American State and Local Government

Political Science 2306E

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Course Description

In this course we will learn about the political actors, institutions, functions, and political processes that shape state and local governments. We will critically analyze why political actors and institutions do what they do and why these actions have the consequences they have. Although there are 50 different state governments and close to 90,000 local governments (plenty of governments to study), we will focus in particular on Texas and compare Texas with other states in reaching generalizations and better understanding Texas politics and government.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will:

1. Explain the origin and development of the Texas constitution.
2. Articulate an understanding of state and local political systems and their relationship with the federal government.
3. Describe separation of powers and checks and balances in both theory and practice in Texas.
4. Demonstrate knowledge of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of Texas government.
5. Evaluate the role of public opinion, interest groups, and political parties in Texas.
6. Analyze the state and local election process.
7. Identify the rights and responsibilities of citizens.
8. Analyze issues, policies and political culture of Texas.

Core Curriculum Learning Objectives

Through the Texas Core Curriculum, students will gain a foundation of knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world, develop principles of personal and social responsibility for living in a diverse world, and advance intellectual and practical skills that are essential for all learning.
1. Critical Thinking Skills – to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information.
2. Communication Skills – to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication.
3. Personal Responsibility – to include the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making.
4. Social Responsibility – to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities

Assigned Book


CourseMate is an online resource that may help you better understand the material. It contains flashcards, chapter audio summaries, eBook, and interactive quizzes, among other things. It is not required that you use CourseMate, but it comes free with the textbook if you buy the book new.

Exams and Grades

Chapter Exams. Students will take an exam for each of the 12 chapters in the book. Each chapter exam will have 20 multiple choice questions, with each question being worth 2 points. You will have 22 minutes to complete the exam. The exams are open book and open note. Be aware, though, that although you can use your book and notes to take the exam, you will need to be prepared beforehand because you will not have enough time to look up each answer. The exams are designed for one question to appear at a time, although you will have the ability to go back and review the questions you have already answered while you are taking the exam. The chapter exams are worth 60 percent of the grade.

Final Exam. The final exam will be comprehensive, meaning that it will be over everything that was covered during the semester. There will be 60 questions on the final, with each question worth 2 points. Students will have 70 minutes to take the final. The format and kinds of questions will be similar to the chapter exams. The final exam is worth 15 percent of the grade.

Current Events Article Reviews. The remaining 25 percent of the grade will be from writing assignments that students will do for eight of the chapters. You decide which chapters and topics you want to do. I will not count or grade more than one paper for each chapter. For each writing assignment you will need to find an article out of a newspaper, magazine, journal, or quality online news source that is relevant to one of the chapters. Some sources you may want to look at include the Austin American Statesman, The Dallas Morning News, Texas Monthly, and www.texastribune.org.
Once you have the article, you will need to write an essay of at least 400 words, in which you briefly summarize the article, discuss the different arguments and views that are presented in the article, explain how the article ties to the relevant chapter, why it is an important topic, how it will affect Texans, and provide your opinion on the issue. The summary of the article should be brief so you will have space to address the other issues and questions about the articles. Put the essay in your own words; do not use quotes from the article. I will grade the essay based on how well you meet the above stated guidelines as well as on spelling, grammar, and overall writing.

You will need to provide me a copy or a link to the article you are using for your paper. The articles you use also need to have been published within six months of when you are submitting the paper to me. Please email your paper and link to the article to me at rlwelch@wtamu.edu.

The grades will be determined as follows:

- 12 Chapter Exams = 480 points (40 points each)
- Final Exam = 120 points
- 8 Current Event Essays = 200 points (25 points each)
- Total Points = 800 points

Final grades will be determined by using the following scale: 90-100% - A, 80-89% - B, 70-79% - C, 60-69% - D, 59% and below - F. The corresponding points are shown below:

- 716 – 800 = A
- 636 – 715 = B
- 556 – 635 = C
- 476 – 555 = D
- 000 – 475 = F

**Course Outline of Readings, Exams, and Writing Assignments**

It does not matter the order in which you do the chapters and when you do the writing assignments. It also does not matter whether you take three days or two weeks to finish a chapter. However, I would encourage you to set a date for when you need or want to complete the course and then figure out how much time you will spend on each chapter and writing assignment so you can complete the course by the appointed date. It is important to keep a schedule and have a plan of action for when you will complete each chapter. Otherwise, it is easy to lose track of time and get busy with other things, especially when you don’t have set dates for exams and assignments like you would have if you were taking a class during a regular semester.

