated in the Undergraduate Catalog. Please note that in instructor may amend this syllabus at her discretion.

Being in Touch

My office hours are listed above and I will always be available during those times. Even outside of those hours I am usually in my office between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm; you are welcome to stop in any time my door is open. If you email me Monday through Friday, I should get back to you within 24 hours. If I do not, please feel free to send me a reminder! If you write over the weekend, you may have to wait until Monday for a reply. A note on etiquette: please sign your emails with your name and include an appropriate salutation. (Hint: you cannot go wrong with, “Hi, Dr. Oldmixon.”) If I need to contact you, I will send you a message at your UNT email address.

Blackboard

A Blackboard page is maintained for this course at <https://learn.unt.edu/>. Students are responsible for checking Blackboard regularly for assignments and notices. Some course assignments will be submitted in Blackboard and student grades will be posted in Blackboard.

Required Reading

Central Ideas in American Government, Soomo Learning, 2014. This is available for purchase through the class's Blackboard page.

Additional materials are available on Blackboard.

Course Schedule

Dates	Topic	Assignment
January 20	Introduction	none
January 22	Models of Democracy	Hudson, Introduction
January 27	Political Logic	Hudson, chapter 3
January 29	Political Logic	none
February 3	Constitutions	<i>Central Ideas</i> , chapter 1 and Federalist 10
February 5	Constitutions	Hudson, chapter 1
February 10	Constitutions	<i>Central Ideas</i> , chapter 2
February 12	Federalism	<i>Central Ideas</i> , chapter 3
February 17	Federalism	none
February 19	Civil Liberties	<i>Central Ideas</i> , chapter 4
February 24	Civil Liberties	none
February 26	Civil Liberties	none
March 3	Civil Rights	<i>Central Ideas</i> , chapter 5
March 5	Civil Rights	<i>Letter from a Birmingham Jail</i> , Dr. M.L. King, Jr.
March 10	Civil Rights	none
March 12	Midterm Exam	none
March 17	Spring Break	none
March 19	Spring Break	none
March 24	The Legislature	<i>Central Ideas</i> , chapter 6
March 26	The Legislature	none
March 31	The Legislature	none
April 2	The Presidency	<i>Central Ideas</i> , chapter 7
April 7	The Presidency	none
April 9	The Presidency	none
April 14	The Bureaucracy	<i>Central Ideas</i> , chapter 8
April 16	The Bureaucracy	none
April 21	The Judiciary	<i>Central Ideas</i> , chapter 9
April 23	The Judiciary	Hudson, chapter 2
April 28	The Judiciary	none
April 30	Catch-up	none
May 5	Class Presentations	none
May 7	Class Presentations	none
May 14	Final Exam	10:30 am – 12:30 pm

Grading

Your course grade will be based on the following components.

Component	Course Points
Exams	200
“Get the Gist” Reading Questions	180
Group Project	120
Total	100

Course grades will be assigned according to the following schedule:

450–500	A
400–449	B
350–399	C
300–349	D
< 300	F

Exams (200 points, 100 points each) Exams will be in class closed book in format. They will include a mixture of objective questions, short answers, and essay questions that cover all the assigned reading (whether discussed in class or not) and any other material (videos, Web presentations) covered in class. Exams will be administered through Blackboard and taken in the UNT computer testing center (330 Sage Hall) at the designated time. The exams are password protected, so you will not be able to access them from other sites.

No make-up exams will be given unless you have a university-excused absence or a family or medical emergency, which is documented and verifiable. Students that will miss an exam due to travel with UNT athletic teams or performance groups, or for observance of a religious holiday should make arrangements to take their exams prior to their absences. On exams days, students may not 1) wear hats, sunglasses, or headphones; 2) eat or drink anything; 3) leave the exam room—even to use the lavatory; 4) answer a phone call; 5) touch, use, or keep in view any electronic devices or class related materials; 6) take the exam after the first person has left.

“Get the Gist” Reading Questions (180 points, 20 points each) Every page of each textbook chapter includes a set of “Get the Gist” questions that are designed to help students check their comprehension of the page’s content. Note: If you miss the Get the Gist questions, you can clear your answers and attempt them again! **Each chapter’s Get the Gist questions are due by 12.:30 pm on the date for which the chapter is assigned.** If for some substantial reason you cannot turn in your assignments at the scheduled time, you should contact me prior to the due date to request an extension. Assignments turned in late but before the next exam will be eligible for 50% of the total points. Late assignments received after the next exam will not receive credit for the assignment. Please note that assignments may be turned in early.

