

POLS 2306: State & Local Government Spring 2024

Section: W01

Department of Social Sciences
Texas A&M University Corpus Christi

1 Instructor Information

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Office Hours: Mondays: 12:00pm-2:00pm

Wednesdays: 1:00-3:00pm

Fridays: 11:00-1:00pm

and by appointment

Class Location & Time: Asynchronous online

When we think of politics, we often think of the national government in Washington, DC. While decisions made by the president, Congress, and the U.S. Supreme Court shape our lives in countless ways we are more often and more directly impacted by the decisions of state and local governments. Why is it, for instance, that the speed limit is 75 miles per hour in many parts of Texas, but 80 miles per hour in many parts of Utah? Why is it easier to vote absentee in Oregon than it is in Texas? Why is recreational marijuana legal in Colorado but not in Texas? Why does Texas lack an income tax? All of these questions are important to our daily lives; to answer *any* of these questions requires understanding of state & local government. This course serves as an introduction to how the state & local political systems work, and how people behave in those systems. We do so with an emphasis on Texas.

This course assumes little knowledge about government or politics, it is after all an introductory course. It functions almost like a buffet. We'll explore lots of topics, including the structure of Texas government (the rules of the game) and the way people and groups behave in that system (how the players play the game). If find you're interested in a topic we cover (and I hope you will!), we probably have other classes where you can learn more about it. Just talk to me and I'll let you know what that course is so you can register for it next semester.

Each week we'll cover a different aspect of state & local government in the abstract along with concrete examples throughout the lecture. So for instance, we might talk about executive power, along with Governor Abbott's response to covid-19. The goal here is that you see the concepts in action to help you grasp the abstract concepts via concrete examples from the world today. In order for this to work, you have the readings and participate in the class discussion forums- remember, I am interested in you participating in class; there is no penalty for answering incorrectly or asking a clarifying question.

I realize many of you may not be political science majors. To that end, this course emphasizes writing. Writing is a critical skill that is important regardless of your major or eventual career. Accordingly, you will write two brief papers. More details are below and in the handouts posted on Blackboard.

Student Learning Outcomes

On completion of this course students will be able to:

1. Recall basic facts related to the foundations of Texas government
2. Describe key political concepts related to state institutions such as the legislature, the various executive actors, and the judiciary.
3. Demonstrate their understanding of key concepts relating to political behavior such as voting, elections, political parties, interest groups and the media.
4. Understanding of definitions, concepts, and theories of state government

Core Objectives

The Four Core Objectives related to this course are: Critical Thinking Skills, Communication Skills, Personal Responsibility, and Social Responsibility. By the end of the semester the course will have met these objectives:

1. By having the students engage in critical thinking activities related to the state constitution, the political and philosophical foundations of Texas, governmental institutions, and political behavior.
2. By having students engage in written, verbal, or visual activities related to the Constitution, the political and philosophical foundations of the state, governmental institutions, and political behavior.
3. By having students engage in course related activities that connect personal responsibility and political ideology to encourage ethical decision making.

2 Course Format

This class is fully online. This means we may never meet face-to-face. Though this is the case, I want to emphasize I am available via e-mail, in virtual office hours, and by appointment. The course is divided into a series of readings & an accompanying video lecture. Each is assigned to a specific day and it has an associated quiz. Roughly every week, we will have an exam (which are timed but open note). You are always free to work ahead. But, each day's assigned reading/quiz etc. is due listed on the syllabus.

The Unique Nature of Online Classes

Please be aware that while there are no class sessions for this course, this does not imply that the course will be easier or less work than a seated lecture course. Moreover, please understand that in online course it is extremely important that you be self-motivated and appropriately manage your time and keep to the due dates listed in the syllabus. This is made all the more pressing because this is a Summer class where each day is the same as a week in the regular semester. If you find yourself falling behind *please* contact me immediately.

This course primarily occurs through Blackboard. To do so you need a computer with internet access (I would recommend against a tablet or smart phone as your primary means of accessing the course). It is up to you to ensure you have reliable and sufficiently fast internet access to utilize all of the course resources (including videos).

Virtual Office Hours

Office hours can be in person or virtual upon request. If you come to office hours, it is okay to turn on/leave off your camera. I am also okay with communicating via the chat box rather than verbally if you prefer. In short, I will follow your lead. It is possible, I may be available for in-person office hours too. I have four scheduled office hours throughout the week to which you can “drop in.” If those do not work for you, just let me know and we can set up a time to meet.

3 Requirements

Text

There is one required book which the majority of our readings will come from. Be sure to read all readings for each listed day *before* listening to the lecture. This is because lectures I designed to build on the readings.

The book is available at the campus bookstore. I also provide the ISBN for the book in the syllabus. Since the assignments are linked to the courseware, it is important you obtain the book *with this specific ISBN*. I understand that sometimes one must wait for financial aid before obtaining the book. Fortunately, the publisher allows for a two-week trial access before you purchase the book if need be.

