

## **PSCI 2306.08: U.S. and Texas Government** *[revised 2/12/21]*

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Office Hours: MWF 11-12 (Zoom Meeting ID: [885 5740 3716](#))

**Spring 2021**

Remote (asynchronous)

### **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 both for being an educated voter and citizen and for taking further courses on the subject.

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 two (non-cumulative) multiple choice exams, a series of assignments from the course's online webtext and workbook, participation in weekly class discussion through Packback Questions, and researching and writing a letter on a political question to a relevant policymaker.

### **What is an "Online" (INET) Course?**

UNT has classified this course as "online" (INET), meaning that the course will be handled remotely with no face-to-face component. The course is organized by weekly topics, as laid out in this syllabus; each topic has a separate "module" in Canvas to organize all associated lecture videos and assignments. The instructor's lecture videos will be posted at the start of the week on Sunday or Monday, and students are free to watch the videos, read the assigned readings, complete the assignments included in these readings, and participate in the Packback Questions discussion at any time during the week until midnight on Friday.

Because there is no face-to-face component, many of the students may not be located in Denton, and offices are usually too small for safe social distancing, the instructor and teaching assistants will do all of their office hours via Zoom. Feel free to email with any additional questions outside of scheduled office hours.

### **Technical Requirements**

Since this is an online course, you will need to have regular access to a computer or other device that connects to the Internet. You will need to connect to the course's Canvas web page, watch course lecture videos that are posted on Canvas, follow the links from Canvas to read and complete the chapters in the webtext, follow links to any external videos that are posted on Canvas, and participate in Packback discussion boards.

### **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 complaint, please only contact me after you have spoken with the TA, and be sure to clarify what you and s/he 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>Mahdi Amirisefat</u>	<u>Raul Guerrero</u>	<u>Kayla Parnin</u>
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• Office Hours:	TTh 1:30-3	T 1-2 PM, Th 1-3 PM	Th 10 AM-1 PM
	Zoom: <a href="https://unt.zoom.us/j/84006203085">84006203085</a>	Zoom: <a href="https://unt.zoom.us/j/2023457013">2023457013</a>	Zoom: <a href="https://unt.zoom.us/j/92228102625">92228102625</a>

### Supplemental Instructor

A Supplemental Instructor (SI) is provided by UNT for all students who want to improve their understanding of the material taught in this course. SI sessions are led by a UNT student who has already mastered the course material and has been trained to facilitate group sessions, review and discuss important concepts, and help students develop strategies for studying and prepare for exams. Attendance at SI sessions is free and voluntary. A schedule of SI meetings will be made available early in the semester, which will be announced on Canvas (and included in a revised version of this syllabus).

- Madeline Kutac
- \* Email: [MadelineKutac@my.unt.edu](mailto:MadelineKutac@my.unt.edu)
  - Weekly Sessions: T 2-2:50 (Zoom: [88141441491](https://unt.zoom.us/j/88141441491)), W 3-3:50 (Zoom: [89916815294](https://unt.zoom.us/j/89916815294)), Th 2:30-3:20 (Zoom: [81025853373](https://unt.zoom.us/j/81025853373)), Sun 5-6:20 (Zoom: [87620015514](https://unt.zoom.us/j/87620015514))

### 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. The three books (all published by Soomo Learning) are the following:

- Jocelyn Evans and Kristy Michaud, *Central Ideas in American Government*
- James R. Henson and Joshua M. Blank, *Texas Politics*
- Workbook: Matthew Eshbaugh-Soha, ed., *PSCI 2306: US & TX Constitutions and Institutions*
- A single access code giving access to all three books is available for purchase at the UNT bookstore and Campus Bookstore, as well as through the Barnes & Noble link in the Canvas page for this course (ISBN 978-1949164855). If you want to avoid the bookstore markup, this access code can also be purchased directly from the publisher through Canvas, by opening one of the assigned chapters and following the instructions from the login page. However you purchase your access code, once you enter it, Soomo (the publisher) will also 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 rather than an electronic version -- but remember that the Get the Gist and workbook assignments can only be completed and turned in electronically, so even if you order the printed book you will still need to use the electronic version 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.

**Packback (required):** This course also requires students to purchase access to the Packback platform, which we will use for discussion throughout the semester (since face-to-face discussion is impossible in an online-only course like this one). More details are provided below in the Packback section under Course Requirements; please note that it is best to purchase and enter your registration code directly from the Packback link in this course's Canvas page, as some students have reported problems being recognized as members of this class community when trying to go through Packback's web site.