**Week 1**  
*Texas Culture and Diversity*, Chapter 1

Writing Assignment 1

*Texas in the Federal System*, Chapter 2
Week 2  The Texas Constitution in Perspective, Chapter 3
Writing Assignment 2
Voting and Elections, Chapter 4
Writing Assignment 3
Week 3  Political Parties, Chapter 5
Interest Groups, Chapter 6
Writing Assignment 4
Week 4  The Legislature, Chapter 7
Writing Assignment 5
The Executive Branch, Chapter 8
Writing Assignment 6
Week 5  Texas Judiciary, Chapter 9
Law and Due Process, Chapter 10
Writing Assignment 7
Week 6  Public Policy in Texas, Chapter 11
Local Government, Chapter 12
Writing Assignment 8
Take the Final Exam

As noted above, it is up to you to decide what topics and chapters to write the essays about. This outline is merely a suggestion and shows a student finishing in the required time.

Academic Integrity: All work must be competed individually unless otherwise stated. Commission of any of the following acts shall constitute scholastic dishonesty: acquiring or providing information for any assigned work or examination from any unauthorized source;
informing any person or persons of the contents of any examination prior to the time the exam is given in any subsequent sections of the course or as a makeup; plagiarism; submission of a paper or project that is substantially the same for two courses unless expressly authorized by the instructor to do so. For more information, see the Code of Student Life.

Acceptable Student Behavior: Classroom behavior should not interfere with the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to learn from the instructional program (Code of Student Life). Unacceptable or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior may be instructed to leave the classroom. Inappropriate behavior may result in disciplinary action or referral to the University’s Behavioral Intervention Team. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including electronic, classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

Students with Disabilities: West Texas A&M University seeks to provide reasonable accommodations for all qualified persons with disabilities. This University will adhere to all applicable federal, state and local laws, regulations and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations as required to afford equal educational opportunity. It is the student's responsibility to register with Student Disability Services (SDS) and to contact faculty members in a timely fashion to arrange for suitable accommodations. Contact Information: Student Success Center, CC 106; phone 806-651-2335.

Title IX Statement: West Texas A&M University is committed to providing a learning, working and living environment that promotes personal integrity, civility, and mutual respect in an environment free of sexual misconduct and discrimination. Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. Harassment is not acceptable. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources here:

- WTAMU Title IX Coordinator Becky Lopez – Kilgore Research Center 147, or call 806-651-3199
- WTAMU Counseling Services – Classroom Center 116, or call 806-651-2340
- WTAMU Police Department – 806-651-2300, or dial 911
- 24-hour Crisis Hotline – 800-273-8255, or 806-359-6699, or 800-692-4039 https://www.notalone.gov/

For more information, see the Code of Student Life.

Evacuation Statement: If you receive notice to evacuate the building, please evacuate promptly but in an orderly manner. Evacuation routes are posted in various locations indicating all exits, outside assemble area, location of fire extinguishers, fire alarm pull stations and emergency telephone numbers (651-5000 or 911). In the event an evacuation is necessary: evacuate immediately do not use elevators; take all personal belongings with you; report to outside assembly area and wait for further information; students needing assistance in the evacuation process should bring this to the attention of the instructor at the beginning of the semester.

WT Attendance Policy for Core Curriculum Classes: For the purposes of learning assessment and strategic planning, all students enrolled in Core Curriculum courses at West Texas A&M
University must swipe their Buff Gold cards through the card reader installed in the classroom/lab for each class/lab meeting.

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