**American Government: Laws and Institutions**

Political Science 1040.001

Fall 2010

**Class Meetings:** MWF 8:00 – 8:50

ESSC 255

**Instructor:** Dr. Wendy L. Watson **Office Hours:** T, 1:00 – 3:00;

207 Marquis Hall M/W 11:00 – 12:45;

wendy.watson@unt.edu and by appointment

**Teaching**

**Assistant:** Chris Freeman **Office Hours:**

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Chris.freeman@

**Course Overview**

This is one of two courses on American and Texas politics required by state law and as part of UNT’s general education requirements. The U.S. government operates on the basis of majority rule with protection of minority rights. In PSCI 1040, we will explore the basic structure of government as well as the instruments of both “majority rule” (the legislative and executive branches) and “minority rights” (the courts and the provisions of the Constitution that preserve individual rights and liberties). In addition, we will consider the corresponding institutions of Texas state government, with an eye toward observing both similarities and differences.

**Course Objectives**

Students who complete this course will be able to

* articulate and appreciate the democratic, constitutional, and theoretical principles that underlie the U.S. system of government;
* compare and contrast the roles of state and national governments in the U.S.;
* identify and describe the major institutions of U.S. and Texas government;
* compare and contrast the roles of those three branches;
* identify, describe, and explain significant changes in the institutions of government over time;
* assess the effects of institutional rules on institutional behavior;
* differentiate between majoritarian and countermajoritarian influences in U.S. government; and
* explain the constitutional constraints on government action.

**Course Readings**

There are two books required for this class:

Fiorina et al. *New American Democracy with Texas Chapters, Volume I (Custom Edition)* (Pearson Learning Solutions) (“Text” on the syllabus).

Cox and Ruderman, *Perspectives on American & Texas Politics, 8th Ed.* (Pearson Learning Solutions) (“Workbook” on the syllabus).

Both books are available at the UNT bookstore. Please note that the Fiorina text is a custom book. Versions of the text you find online will not contain all of the material you need for class.

Also note that the workbook will come with an online access code. You will need that code, so do not throw it away.

Finally, please note that you will be expected to complete a number of assessments through Blackboard Vista. You should locate the Blackboard page (through the UNT homepage) and check to make sure you are able to log on and that you see a link to this class on your Blackboard homepage.

**Grading**

Grades in this class will be assigned on a fixed scale:

90-100 A

80-89 B

70-79 C

60-69 D

<60 F

Your grade will be based on the following factors:

Three Exams 60% (20% each)

Online Prep Quizzes 15%

Workbook Assignments 25%

I rarely change grades unless I have made a computational error, and I will not curve this class. I will not discuss or disclose grades over e-mail or via phone. Your grades for various elements of the course will be posted on Blackboard within 96 hours of submission of the work. If you believe I have made an error, you must report it to me within 48 hours of receiving the assignment back. There is no extra credit available in this course; you should do the work that is assigned to get as many points as you possibly can.

**Exams**

There are three exams in this class (on October 1, November 5, and at 8:00 a.m. on Friday, Dec. 17). Each exam will consist of 50 multiple choice questions; you will use a scantron to answer these questions, so you MUST bring two sharpened #2 pencils and an eraser. The exams are not cumulative (i.e., each exam will only cover a portion of the class material with no overlap).

If you miss one of the in-class exams (on 10/1 or 11/5) for any reason, you will have to take a make-up exam on December 6. If you miss both in-class exams, you’re going to have a problem. If you have a legitimate excuse (serious illness or the death of a close relative), you must notify me before the exam and provide documentation; this will preserve my willingness to work with you in the event you miss both in-class exams.

**Online Prep Quizzes**

For each of the ten units on the syllabus, you will be expected to take a quiz, through Blackboard, before we begin the material in class. The quizzes are not heroic; they are designed to make sure you have done the reading and mastered the basic factual information in the chapters. You may take each quiz as many times as you like (you can take a quiz 100 times in order to achieve a perfect score). However, if you do not take a quiz or if you quit before your achieve a grade of 70%, you will receive a “0”. Your average on these quizzes will account for 15% of your grade.

**Workbook Assignments**

You must purchase the BLUE workbook for this course (available from the UNT bookstore). The text of the workbook is in paper form. There are, in addition, assignments and exercises that you will access through Blackboard; you will need an access code (that accompanies your workbook) to get to those assignments. There are nine “workbook assignments” (each consisting of 2 or more individual exercises). At the end of the semester, I will drop your lowest workbook assignment score. Your average on the remaining eight assignments will account for 25% of your course grade.

Please note that the material contained in workbook chapters is required reading and is fair game on exams.

