

# **PSCI 2306.005: U.S. and Texas Government - Final version of syllabus** *(formerly PSCI 1040: "American Government: Laws and Institutions")*

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Office: 165 Wooten Hall (Hours: MW 1-2 PM, F 12-1)

**Fall 2017**

MWF 9:00-9:50 AM

100 AUDB/Auditorium bldg

## **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. Students are expected to attend every class meeting, having already done the assigned reading; class lectures will assume a basic understanding of the readings and will go beyond the content of those readings, rather than simply restating them. Class performance will be measured with three (non-cumulative) exams that combine multiple choice and short answer/identification questions, as well as a series of assignments from the course's online workbook.

## **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 your 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>Maria Angelica Diaz</u>	<u>Troy Holloway</u>	<u>Michelle Ramirez</u>
• For last names:	A - H	I - Q	R - Z
• Office Location:	111 Wooten Hall	132 Wooten Hall	111 Wooten Hall
• Office Hours:	MWF 9:50-10:50	MW 10:30-12	MW 11-12:30
• Email:	MariaAngelicaDiaz@my.unt.edu	TroyHolloway@my.unt.edu	mar0545@unt.edu

## **Supplemental Instructors**

Three Supplemental Instructors (SIs) are 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 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. A schedule of SI meetings will be made available early in the semester, which will be posted in the online version of this syllabus and in a Blackboard announcement.

	<u>Samuel Evans</u>	<u>Audree Hall</u>	<u>Marshall Richardson</u>
• Email:	samavanzi@gmail.com	audreehall1997@gmail.com	johnrichardson4@my.unt.edu
• Weekly Sessions:	M 4:30-5:30 (Sage 230) W 12:30-1:30 (PHYS 116) F 3-4 PM (WH 110)	M 3-3:50 PM (WH 117) T 5:30-6:20 PM (BLB 040) W 7-7:50 PM (WH 117)	M 2-3 PM (WH 210) W 2-3 PM (BLB 075) Th 3-4 PM (PEB 219)

### Assigned Readings

Both of these books are available at the UNT Bookstore, and should be available at other Denton-area bookstores -- but they are almost certainly not available at any online bookstores such as Amazon, because these are custom editions put together for UNT students. You may, of course, purchase the full versions of these books from any source (as long as you purchase the correct edition), but be aware that some chapters of that book are used for PSCI 2305 and will not be used in this course, and different instructors may use different books (so there is no guarantee that the same books will be used in the section of PSCI 2305 that you end up taking).

**Required textbook access code ("Edwards", "Gibson"):** A custom electronic book that is unique to UNT [ISBN 978-0-13-4628936], which is labeled in the bookstore as "Edwards, Government in America" but actually gives you access to the relevant chapters of two books:

- George C. Edwards III, Martin P. Wattenberg, and William G. Howell (2018). *Government in America: People, Politics, and Policy*, 2016 presidential election edition / 17th edition. New York: Pearson.
- L. Tucker Gibson, Jr., Clay Robison, and Joanne Connor Green (2018). *Government and Politics in the Lone Star State*, 2016 presidential election edition / 10th edition. New York: Pearson.

- *This is a custom book that selects the relevant content from both books, and saves you money by being offered in an electronic form that is accessible via Blackboard. Once you buy the access code and enter it, you may optionally pay the publisher a small additional fee to order a printed copy. This custom book allows you to avoid the expense of buying complete books and the waste of paying for so many chapters that we won't use in this course (the complete hardcover editions of these two books would cost over \$200, more than double the price of this custom edition) -- but it also means that this custom edition is unlikely to be found at places like Amazon, and it may or may not be available as a rental or in electronic form unless you purchase the complete version of each book. If you want to purchase hard copies, be sure to get the correct editions, and be sure to purchase both the Edwards and Gibson books!*

- *Please note that the bookstore sometimes shelves books for several sections in a single pile; our section's access code may be shelved under PSCI 2305/2306 sections taught by Professors King or Meernik (who are also using the same books in their courses). This access code can also be purchased directly from the publisher by clicking the Online Textbooks link in Blackboard, which will open something called Revel (the web portal for the book's publisher). This will give you the opportunity to enter an access code that you purchased elsewhere, as well as to purchase one here if you have not elsewhere.*

- *Once you enter the access code, use the Online Textbooks link in Blackboard to open the publisher's Revel tool and access the relevant chapters of the book. Remember that the Edwards chapters (American government) are listed first, with the Gibson chapters (Texas government) listed further down the page.*

**Required workbook access code ("workbook"):** Matthew Eshbaugh-Soha, ed. (2017). *PSCI 2306 US & TX Constitutions and Institutions*. Soomo Learning. [ISBN 978-0-9984578-7-1]

