

PSCI 2306.001: U.S. and Texas Government

Dr. Paul Hensel

phensel@unt.edu

<https://www.paulhensel.org>

Office Hours: W 11:00-12:30, Th 10:30-Noon

Spring 2025

MWF 10:00-10:50 AM

116 Sage

Course Description

This course is meant to introduce students to the government and politics of the United States and Texas, and is required by the Texas legislature for all students in colleges or universities receiving public funding. We will focus on the laws and institutions that make up the U.S. and Texas political systems, including the Constitution and the three branches of government. We will also examine a number of issues that are affected by these laws and institutions, including federalism, civil liberties, and civil rights. Upon completion of this course, students should have a broad understanding of the fundamentals of American and Texas government and politics, and should be able to think critically about current and past political events in these political systems. This should be useful for being an educated voter and citizen, as well as for taking further courses.

It should be noted that this is not a course in current events, although some reference will obviously be made to current events. Also, I do not seek to indoctrinate students with my own personal opinions or political views, whatever these might be. Rather, my goal is to provide students with the tools to evaluate events themselves and form their own opinions. Class performance will be measured with three (non-cumulative) exams, as well as a series of assignments from the course's online webtext.

Teaching Assistants

The teaching assistants should be your first resource for any administrative or procedural questions related to the course (such as late assignments, missing homework, or incorrect grades). If you have a question or complaint, please only contact me after you have spoken with the TA, and be sure to clarify what you and your TA have already done to try to resolve the problem. Of course, you may always contact any TA or the instructor with any substantive questions related to the course (and you are especially encouraged to do so during our scheduled office hours).

	<u>Ahmed Hamza</u>	<u>Afolabi Toyé</u>
• For last names:	A - K	L - Z
• Email:	AhmedHamza@my.unt.edu	AfolabiToye@my.unt.edu
	or through Canvas	or through Canvas
• Office Hours:	WF 11:00-12:30 140 Wooten Hall	Th 1:00-2:00, F 12:00-2:00 152 Wooten Hall

Supplemental Instructor

UNT is providing a Supplemental Instructor (SI) for all students who want to improve their understanding of the material taught in this course. The SI is a UNT student who has already mastered the course material and has been trained to facilitate group sessions where students can meet to compare class notes, review and discuss important concepts, develop strategies for studying, and prepare for exams. Attendance at SI sessions is free and voluntary. The full schedule of SI meetings will be made available as soon as possible, which will be posted in the online version of this syllabus and announced via Canvas:

	<u>Sabrina Wells</u>
• Email:	SabrinaWells@my.unt.edu
• Weekly Sessions:	M 2:00-2:50 (356 Sage) T 4:00-4:50 (Zoom: https://unt.zoom.us/j/88174121491) W 3:00-3:50 (355 Sage)

Assigned Readings

Webtext access code (required): This course uses a custom electronic "webtext" that is unique to this course, which gives you access to the relevant chapters of three books that will be used for this course, without forcing you to pay for chapters that we won't be using or for the cost of printing, shipping, and shelving printed books:

- Jocelyn Evans and Kristy Michaud, *U.S. and Texas Politics with 2306 Workbook*, 15th edition
- An access code giving access to this webtext is available for purchase at the UNT Union bookstore (Barnes & Noble), and perhaps at other local bookstores (the ISBN for this webtext package is 978-1-954890-91-6; be sure that you are purchasing the correct one, as Soomo has other packages available for PSCI 2305 and for different combinations of 2306 chapters). You can also order the passcode directly from Soomo when you are logging in to one of the chapters in Canvas.
- You will need to enter the passcode in Canvas, by opening one of the assigned chapters and following the instructions from the login page. (Do not try to buy a physical copy of the book instead of the access code – you will need to enter the access code through Canvas if you want the webtext assignments to count for points in this class) Once you enter your access code, Soomo will allow you to order a printed copy of the book for what they describe as "a small fee" if you'd prefer to read a hard copy of the book -- but the webtext multiple choice and workbook assignments can only be completed and turned in electronically, so even if you order the printed book from them you will still need to use the electronic version through Canvas to get credit for those assignments.
- To get help from the Soomo team, please visit their support site at <https://soomolearning.com/support>. The TAs and I cannot address technical questions regarding purchase, registration, or usage of their products, or questions like "why didn't I get a perfect score on the assignment?"; only Soomo can help with these sorts of issues.