- To register on Packback, create an account by navigating to the Packback Questions tab in Canvas and click "Register as a new student" (if you already have a Packback account from a previous semester you can log in with your previous credentials). Make sure to register with your UNT email address and your real first and last name, or you may not be able to get the discounted UNT price or have your grades recorded correctly. The account should cost less than the usual \$25, because UNT is a preferred partner of Packback; it should be even less if you have already used Packback in a previous semester. Once you have your account, enter our class community's lookup key into the "Join a new Community" section in Packback: **26c76a4b-2b80-489a-b8f8-90acd1b82008**. Follow the instructions on your screen to finish your registration.
- To get help from the Packback team, please visit their support site at <https://help.packback.co/hc/en-us> or contact their customer support team directly at [help@packback.co](mailto:help@packback.co). The TAs and I cannot address technical questions regarding purchase, registration, or usage of this product, or questions like "why didn't I get a full credit for posting this week?"; only Packback can help with these sorts of issues. *Note that some students in the past have had problems when trying to register or log in from Packback's web site; it works best to access Packback from the tab on the class Canvas page.*

### **Course Requirements**

**(1) Midterm Examination (20%):** The course's midterm exam will be given through Canvas on the date listed in the syllabus. The exam will be available to students for 24 hours, but once begun, it must be completed within 90 minutes. It will contain 50 multiple choice questions, which will draw roughly equally from the assigned readings and the instructor's lectures.

**(2) Final Examination (20%):** The course's final exam will be given through Canvas on the date listed in the syllabus, which will take place during final exam week on a day determined by UNT. The exam will be available to students for 24 hours, but once begun, it must be completed within 90 minutes. It will contain 50 multiple choice questions, which will draw roughly equally from the assigned readings and the instructor's lectures.

**(3) "Get the Gist" Assignments (20%):** The 14 chapters in the webtext from the American and Texas books include these questions within the text, for you to answer as you do the reading. You may redo these questions as many times as you'd like if you want to improve your score, but no more retakes are allowed after the midterm exam (for chapters in the first half of the course) or the last week of classes (for chapters in the second half of the course). Your lowest score from the 14 chapters will be dropped from calculation of the grade.

**(4) Workbook Assignments (20%):** The 8 workbook chapters in the webtext include these questions within the text, for you to answer as you do the reading. These workbook chapters are organized around the four learning objectives adopted by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (critical thinking, communication, personal responsibility, and social responsibility). You may redo the workbook questions as many times as you'd like if you want to improve your score, but no more retakes are allowed after the midterm exam (for chapters in the first half of the course) or the last week of classes (for chapters in the second half of the course). Your lowest score from the 8 workbook chapters will be dropped from calculation of the grade.

**(5) Packback (15%):** Participation is a requirement for this course, and the Packback Questions platform will be used for online discussion about class topics. Packback Questions is an online community where you can be fearlessly curious and ask open-ended questions to build on top of what we are covering in class and relate topics to real-world applications. For a brief introduction to Packback Questions and why we are using it in class, watch this video: <https://vimeo.com/163888277>. *Be sure to access Packback directly from the tab in the Canvas site for this course; it may not accurately recognize your membership in the class community if you try to access it directly from the Packback web site.*

- There will be no Packback assignment for the first week of the course (which is only introductory and is meant to give students time to read the syllabus carefully and to purchase and sign in to the webtext and Packback) or for the week of the midterm exam or the final week of the semester.
- In every week besides those, students are expected to post 1 original open-ended question with a minimum Curiosity Score of 50 (as measured by Packback), which is worth 1/3 of the week's Packback grade. Your question should provide sufficient background information for students who are unfamiliar with the subject to be able to engage and answer your question. Students are also expected to post two responses per week to questions asked by classmates with a minimum Curiosity Score of 50 (as measured by Packback), which are each worth 1/3 of the week's grade. All posting must be completed by midnight on the Friday of the week in question. Note that half credit will be provided for questions and responses that do not meet this minimum Curiosity Score. Your lowest weekly Packback score will be dropped from calculation of the grade.