Group Project (120 points) This semester, you will be working in groups to draft a Constitution for the New USA (the US as it is being rebuilt following the zombie apocalypse). We will devote regular class time to this project, though you will be expected to work independently outside of class. The document itself will be drafted within a “wiki” in Blackboard Learn. That means that each member of the group can work on the document—adding, deleting, and editing the text—without needing to share files or keep track of the most up-to-date version of the document. It also means that I will be able to look at all the iterations of the document to see who contributed what to the final version. Notations about the “why” of certain decisions should be added in comments to each wiki page.

In addition to the group effort, you will (as an individual) write a 1500 words essay reflecting on your group constitution and tying it to class material. Why did you change what you changed? Historically, why did the “founders” make the mistake you are fixing? These are just some of the questions you might consider. Your paper, whatever focus you choose to give it, should have

a clearly defined thesis statement, well-supported by logical argument and, where appropriate, properly-cited sources.

At the end of the term, we have two days set aside for group presentations. Your presentation must be at least 10 minutes but no more than 12 minutes long. The time limit is firm; rehearse your presentation to make sure you do not exceed it. The presentation should include a handout of some sort as well as a visual component (a poster, video, slide show, something). In your presentation, you should focus on your overall goals in drafting your constitution and highlight the most important provisions of your constitution.

Group constitutions and individual essays are due by 5:00 pm on April 30. If for some substantial reason you cannot turn in your assignments at the scheduled time, you should contact me prior to the due date to request an extension. Assignments turned in late but on the due date will be eligible for 90% of the total points; assignments turned in the day following the due date will be eligible to receive 80% of the total points; assignments turned in two days following the due date will be eligible to receive 70% of the total points. Assignments turned in three days following due date or later will not be eligible to receive any credit. Please note that assignments may be turned in early.

Other Class Policies

For course drop information, see schedule at <http://essc.unt.edu/registrar/schedule/scheduleclass.html>.

Laptops Recent literature suggests that using laptops in class is negatively associated with student success. I advise against using laptops, but it is up to you. The larger problem is that laptop use negatively affects student success for the people sitting around laptop users. Laptop users should take care not to distract their peers.

Classroom Conduct Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at <https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>.

The short version is that we must all practice the Golden Rule—treat others as you would like to be treated. Specifically, this means that all students must treat the instructor, the other students, the teaching assistants, and the classroom setting with respect. The same is true for the instructor. Therefore:

- All potentially disruptive electronic devices must be silenced.
- Students should not send text messages, have side conversations, fall asleep, or read irrelevant materials during class. It is impolite and distracting.
- Students should be on time and stay for the entire period.
- Please show respect for alternative opinions and points of view.

Extra Credit Students should not expect or ask for extra credit. If extra credit is offered, it will be offered to the entire class. Note the grading criteria, and plan accordingly for your success. If you need a particular grade to graduate, keep a scholarship, etc., then exert the effort necessary to earn such a grade. If problems arise, address them early before they become unresolvable!

Religious Holidays In accordance with UNT Policy 15.2.5, students will be excused from class or other activities for the observance of religious holidays, for religions whose places of worship are exempt from property tax under Section 11.20 of the Tax Code. The student is encouraged to notify the instructor as soon as possible regarding the absence.

Departmental Statement of ADA Compliance The University of North Texas 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 you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You 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 Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.

Cheating and plagiarism The UNT Code of Student Conduct and Discipline defines cheating and plagiarism as the use of unauthorized books, notes, or otherwise securing help in a test; copying others' tests, assignments, reports, or term papers; representing the work of another as one's own; collaborating without authority with another student during an examination or in preparing academic work; or otherwise practicing scholastic dishonesty.

Normally, the minimum penalty for cheating or plagiarism is a grade of "F" in the course. In the case of graduate departmental exams, the minimum penalty shall be failure of all fields of the exam. Determination of cheating or plagiarism shall be made by the instructor in the course, or by the field faculty in the case of departmental exams.

Cases of cheating or plagiarism on graduate departmental exams, theses, or dissertations shall automatically be referred to the departmental Graduate Studies Committee. Cases of cheating or plagiarism in ordinary coursework may, at the discretion of the instructor, be referred to the Undergraduate Studies Committee in the case of undergraduate students, or the Graduate Studies Committee in the case of graduate students. These committees, acting as agents of the department Chair, shall impose further penalties, or recommend further penalties to the Dean of Students, if they determine that the case warrants it. In all cases, the Dean of Students shall be informed in writing of the case.

Students may appeal any decision under this policy by following the procedures laid down in the UNT Code of Student Conduct and Discipline.

Policies on academic dishonesty: <http://www.vpaa.unt.edu/academic-integrity.htm>