Course Requirements

Please note that all assignments except for exams are completed online, to make sure that students have no incentive to come to class if they have recently been exposed to Covid-19 (or any other public health issue) or if they are symptomatic. This does NOT mean that you are not expected to come to class when you are healthy, though. Throughout the Covid era, students who rarely came to class have done poorly in my courses, even if they thought they got enough information from friends, GroupMe, or elsewhere. Seeing and hearing the material in person, and being part of the class discussion of this material, makes a huge difference in learning and in grades.

(1) Three Examinations (20% each): Three exams will be given on the days specified in this syllabus; the two midterm exams will be held during class, and the final exam will be held during finals week at the time specified by UNT's exam schedule. Each exam is non-cumulative, and will draw roughly equally from the assigned textbook and workbook readings and the instructor's lectures. Each will contain 40 multiple choice questions, and 5 short answer/fill-in-the-blank questions. Be sure to be on time to each exam; once the first student leaves the room after an exam starts, anybody else entering to take the exam will lose five letter grades.

(2) Webtext Assignments (40%): The 22 chapters in the webtext include questions within the text, for you to answer as you do the reading. These chapters are used to assess the four learning objectives adopted by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (critical thinking, communication, personal responsibility, and social responsibility). You may redo the questions for any particular chapter as many times as you'd like if you want to improve your score, up until the next exam -- but all webtext grades become final once the next exam is held. Your lowest score from these chapters will be dropped from calculation of the grade.

Warning about Canvas Gradebook

You can keep track of your class grade using the gradebook in Canvas, as each portion of the grade is either recorded there automatically (webtext chapters) or entered manually by your TA (exam scores). Be aware, though, that this may not be completely accurate in estimating your grade at any point in time, because the Canvas gradebook doesn't always accurately handle grades where the lowest score of each type is dropped,

and it may not handle late work accurately. Webtext assignments may be completed up through the end of the next exam, so Canvas won't reduce your grade before that time by showing a zero for chapters that have not yet been completed, but these will turn to zero and hurt your final grade if they are not completed before that deadline. The Canvas gradebook's reported grade is best treated as a semi-reliable estimate, which you can verify by calculating your grade manually following the percentages listed in this syllabus and by making sure that you have completed all assigned work so far.

Course Rules

(1) **Classroom:** All students must treat the instructor, the other students, and the classroom setting with respect. This includes arriving on time and staying for the entire class (or notifying the instructor in advance if this will not be possible), turning off cell phones and similar devices during class, and refraining from reading, passing notes, talking with friends, and any other potentially disruptive activities. This also means showing respect for alternative opinions and points of view, listening when either the instructor or a fellow student is speaking to the class, and refraining from insulting language and gestures.

Following departmental policy, any student engaging in unacceptable behavior may be directed to leave the classroom. Additionally, the instructor may refer the student to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities to consider whether the student's conduct violated UNT's Code of Student Conduct (which may be found at <https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>).

(2) **PowerPoint:** The instructor's lecture notes and PowerPoint slides will not be posted online or otherwise handed out to students, except under special circumstances (such as the primarily online/remote or hybrid courses that were offered during the early years of the Covid-19 pandemic). If you think you might be unable to attend one or more class meetings, make arrangements with another student to borrow or copy their notes.

Also be aware that any PowerPoint slides presented to the class will not contain all material that will be necessary for an "A" grade on course exams. The instructor's verbal lecture will also include important information that is not presented directly on the slides, so students should be careful to take notes on verbal lecture material as well as the brief overviews presented on the slides.

(3) **Online Resources:** Any class recordings, videos, PowerPoint slides, or other similar course materials are reserved for use only by students in this class for educational purposes. The materials 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.