**(6) Letter to Policy-maker (5%):** One of the central themes of PSCI 2306 is the division of policy-making power among the various branches and levels of government. Another is the importance of representation and having a government that reflects the will of the people. This assignment requires you to demonstrate core competencies of critical thinking, communication, social responsibility, and personal responsibility within the context of civic engagement in the U.S. political process. In this assignment, you will:

1. Identify a current political issue that affects you and your community.
2. Educate yourself about the issue by reading at least three articles from reputable news sources about the issue.
3. Determine which policy-maker is in the best position to represent your interests with respect to that issue. That could be your representative in the U.S. House of Representatives, your representative in a state legislature, or some member of the executive branch. The key is that you identify a person who has some policy-making authority with respect to the issue you have chosen and a person who might listen to your position (for example, choosing your own representative to the U.S. House rather than some other representative).
4. Draft a letter to your legislative or executive-branch policymaker in which you:
  - a. Identify yourself as one of the politician's constituents;
  - b. Identify the political issue about which you are concerned;
  - c. Clearly state a position on that issue (what should the policymaker do or not do); and
  - d. Provide an explanation for your position that will persuade the policymaker to agree with you.
  - e. List the three articles you read while researching this topic.
  - f. For tips on writing a letter to Congress, visit <https://www.thoughtco.com/write-effective-letters-to-congress-3322301>
5. After you draft your letter and feel comfortable with both the content and format of your letter, submit the letter through the link in Canvas. This must be done by the end of the last week of classes (midnight on Friday, April 23).
  - a. You are not required to send the letter to the policymaker in question, but you may do so if you choose. (If you do this, you won't need to list the three articles you read in this version)

### ***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 (Get the Gist and workbook) or entered manually by your TA (curved exam grades, Packback, policymaker letter). 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; it may not handle late work accurately - Get the Gist and workbook assignments may be completed up through the end of the midterm or final exam for the course, so what Canvas treats as a zero can still be improved until the next exam; and Packback grades must be entered manually by your TA, so they may not always be completely up to date (your TA is unlikely to be waiting at their*

computer at midnight Friday so s/he can enter your Packback scores in Canvas). The Canvas gradebook's reported grade is best treated as a semi-reliable estimate, which you can verify by looking up your Packback grades on Packback itself (Packback grades are not automatically transferred to Canvas) and by calculating your grade manually following the percentages listed in this syllabus.

### Course Rules

(1) Makeup exams, whether for full credit or not, can 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 exact 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%), equivalent to showing up late at the original exam after one or more students have already finished and left the room. 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.

(2) 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.

(3) 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 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). 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.

(4) 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 <http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>).

(5) The instructor's lecture notes and PowerPoint slides will not be posted online or otherwise handed out to students under any circumstances. If you are unable to attend one or more class meetings, make arrangements with another student to borrow or copy their notes. (Note that this rule does not apply for online/remote courses.)

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.

(6) Failure to abide by these policies will be dealt with in an appropriate manner, which may include a reduction in the course grade. Any exceptions 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.

(7) The instructor's teaching-related policies and expectations are described in more detail at <<http://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 on the last class period before Thanksgiving (for fall semesters) or spring break (for spring semesters).

(8) 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.

(9) 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 <<http://www.paulhensel.org/teaching.html>>.

(10) 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.

## UNT Policies

### Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is defined in the UNT Policy on Student Standards for Academic Integrity, which is located at: <<http://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>>. This includes 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. All students should review the policy carefully; failure to read or understand the policy does not protect you from sanctions for violating it.

Any suspected case of academic dishonesty will be handled in accordance with current University policy and procedures. Possible academic penalties range from a verbal or written admonition to a grade of "F" in the course; further sanctions may apply to incidents involving major violations. You will find the policy and procedures at <<http://facultysuccess.unt.edu/academic-integrity>>.

### 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 <<http://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 <<http://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](mailto:SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu) or by calling the Dean of Students' office at (940) 565-2648. You are not alone; we are here to help.

### **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>>

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### **Schedule of Topics and Assigned Readings**

#### **Week 1 (Jan. 11-15): Introduction to Course**

- Readings/Assigned Work: (none)  
--No Packback requirement this week.
- Description of Topic: This week will be an introduction to the course. Be sure to read through this entire syllabus, watch the welcome video, purchase the assigned reading, and purchase your Packback access code.

#### **Week 2 (Jan. 18-22): Government and Politics**

- Readings/Assigned Work: Chapter 1 ("The Founding and the Constitution")  
--Packback Questions: Post 1 original question and 2 responses by midnight Friday.
- 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?

### **Week 3 (Jan. 25-29): US and Texas Constitutions**

- Readings/Assigned Work: Chapters 2 ("Workbook: The Constitution"), 3 ("Texas: The Constitution")

--Packback Questions: Post 1 original question and 2 responses by midnight Friday.