- *This workbook includes eight chapters of text written by UNT faculty who are experts in these areas, as well as assignments related to each chapter that will form an important part of the course grade. The workbook is only available in electronic format through the class Blackboard page, and requires that an access code be purchased to allow access.*

- *Please note that the bookstore sometimes shelves workbook registration codes for all sections of PSCI 2306 in a single location, which may not be shelved under this section -- there is only one workbook for PSCI 2306, so purchase that version regardless of which section it is listed under. This access code can also be purchased directly from the publisher by clicking the Workbook link in Blackboard, which will open something called Soomo (the web portal for the book's publisher). This will give you the opportunity to enter an access code that you purchased elsewhere, as well as to purchase one here if you have not elsewhere.*
- *Once you enter the access code, use the Workbook link in Blackboard to open the publisher's Soomo tool and access the relevant chapters of the book.*

### **Course Requirements**

(1) **Examinations:** Three (non-cumulative) exams will be given in class. Each exam counts for 25% of the course grade (so the three exams together account for 75% of the total grade), and will draw roughly equally from the assigned 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 the exam; once the first student leaves the room after the exam starts, anybody else entering to take the exam will lose five letter grades.

(2) **Workbook Assignments:** There will also be eight workbook assignments included as part of the assigned workbook chapters, which are due on the dates listed in the class schedule on this syllabus. These will give you a chance to check your understanding of the reading when you are first doing it, and can be very helpful in making sure that you understand the material before you come to class (and before you take the exams). These assignments must be completed electronically through the course workbook (via Blackboard); your grades will automatically be recorded as you complete them. Your combined total score across all workbook assignments for the course will count as 25% of the total course grade.

You must complete at least seven (7) of these eight (8) workbook assignments. Assignments may be retaken as many times as you like, but they will face a 50% penalty if completed after the start of class on the assigned due date. If you complete all eight assignments, your lowest of the eight grades will be dropped from calculation of the grade. Please note that failing to complete at least seven workbook assignments before the course's final examination means that you did not complete the course requirements, and will mean an automatic failing grade for the course.

### **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 will only be offered as 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, any makeup examination that might be offered will face a grade penalty of five letter grades, equivalent to showing up late at the original exam after one or more students have already finished and left the room.

(2) Failure to complete any paper assignment (or to complete the assigned number of this course's workbook assignments) or failure to take any exam will result in a failing grade for the entire course; a passing grade requires completion of all course requirements. Late work will be assessed a substantial penalty (one letter grade per day that it is late), based on when the instructor receives the assignment, so it is in your interest to email a copy to the instructor as soon as it is completed; as long as you turn in an identical printed copy at the

next class meeting, the late penalty will be based on when the email was received.

Note that 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.

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.paul-hensel.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 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.paul-hensel.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 Blackboard's class email list; students are responsible for making sure that they check the email account that is on file with Blackboard.

### **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**

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact them by phone at (940) 565-4323.

### **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. Renee LeClaire McNamara, UNT's 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 <<http://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 either online through Blackboard or at:

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

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### Schedule of Topics and Assigned Readings

*Please note that for some topics that take more than one day to cover, I have separated the assigned readings by day, to allow students to focus on material that will be relevant to each day's class. Where I do not list separate readings for each day of a multi-day topic, you are expected to complete the entire assigned reading before the first day of that topic.*

1. Monday, Aug. 28 Overview of Course

2-5. Wednesday, Aug. 30 - Wednesday, Sept. 6: Introduction to American Government and Politics

#### **4. Monday, Sept. 4: NO CLASS (Labor Day)**

- Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic): Edwards chapter 1 ("Introducing Government in America")

- Assigned Readings (day 2): No new readings

- Assigned Readings (day 3): No class - Labor Day

- Assigned Readings (day 4): No new readings

- *Discussion Points*: 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. When doing the readings, try to think about each type of government, role played by government, or detail of U.S. government: is this a desirable way to do things or not? Can/should this be changed to make it work better, and if so, how?

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?

6. Friday, Sept. 8: Texas Political Culture

- Assigned Readings: Gibson chapter 1 "The Social and Economic Environment of Texas Politics")

- *Discussion Points*: This class meeting will turn from American political culture to the unique political culture of Texas, which differs in important ways from other parts of the country. Texas has a different history than most U.S. states, which has shaped its culture in unique ways, and it has a unique geographic and demographic setting. When doing the readings, think about the similarities and differences between political culture in Texas and in the rest of the country. Do these differences matter, and if so how? Or are they more like pieces of trivia, which are interesting to talk about but don't have much effect on people's daily lives?

7-10. Monday, Sept. 11 - Monday, Sept. 18: The U.S. Constitution

**\*\*\*Workbook chapter #1 due Sept. 13\*\*\***

- Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic): Edwards chapter 2 ("The Constitution")
- Assigned Readings (day 2): Workbook chapter 1 (Steve Forde, "The Constitution")
- Assigned Readings (days 3-4): No new readings
- *Discussion Points*: 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?