(4) **Keep Backups:** For any assignments that are turned in physically during the semester, students must keep an extra copy of each assignment until the instructor has returned the graded copy of that assignment. Students must also keep graded, returned copies of all such assignments. Failure to do so will invalidate any potential question or protest about grades.

Also, students are responsible for maintaining backups of any written work for this course, preferably in a location away from the main computer that is being used (such as online backup through Dropbox, Google Drive, or Microsoft OneDrive). No extensions will be granted for work that is not turned in on time because of computer, hard drive, or printer failure, theft, power surge, or similar causes.

(5) **Makeup Exams:** Makeup exams, whether for full credit or not, will take place only on UNT's designated "Reading Day" at the end of the last week of classes. Only one time slot on Reading Day will be offered for all makeup exams in any of the instructor's courses; students seeking to take a makeup exam in this time slot must contact the instructor no later than 5 PM on Tuesday of the last week of classes. Makeup exams in classes that usually use multiple choice tests will be offered as short answer/essay examinations (regardless of the type of exam that is being made up) over the same material that would have been covered by the original exam.

Full-credit makeup examinations are given only with prior instructor approval (if at all possible) and with appropriate documentation. Note that the documentation must indicate why you could not be in class *at the time of the originally scheduled test*. If appropriate documentation is not provided, the makeup examination can still be taken, but will face a grade penalty of five letter grades (50%). Makeup exams

(whether full or reduced credit) are only available for students who missed the original exam; this is not an option for trying to retake an exam to get a higher score.

(6) End of the Course: The scheduled final exam time represents the conclusion of the course. No late assignments or documentation will be accepted after the conclusion of this two-hour period, and no makeup exams will be offered after this time. If you may need to miss the scheduled final exam time, you must contact Dr. Hensel as soon as you know about the potential conflict/issue, to arrange an early exam before the regularly scheduled exam.

(7) Academic Integrity, Plagiarism, and Generative AI/Chatbots: All work turned in for this course must be your own original work. Such actions as plagiarizing by using a source without giving it appropriate credit, or using material written by somebody else or by generative AI/chatbots like ChatGPT and presenting it as your own, represent violations of academic integrity. Please note that penalties will apply even if you did not knowingly intend to plagiarize or cheat – you must be familiar with the rules of academic integrity and doing your own original work, whether this is at UNT or later in your career, and ignorance is no excuse.

Academic integrity is defined in the UNT Policy on Student Standards for Academic Integrity: <<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>>. This covers such issues as cheating (including use of unauthorized materials or other assistance on course assignments or examinations), plagiarism (whether intentional or negligent), forgery, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and sabotage. Any suspected case of academic dishonesty will be handled in accordance with current University policy and procedures, as described at <<https://vpaa.unt.edu/ss/integrity>>. If this is your first academic integrity violation, you can expect a failing grade on the assignment, and you will be reported to the university's Academic Integrity office; repeat violations in one or more courses will lead to stronger sanctions up to and including expulsion from UNT.

(8) Covid-19/Community Health Issues: Based on the current health situation in Denton County, UNT is open for business as usual. Our class will meet face-to-face on the schedule listed in the syllabus, with each class meeting including both lecturing by the instructor and class discussion of the assigned topics. Please note that unless circumstances change, I will not record the class meetings for posting online, nor will I conduct class meetings in a hybrid format that is broadcast through Canvas. I recommend making arrangements with one or more other students in the course to share copies of notes in case you might have to miss class.

I have set up this course to ensure that there is no grade penalty for missing class due to suspected or confirmed Covid (or any other future community health issue). The only in-person grade component is the examinations, which may be made up on Reading Day at the end of the semester; all other class assignments are turned in through Canvas.

(9) Exceptions: Any exceptions to these policies are given at the instructor's discretion -- only with prior approval where possible, and only with appropriate documentation. Before asking for an exception, be aware that I will not grant exceptions that might be perceived as giving one student an unfair advantage or an opportunity that was not available to the remaining students who followed the rules correctly, turned in their work on time, and so on.