**Class Policies**

1. Lectures are not intended to regurgitate the material in the textbook. Rather, you should do the reading before class and come prepared to delve into the more difficult concepts covered in the text. You are ultimately responsible for the material in the readings and from class. If you are struggling with the reading, it is your responsibility to seek my help. I will help you, but you have to ask.
2. Class starts at 8:00 and runs until 8:50. I expect you to be in class, ready to roll, at 8:00, and I expect you to stay until 8:50. Moreover, during that time period, I expect you to be attentive. Arriving late, leaving early, talking to your neighbor, surfing the web, or otherwise distracting your fellow students will not be tolerated. I will ask you to leave class and, after one such incident, I will begin docking points from your grade. Remember, I am not tracking attendance; if you do not plan to pay attention, you may as well stay home.
3. All workbook assignments will be turned in electronically, and late assignments will not be accepted. It is your responsibility to plan for possible computer problems (by not waiting until the last minute to turn in work) and to contact the appropriate IT support person if you encounter problems with Blackboard.
4. If you miss an exam (for any reason, legitimate or not), you will take a make-up on Monday, December 6. The make-up exam will be a mix of short answer, multiple choice, and fill-in-the-blank; in all likelihood, you will find the make-up more difficult than the regular exam, so before you miss a test, ask yourself whether you are really so sick that you should stay home.
5. I will not hand out exams after the first completed test has been turned in (so be on time). Moreover, during exams, you may not wear headphones. Your phones must be turned off and put away; if I catch you with a phone in your hand or anywhere visible, I will take your exam and you will receive a “0”.
6. If you require an accommodation for a religious observance or for a disability, I am happy to oblige, but I will not do so on an ad hoc basis. If you require an accommodation for religious reasons, you must contact no later than Friday, September 3. If you require an accommodation for a disability, you must provide me with appropriate documentation from ODA before I can assist you.
7. All work must be your own. That includes workbooks assignments. You may not collaborate with your classmates.

**Office Hours (Real and Virtual)**

My office hours and those of your teaching assistant are YOUR TIME. You are free to stop by our offices without an appointment during these hours; come with questions, concerns, or even a desire for further discussion.

In addition to our “in real life” office hours, I will occasionally host virtual office hours through Twitter. If you are not a member of Twitter, visit twitter.com and create a free account. If you have a question or comment about class, simply “tweet” it including the following phrase: #1040Watson. I will monitor all tweets containing that “hashtag” and will respond ASAP. I will also occasionally announce periods of one or two hours during which I will be at my computer to allow for a “real time” Twitter chat among interested members of the class.

**Class Schedule:**

| **Date** | **Topic** | **Reading** | **Due (Before the Beginning of Class)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Aug. 27 | Welcome |  |  |
| Aug. 30 – Sept. 3 | Democracy in U.S. | Text Chapter 1; Workbook Chapters 1 & 2 | Prep Quiz 1  (Aug. 30) |
|  |  |  | Workbook One:  Ex. 1-3, 2-3, 2-4  (Sept. 3) |
| Sept. 6 | No Class – Labor Day |  |  |
| Sept. 8 – Sept. 17 | U.S. and Texas Constitutions | Text Chapters 2 and TX-2; Workbook Chapter 3 | Prep Quiz 2  (Sept. 8) |
|  |  |  | Workbook Two:  Ex. 3-2, 3-4  Sept. 17 |
| Sept. 20 – Sept. 24 | Federalism | Text Chapter 3; Workbook Chapter 4 | Prep Quiz 3  (Sept. 20) |
|  |  |  | Workbook Three: Ex. 4-1, 4-6  (Sept. 24) |
| Sept. 27 | Catch-up |  |  |
| Sept. 29 | Review |  |  |
| **Oct. 1** | **Exam 1** |  |  |
| Oct. 4 – Oct. 8 | Congress | Text Chapter 12, Workbook Chapter 5 | Prep Quiz 4  (Oct. 4) |
|  |  |  | Workbook Four:  Ex. 5-4, 5-6  (Oct. 8) |
| Oct. 11 – Oct. 15 | Executive | Text Chapter 13, Workbook Chapter 6 | Prep Quiz 5  (Oct. 11) |
| Oct. 15 |  |  | Workbook Five:  Ex. 6-3, 6-5, 6-6  (Oct. 15) |
| Oct. 18 – Oct. 22 | Bureaucracy | Text Chapter 14, Workbook Chapter 7 | Prep Quiz 6  (Oct. 18) |
| Oct. 25 – Oct. 29 | Texas Legislature and Executive | Text Chapters TX-3 and TX-4 | Prep Quiz 7  (Oct. 25) |
|  |  |  | Workbook Six:  Ex. 7-3, 7-4  (Oct. 29) |
| Nov. 1 | Catch-up |  |  |
| Nov. 3 | Review |  |  |
| **Nov. 5** | **Exam 2** |  |  |
| Nov. 8 – Nov. 17 | Courts (U.S. and Texas) | Text Chapters 15 and TX-5; Workbook Chapter 8 | Prep Quiz 8  (Nov. 8) |
|  |  |  | Workbook Seven: Ex. 8-3, 8-4  (Nov. 15) |
| Nov. 19 – Nov. 24 | Civil Liberties | Text Chapter 16; Workbook Chapter 9 | Prep Quiz 9  (Nov. 19) |
|  |  |  | Workbook Eight:  Ex. 9-2, 9-4  (Nov. 24) |
| Nov. 29 – Dec. 3 | Civil Rights | Text Chapter 17; Workbook Chapter 10 | Prep Quiz 10  (Nov. 29) |
|  |  |  | Workbook Nine:  Ex. 10-4, 10-5  (Dec. 3) |
| **Dec. 6** | **Make-up Exams** |  |  |
| Dec. 8 | Review |  |  |
| **Dec. 17**  **8 – 10 AM** | **Last Exam** |  |  |

**University of North Texas--Policy on 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 the failure of all fields of the exam. Determination of cheating or plagiarism shall be made by the instructor in the course.

Cases of cheating or plagiarism in ordinary course work may, at the discretion of the instructor, be referred to the Undergraduate Studies Committee. 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 a decision under this policy by following the procedures laid down in the UNT Code of Student Conduct and Discipline.

### University of North Texas-Statement of ADA Compliance

The Political Science Department cooperates with the Office of Disability Accommodation to make reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. Please present your written accommodation request on or before the sixth class day.