11. Wednesday, Sept. 20: The Texas Constitution

- Assigned Readings: Gibson chapter 2 ("The Texas 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).

12. Friday, Sept. 22: Wrapup and Review for Exam

**13. Monday, Sept. 25: EXAM #1 (in the regular classroom)**

14-16. Wednesday, Sept. 27 - Monday, Oct. 2: Federalism / State and Local Government

**\*\*\*Workbook chapter #2 due Sept. 29\*\*\***

- Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic): Edwards chapter 3 ("Federalism")
- Assigned Readings (day 2): Workbook chapter 2 (Elizabeth Oldmixon, "Federalism")
- Assigned Readings (day 3): Gibson chapters 3 ("Texas Government and Politics in the Federal System") & 4 ("Local Government in Texas")
- *Discussion Points*: 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?

17-19. Wednesday, Oct. 4 - Monday, Oct. 9: The Federal Legislative Branch: Congress

**\*\*\*Workbook chapter #5 due Oct. 6\*\*\***

- Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic): Edwards chapter 11 ("Congress")
- Assigned Readings (day 2): Workbook chapter 5 (Jim Meernik, "The Legislative Branch")

- Assigned Readings (day 3): No new readings
- *Discussion Points*: 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?

#### 20. Wednesday, Oct. 11: The Texas Legislature

- Assigned Readings: Gibson chapter 5 ("The Texas Legislature")
- *Discussion Points*: 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?

#### 21-24. Friday, Oct. 13 - Friday, Oct. 20: The Federal Executive Branch (I): The Presidency

**\*\*\*Workbook chapter #6 due Oct. 15\*\*\***

- Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic): Edwards chapter 12 ("The Presidency")
- Assigned Readings (day 2): Workbook chapter 6 (Matthew Eshbaugh-Soha, "The Presidency")
- Assigned Readings (days 3-4): No new readings
- *Discussion Points*: 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?

#### 25-26. Monday, Oct. 23 - Wednesday, Oct. 25: The Federal Executive Branch (II): The Bureaucracy

**\*\*\*Workbook chapter #8 due Oct. 23\*\*\***

- Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic): Edwards chapter 14 ("The Federal Bureaucracy"), Workbook chapter 8 (Matthew Eshbaugh-Soha, "The Bureaucracy")
- Assigned Readings (day 2): No new readings
- *Discussion Points*: 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?

#### 27. Friday, Oct. 27: The Texas Executive and Bureaucracy

- Assigned Readings: Gibson chapter 6 ("The Texas Executive"), chapter 7 ("The Texas Bureaucracy and Policy Implementation")
- *Discussion Points*: 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?

28. Monday, Oct. 30: Wrapup and Review for Exam

**29. Wednesday, Nov. 1: EXAM #2 (in the regular classroom)**

30-32. Friday, Nov. 3 - Wednesday, Nov. 8: The Federal Judicial Branch: The Federal Court System

**\*\*\*Workbook chapter #7 due Nov. 6\*\*\***

- Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic): Edwards chapter 15 ("The Federal Courts")
- Assigned Readings (day 2): Workbook chapter 7 (Wendy Watson, "The Courts")
- Assigned Readings (day 3): No new readings
- *Discussion Points*: 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)

33-34. Friday, Nov. 10 - Monday, Nov. 13: The Texas Courts

- Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic): Gibson chapter 8 ("The Judicial System in Texas")
- Assigned Readings (day 2): No new readings
- *Discussion Points*: Today 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.

35-38. Wednesday, Nov. 15 - Wednesday, Nov. 22: Civil Liberties

**\*\*\*Workbook chapter #3 due Nov. 17\*\*\***

- Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic): Edwards chapter 4 ("Civil Liberties and Public Policy")
- Assigned Readings (day 2): Workbook chapter 3 (Wendy Watson, "Civil Liberties")
- Assigned Readings (days 3-4): No new readings
- *Discussion Points*: 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 a number of later amendments. Over this week 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.

**39. Friday, Nov. 24: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)**

40-43. Monday, Nov. 27 - Monday, Dec. 4: Civil Rights

**\*\*\*Workbook chapter #4 due Nov. 29\*\*\***

- Assigned Readings (day 1 of this topic): Edwards chapter 5 ("Civil Rights and Public Policy")
- Assigned Readings (day 2): Workbook chapter 4 (Regina Branton, "Civil Rights")
- Assigned Readings (days 3-4): No new readings
- *Discussion Points*: 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?

44. Wednesday, Dec. 6: Course Wrapup and Review for Final Exam

**45. Friday, Dec. 8: NO CLASS (UNT Reading Day)**

**FINAL EXAM: Wednesday, Dec. 13, 8:00 - 10:00 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>>*