(10) Other Teaching Policies: The instructor's teaching-related policies and expectations are described in more detail at <<https://www.paulhensel.org/teachgrade.html>>. Failure to visit that web site does not constitute a valid excuse for ignorance of these policies.

In particular, note that I do not "round up" grades -- an 89.9 counts as a B rather than an A -- and the only extra credit opportunity, if any, will be offered in class during the last class meeting before Thanksgiving (for fall semesters) or spring break (for spring semesters).

(11) Discussing Grades: Consistent with UNT rules, instructors (whether professors, teaching fellows, or teaching assistants) may not discuss student grades over email, telephone, or in any other setting that is not face-to-face due to privacy and security concerns. If you have questions about your grades, you may meet with me during office hours, or I will be glad to make an appointment at a more convenient time.

(12) **Canceling Class:** I will never cancel class on my own for weather-related reasons; unless you hear official word through UNT's Eagle Alert service, class will be held at the regular time and place. Students who are unable to make it to class due to weather are still responsible for any material covered in lecture that day. If class is canceled, the next class meeting after school resumes will cover the material that would have been covered in the canceled class meeting, and a revised syllabus will be posted as soon as practical to adjust the schedule of remaining class meetings. More detail on the instructor's weather-related policies is provided at <<https://www.paulhensel.org/teaching.html>>.

Note that if class is canceled (and especially if the entire university is closed due to weather or other concerns), I will attempt to send class emails through Canvas to explain any relevant changes in the class schedule and/or syllabus. If you do not receive any such emails, please log in to Canvas directly (<https://unt.instructure.com>) and check the Announcements tab; in the February 2021 power blackout many students reported not receiving Canvas emails, but the announcements were all available on Canvas for students to see if they logged in to it directly. If the entire Canvas site is also not functioning, I will attempt to post these announcements to the online syllabus page for this course on my web site (<https://www.paulhensel.org/>>).

(13) **Changes:** The content of this syllabus may be modified by the instructor at any time during the semester if deemed necessary. Any such changes will be announced in class as well as via a Canvas announcement; students are responsible for making sure that they check the email account that is on file with Canvas, and/or check the announcements tab for this course in Canvas in case there is some sort of email problem.

UNT Policies

Americans with Disabilities Act

UNT is committed to making reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) each semester to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will contact me with a letter listing recommended accommodations; you will then need to discuss these with me so we can decide how to meet your specific needs in the course. It is advisable to discuss these issues as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation; **I can not grant you an accommodation that you did not discuss with me before the assignment in question was due.** For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <<https://www.unt.edu/oda>> or contact them by phone at (940) 565-4323.

Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation

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.

Sexual Discrimination, Harassment, and Assault

UNT is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these acts of aggression, please know that you are not alone. The federal Title IX law makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses. UNT has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

UNT's Dean of Students web site at <<https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources>> offers a range of on-campus and off-campus resources to help support survivors, depending on their unique needs. The Student Advocate may be reached through email at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students' office at (940) 565-2648. You are not alone; we are here to help.

Student Resources at UNT

In recent semesters, many students have experienced unexpected health, family, work, or other issues. If any such issue comes up, please do not hesitate to contact me, so we can try to work out a reasonable solution. Remember, I can't help you if you don't let me! Here are a few resources that UNT has made available for students facing unexpected difficulties:

- **Student Counseling and Testing Services** (couples counseling, individual/group sessions to help manage depression, eating disorders, grief, self esteem/identity, substance abuse, stress, and much more):
List of services: <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services/services>
FAQ: <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services/resources-and-self-help/faq>
Emergency contacts: <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-counseling/emergency-contacts>
- **Student Health and Wellness Center** (offering everything from Covid testing to flu vaccines, gynecological care, X-rays and lab diagnostics, vision and dental care, and much more):
<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center>
- **Other Wellbeing and Safety Resources:**
<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/wellbeing-and-safety>

Instructor's Web Site

The instructor maintains a web site at <<https://www.paulhensel.org>> that includes -- among other things -- teaching policies, solutions to common student writing problems, syllabi for my other courses, and Internet resources for students of international relations. Students are strongly encouraged to become familiar with this web site during the semester. The online version of this syllabus can be found at:

<<https://www.paulhensel.org/Teaching/psci2306.html>>

Schedule of Topics and Assigned Readings

1. Monday, Jan. 13: Introduction to Course

- **Readings/Assigned Work:** (none)
- **Description of Topic:** This meeting will be an introduction to the course. Be sure to read through this entire syllabus, and purchase the assigned reading.