- 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.

We will conclude by examining 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).

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?

### **Week 4 (Feb. 1-5): Federalism / State & Local Government**

- Readings/Assigned Work: Chapters 4 ("Federalism"), 5 ("Texas: Federalism"), 6 ("Workbook: Federalism")

--Packback Questions: Post 1 original question and 2 responses by midnight Friday.

- 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?

### **Week 5 (Feb. 8-12): US Legislative Branch: Congress**

- Readings/Assigned Work: Chapters 7 ("Congress"), 8 ("Workbook: The Legislative Branch")

--Packback Questions: Post 1 original question and 2 responses by midnight Friday.

- 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?

### **Week 6 (Feb. 15-19): Texas Legislature**

- Readings/Assigned Work: Chapter 9 ("Texas: The Legislature")

--Packback Questions: Post 1 original question and 2 responses by midnight Friday.

- 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?

### **Week 7 (Feb. 22-26): Exam #1 (through Canvas)**

- Readings/Assigned Work: *Midterm exam available on Friday, February 26. The exam will be available all day, but you will only have 90 minutes to complete it once you begin.*

--No Packback requirement this week.

**\*\*\*Note: All Get the Gist and Workbook assignments for the first half of the course must be completed by midnight on Friday, February 26. No late penalties are charged for late work up to this time, but no late work will be accepted after this time.\*\*\***

### **Week 8 (Mar. 1-5): U.S. Executive Branch I: Presidency**

- Readings/Assigned Work: Chapters 10 ("The Presidency"), 11 ("Workbook: The Presidency")

--Packback Questions: Post 1 original question and 2 responses by midnight Friday.

- 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?

### **Week 9 (Mar. 8-12): U.S. Executive Branch I: Bureaucracy**

- Readings/Assigned Work: Chapters 12 ("Bureaucracy"), 13 ("Workbook: The Bureaucracy")

--Packback Questions: Post 1 original question and 2 responses by midnight Friday.

- 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?

### **Week 10 (Mar. 15-19): Texas Executive Branch**

- Readings/Assigned Work: Chapters 14 ("Texas: The Governor"), 15 ("Texas: The Executive Branch")

--Packback Questions: Post 1 original question and 2 responses by midnight Friday.

- 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?

### **Week 11 (Mar. 22-26): U.S. Judicial Branch**

- Readings/Assigned Work: Chapters 16 ("The Judiciary"), 17 ("Workbook: The Courts")  
--Packback Questions: Post 1 original question and 2 responses by midnight Friday.
- 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)

### **Week 12 (Mar. 29-Apr. 2): Texas Judicial Branch**

- Readings/Assigned Work: Chapter 18 ("Texas: The Justice System")  
--Packback Questions: Post 1 original question and 2 responses by midnight Friday.
- 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.

### **Week 13 (Apr. 5-9): Civil Liberties**

- Readings/Assigned Work: Chapters 19 ("Civil Liberties"), 20 ("Workbook: Civil Liberties")  
--Packback Questions: Post 1 original question and 2 responses by midnight Friday.
- 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.

### **Week 14 (Apr. 12-16): Civil Rights**

- Readings/Assigned Work: Chapters 21 ("Civil Rights"), 22 ("Workbook: Civil Rights")  
--Packback Questions: Post 1 original question and 2 responses by midnight Friday.
- 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?

### **Week 15 (Apr. 19-23): Course Wrapup**

• Readings/Assigned Work: *The signature assignment for the UNT core, your letter to a policymaker, is due by midnight on Friday, April 23; turn in through the link in Canvas.*

--No Packback requirement this week.

• Description of Topic: This is the final week of the semester. This will be used to wrap up the course and prepare for the final exam (or, if needed, to catch up if weather or Covid-19 issues forced us to fall behind earlier in the semester).

**\*\*\*Note: All Get the Gist and Workbook assignments for the second half of the course must be completed by midnight on Friday, April 23. No late penalties are charged for late work up to this time, but no late work will be accepted after this time.\*\*\***

### **FINAL EXAM: Tuesday, Apr. 27**

• *Final exam available through Canvas on Tuesday, April 27. The exam will be available all day, but you will only have 90 minutes to complete it once you begin.*

*--Please note that the format of the final exam may need to change if there is a problem with students cheating on the midterm. Because this class is required for graduation, and the exams are graded on a curve, I have no tolerance for students cheating because this could hurt the curve and make it more difficult for other students to pass the class (and thus graduate).*