2-5. Wednesday, Jan. 15 - Wednesday, Jan. 22: Introduction to American Government and Politics

4. Monday, Jan. 20: No Class (Martin Luther King, Jr., Day)

- **Readings/Assigned Work:** (none)
- **Description of Topic:** This topic will serve as a starting point for the rest of the class, beginning with definitions of "politics" and "government." We will also briefly examine major types of government and consider the roles that government typically plays in society, before introducing the U.S. government and political system specifically.

The remainder of the topic addresses Americans' beliefs and values related to politics, such as who should govern and how. We will begin with "liberalism," with its emphasis on individual liberty and limits on government. We will also consider a number of beliefs related to the role that should be played by such concepts as religion, diversity, and equality. Each of us already has our own feelings about each of these issues, but as you do the readings, try to see if you can understand why other Americans might hold different beliefs from your own (even if you do not agree with them). How important do you think it is that most/all Americans share similar views on such major issues? How important do you think it is that official government policy reflect the views of the majority of the population, rather than trying to reflect the many different views that are held by smaller groups within the country?

- **Additional Online Resources:** (these are provided for your information; they are not required reading)
--Alexis de Tocqueville (1835-1840), [*Democracy in America*](#) (a famous discussion of US politics)
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~Hyper/DETOC/toc_indx.html>

6-8. Friday, Jan. 24 - Wednesday, Jan. 29: The U.S. Constitution

- **Assigned Readings** (day 1 of this topic): Chapter 1 ("The Founding and the Constitution")

- Assigned Readings (day 2): Chapter 3 (Workbook: "The U.S. Constitution")
- Assigned Readings (day 3): No new readings
- Description of Topic: Most countries have some fundamental document that sets the ground rules for the political system; in the U.S. this is our Constitution. This topic will begin with a brief history of other governing documents, ranging from England's Magna Carta to our own Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation. We will see why the Articles of Confederation (1781-1788) were inadequate and how they were ultimately replaced with the current Constitution. We will examine the many compromises that were made along the way to the Constitution, and see how these compromises that were made over two centuries ago continue to shape government and politics in the 21st century. We will also consider how the Constitution can be amended and trace some of the major amendments that have passed, beginning with the Bill of Rights.

When doing the readings, think about the importance of the many compromises that were made in putting together the original Constitution. Was the compromise useful, and was it worth making in order to ensure that the Constitution would pass? Did the compromise weaken the Constitution or our government too much, or did it prevent the Constitution and/or government from adapting to problems the original founding fathers hadn't foreseen? Would it be desirable to revisit some or all of these compromises in order to produce a governing document that reflects today's world more than the world of the 1780s, or would it be better to leave things as they are and try to work within the system as it has endured for over two centuries so far?

- Additional Online Resources:

--[The Magna Carta](#)

<<https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/magna-carta>>

--[The Declaration of Independence](#)

<<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>>

--[The Articles of Confederation](#)

<https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/artconf.asp>

--[The Constitution \(including amendments\)](#)

<https://www.senate.gov/civics/constitution_item/constitution.htm>

9. Friday, Jan. 31: The Texas Constitution

- Assigned Readings: Chapter 2 ("Texas: The Constitution")
- Discussion Points: Here we examine the state constitution of Texas, which is quite different from the U.S. Constitution. We consider some of the differences (such as length, ease of amendment, and level of detail) and look at how this produces a different governmental structure. While reading, think about these differences, and try to decide which approach seems better (and why).

- Additional Online Resources:

--[Historical Constitutions of Texas](#)

<<https://tarlton.law.utexas.edu/constitutions/>>

--[The Texas Constitution](#)

<<https://tlc.texas.gov/docs/legref/TxConst.pdf>>

--[Amendments to the Texas Constitution](#)

<<https://tlc.texas.gov/docs/amendments/Constamend1876.pdf>>

10-12. Monday, Feb. 3 - Friday, Feb. 7: Federalism / State and Local Government

- Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic): Chapter 4 ("Federalism")
- Assigned Readings (day 2): Chapter 6 (Workbook: "Federalism")
- Assigned Readings (day 3): Chapter 5 ("Texas Federalism")
- Description of Topic: This topic addresses the relationship between different levels of government. We begin with the Constitution and the division between the federal government and the states, seeking to understand how powers are divided and why things were set up this way. We will then consider the division of powers between the state and local governments, which is more properly a state-based matter that is not directly addressed by the Constitution. When doing the readings, think about the current division of powers between federal, state, and local government. Is this division the best way to handle things, or at least some things? If not, why not, and how might these matters be handled better?

- Additional Online Resources:

- US Census Bureau, [Census of Governments](https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cog.html) reports
<<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cog.html>>
- [Denton County Government](https://www.dentoncounty.gov)
<<https://www.dentoncounty.gov>>
- [City of Denton Government](https://www.cityofdenton.com)
<<https://www.cityofdenton.com>>
- [Denton Independent School District](https://www.dentonisd.org)
<<https://www.dentonisd.org>>

13. Monday, Feb. 10: Wrapup and Review for Exam

- Description of Topic: Today we will finish any material from the previous topic that was not already completed, and we will talk about the first midterm exam.

14. Wednesday, Feb. 12: EXAM #1 (in the regular classroom)

*****Note: All webtext multiple choice and workbook assignments for the first third of the course must be completed by the start of the exam. No late penalties are charged for late work up to this time, but no late work will be accepted after this time.*****

15-18. Friday, Feb. 14 - Friday, Feb. 21: The Federal Legislative Branch: Congress

- Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic): Chapter 7 ("Congress")
- Assigned Readings (day 2): Chapter 8 (Workbook: "The Legislative Branch")
- Assigned Readings (days 3-4): No new readings
- Description of Topic: We begin looking at the three branches of government by studying the legislative branch of the federal government, represented by Congress. We will examine the structure and functions of Congress, before spending more time on the role of Congressional committees, the legislative process, and the relationship between Congresspersons and their constituents. While doing these readings, think about the low public approval of Congress (according to Gallup, throughout 2013 around 15% of Americans approved of the way Congress is handling its job and around 80% disapproved). Why is Congress so unpopular, should we be concerned about this, and what (if anything) could be done to address this?

- Additional Online Resources:

- [Who Represents Me?](https://wrm.capitol.texas.gov/home)
<<https://wrm.capitol.texas.gov/home>>
- [US Senate](https://www.senate.gov)
<<https://www.senate.gov>>
- [US House of Representatives](https://www.house.gov)
<<https://www.house.gov>>

19. Monday, Feb. 24: The Texas Legislature

- Assigned Readings: Chapter 9 ("Texas: The Legislature")
- Description of Topic: Here we examine the Texas legislature, which is somewhat different from the federal Congress. We will examine how it works, focusing on the differences from Congress -- most notably the fact that it has low pay and meets much less frequently. While doing this reading, think about the advantages and disadvantages of this Texas approach as compared with the federal approach. Should Congress think about moving toward the Texas model, should Texas think about moving toward the federal model, or would it be best for both to stay the way they are now?

- Additional Online Resources:

- [Texas Legislature](https://capitol.texas.gov)
<<https://capitol.texas.gov>>

20-23. Wednesday, Feb. 26 - Wednesday, Mar. 5: The Federal Executive Branch (I): The Presidency

- Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic): Chapter 10 ("The Presidency")

- Assigned Readings (day 2): Chapter 11 (Workbook: "The Presidency")
- Assigned Readings (days 3-4): No new readings
- Description of Topic: Few individuals capture the attention of citizens or observers more easily than the U.S. president. We will examine the requirements of the presidency, including the process by which the president is elected and (if necessary) replaced. We will then examine the powers and responsibilities of the president in both foreign policy and domestic politics, the other members of the president's administration, and the relationship between the president and other actors in the U.S. political system. While doing these readings, think about the powers and limitations of the president -- were some of the founding fathers right to wish for a more powerful, almost king-like figure? Would the country be better off with a weaker figure, or is the current model just about right for the country's needs?
- Additional Online Resources:
 - [The White House](https://www.whitehouse.gov)
<<https://www.whitehouse.gov>>
 - [The Cabinet](https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/cabinet/)
<<https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/cabinet/>>
 - [Executive Office of the President](https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/executive-office-of-the-president/)
<<https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/executive-office-of-the-president/>>

24, 28. Friday, Mar. 7, Monday, Mar. 17: The Federal Executive Branch (II): The Bureaucracy
25-27. March 10-14: NO CLASS (Spring Break)

- Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic): Chapter 12 ("Bureaucracy")
- Assigned Readings (day 2): Chapter 13 (Workbook: "The Bureaucracy")
- Description of Topic: Whereas the president is the most prominent member of government, the bureaucracy is more of a background player in the executive branch. Here we will examine what the U.S. bureaucracy includes, why it exists, and what it does. While doing these readings, think about how important a role the federal bureaucracy plays in your life. While it's easy to blame bureaucrats for all of our problems, do most of the bureaucrats play a helpful role, or is their poor reputation justified?
- Additional Online Resources:
 - [Federal Government Departments and Agencies](https://www.usa.gov/federal-agencies)
<<https://www.usa.gov/federal-agencies>>

29-30. Wednesday, Mar. 19 - Friday, Mar. 21: The Texas Executive and Bureaucracy

- Assigned Readings: Chapter 14 ("Texas: The Governor"), Chapter 15 ("Texas: The Executive Branch")
- Description of Topic: This topic examines the executive branch in Texas, including both the governor and the many agencies and bureaucrats. Unlike the federal government, the Texas governor is generally seen as weak politically, while the bureaucracy is seen as quite important because the part-time legislature is usually not in session. Does this seem like a more or less desirable system than the federal executive branch that we have examined over the past several weeks, and why?
- Additional Online Resources:
 - [Texas Governor](https://gov.texas.gov)
<<https://gov.texas.gov>>
 - [Texas State Executive Offices](https://ballotpedia.org/Texas_state_executive_offices)
<https://ballotpedia.org/Texas_state_executive_offices>
 - [Texas State Agencies and Departments](https://www.texas.gov/texas-state-agencies-departments/)
<<https://www.texas.gov/texas-state-agencies-departments/>>

31. Monday, Mar. 24: Wrapup and Review for Exam

- Description of Topic: Today we will finish any material from the previous topic that was not already completed, and we will talk about the second midterm exam.

32. Wednesday, Mar. 26: EXAM #2 (in the regular classroom)

*****Note: All webtext multiple choice and workbook assignments for the middle third of the course must be**

*completed by the start of the exam. No late penalties are charged for late work up to this time, but no late work will be accepted after this time.****

33-34. Friday, Mar. 28 - Monday, Mar. 31: The Federal Judicial Branch: The Federal Court System

- Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic): Chapter 16 ("The Judiciary")
- Assigned Readings (day 2): Chapter 17 (Workbook: "The Courts")
- Description of Topic: This topic examines the third branch of the federal government, the judicial branch. We will examine the country's sometimes confusing judicial system, with its sometimes tangled web of local, state, and federal courts. This will include the process by which judges are seated on the different courts, as well as each court's jurisdiction in terms of geographic area and/or types of cases. We will focus in particular on the Supreme Court, with its ability to review and overturn both legislative and executive actions. When doing these readings, think about whether you agree with the level of power that the Supreme Court has in today's judicial and political system -- is this desirable overall? (be sure to consider both times when the Court is dominated by justices who tend to share your own political or legal views, and times when it leans the opposite direction)
- Additional Online Resources:
 - [Supreme Court](https://www.supremecourt.gov)
<<https://www.supremecourt.gov>>
 - [Federal Courts](https://www.uscourts.gov)
<<https://www.uscourts.gov>>

35-36. Wednesday, Apr. 2 - Friday, Apr. 4: The Texas Judicial Branch

- Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic): Chapter 18 ("Texas: The Judicial Branch")
- Assigned Readings (day 2): No new readings
- Description of Topic: Here we look at the Texas court system in much more detail, after talking about state and local courts only generally over the past week. We will investigate the many layers of the Texas system, which are even more confusing and overlapping than the courts in many other states or the federal system. We will also address some challenges faced by the Texas system, ranging from money (as judge elections attract ever-larger campaign donations) to the death penalty (common in Texas, although a surprising number of convictions are overturned by higher courts). While doing the reading, think about how serious each of these challenges is, and whether you can think of any solutions with a reasonable chance of success.
- Additional Online Resources:
 - [Texas Courts](https://www.txcourts.gov/about-texas-courts/)
<<https://www.txcourts.gov/about-texas-courts/>>

37-42. Monday, Apr. 7 - Friday, Apr. 18: Civil Liberties

- Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic): Chapter 19 ("Civil Liberties")
- Assigned Readings (day 2): Chapter 20 (Workbook: "Civil Liberties")
- Assigned Readings (days 3-6): No new readings
- Description of Topic: A major concern of Americans ever since the days of the founding fathers has been individual liberty. Civil liberties have featured prominently in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, as well as later amendments. We will consider a number of prominent issues related to civil liberties, ranging from the freedoms of speech, the press, and assembly to religious issues, issues of law and justice, and the right to privacy. In many of these cases, there is an important tension between an individual's personal rights and the safety or rights of the masses, as demonstrated by the TSA checkpoints at airports -- where is the ideal line between an individual's privacy and the safety of every other passenger on the plane that might be hijacked or crashed by an individual hiding a weapon? As you do these readings, think about whether the law (in its current form) goes far enough in protecting individual liberties, or whether it already goes too far.

43-46. Monday, Apr. 21 - Monday, Apr. 28: Civil Rights

- Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic): Chapter 21 ("Civil Rights")
- Assigned Readings (day 2): Chapter 22 (Workbook: "Civil Rights")
- Assigned Readings (days 3-4): No new readings

- Description of Topic: Our final topic of the semester concerns issues of civil rights, typically involving legal guarantees of equal treatment for each group. We will examine the basic issues involved here, with particular attention to equality along racial, gender, and disability-related lines. While doing these readings, think about how important these issues are in today's American democracy. Has enough been done to address these issues already, not enough, or is there too much attention paid to these sorts of issues? Is there a fair solution that can help historically disadvantaged groups without punishing individuals from groups that have historically received advantaged treatment, even if these individuals have never directly benefited from this history?

47. Wednesday, Apr. 30: Course Wrapup and Review for Final Exam

- Readings/Assigned Work: No new readings
- Description of Topic: This is the final meeting of the semester. This will be used to wrap up the course and prepare for the final exam (or, if needed, to finish any material from the previous topic that was not already completed).

48. Friday, May 2: NO CLASS (UNT Reading Day)

- *Note that this is the only day when makeup exams will be offered. If you need a makeup exam because you did not take exam #1 or exam #2, be sure to send Dr. Hensel an email indicating which exam you need and listing your availability on this day by midnight on Sunday of the last week of classes.*

FINAL EXAM: Saturday, May 3, 7:30-9:30 AM (in the regular classroom)

- *The final exam is held on the day during Final Exam Week that is assigned by UNT, based on the time when our class meets: <<http://registrar.unt.edu/exams/final-exam-schedule>>*

*****Note: All webtext multiple choice and workbook assignments for the final third of the course must be completed by the start of the exam. No late penalties are charged for late work up to this time, but no late work will be accepted after this time.*****