1. Rottingaus, Brandon. 2023. *Inside Texas Politics: Power, Policy, and Personality in the Lone Star State*. 4th Edition)digital. Oxford University Press: New York.
ISBN: 978-0197672440

Assessment

This course is worth 100 points which are broken up over several different items. It is your responsibility to keep track of your grade over the course of the semester

- Applied Assignments: 13 points
 - Quizzes: 13 points
 - Short Papers: 24 points
 - Exams: 50 points
1. **Applied Assignments (13 points)**— Research tells us receiving information in different ways leads us to commit information to memory better. For this reason, much like the reading quizzes, each chapter also has an applied assignment. These take many forms, some are videos and some involve looking at graph. These are relatively short assignments that the

reading and reading quiz will prepare you for. Collectively, each chapter's video quiz is worth 1 point. All applied assignments are due by 11:59pm on the date listed on the syllabus. There is no time limit on this assignment.

2. **Quizzes (13 points)**– Every lecture day has a brief quiz. All quizzes are due at 11:59pm for the listed day (as in it must be submitted by midnight). Quizzes cover material from the reading and the lecture for that day. The quizzes consist of five multiple choice questions. Your reading quizzes, applied assignments, and lecture videos will prepare you for the quizzes. They are open note; but they are timed at ten minutes with just one attempt, so I recommend taking the time to review your notes before taking the quiz. If you do the readings and watch the lectures, you should have no problem with the quizzes. Each quiz is worth 1 point toward your final grade.
3. **Short Papers (24 points)**— Over the course of the semester, you will write two short papers (2-3 pages) answering a short question relating the class material to the contemporary political world in 2024. Early in the semester, you will have a choice to sign up for the topics you would like to write about. Please know there are a limited number of slots for each paper and they are “first come, first serve.” So, be sure to sign up early. You must sign up for the topics you want to write on at the start of the semester and cannot change your choice. Paper deadlines are always at 11:59pm on a Friday evening (although they can be turned in early). A full list of these readings is available on Blackboard. By January 22 at 4:00pm, be sure to sign up for your choices on Blackboard. For more details, see the Writing Assignment handout.
4. **Exams (50 points)**—There are three exams. The first is worth 10 points. The second and third are worth 20 points each. None of the exams are cumulative and consist of 50 multiple choice questions. Study guides for each exam are posted on Blackboard from the start of the semester. Exams are open from the start of the semester, but they close at 11:59pm on the date listed on the syllabus (as in it must be submitted by 11:59pm). Taking exams on the scheduled day is imperative, if you miss an exam and do not have a valid documented excuse on file with SEAS the make up exam will be a separate research paper. Should you miss the exam, the onus is on you to schedule a make-up with me. I will not seek you out to remind you that you missed the exam.

Assessment Scale

A: 90-100	B: 80-89.9	C: 70-79.9	D: 60-69.9	F: <59.9
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Sensitive Topics

Since politics is a reflection of the society in which we live, we will cover several topics which touch on topics which might be sensitive such as gay rights, protest movements, abortion policy, and sexual assault. These topics are included because we cannot adequately study Texas politics without covering them. My personal policy is to remain neutral (I'm a political scientist, emphasis on the second word). I encourage disagreement, but it must be done in a respectful way. You

have my assurance that I will do everything reasonably related to keeping these discussions civil and academic. I know aspects of this course may be emotionally difficult. You may personally connect with or be affected by some of the material covered in this course, so I urge you to identify a support system outside of this class. I am happy to meet with you to discuss any concerns or accommodation needs, but I also encourage you to seek out confidential or other resources.

4 Course Policies

Contacting the Instructor

I am happy to help you either via e-mail, office telephone, or in-person during office hours. Of course, if office hours do not fit your schedule let me know and we can schedule a meeting at a time that is more convenient. If you come to office hours you should come prepared; bring your book, notes, and read the material in advance. If you contact me via e-mail, I will respond within 48 hours, though in most cases it will be less than six hours. Should you not hear from me after 48 hours, feel free to send a follow-up. However, in any e-mail you must identify yourself and use proper format which consists of an opening (As simple as the recipient's name), a closing (as simple as your name), and a descriptive subject line. If you do not follow that convention or if you use Internet shorthand (ie: "u" instead of "you,") I will not reply to the message. Telephone calls will be returned as soon as possible, though e-mail is usually quicker. Please note, the phone number listed is my office phone; it cannot receive text messages.

Make-up Exams and Assignments

To qualify for a make-up test a student must notify me of the absence in advance via e-mail and provide documentation. Make-up exams will be a written research paper. The onus is on the student for a make-up exam. I will not seek you out to let you know you missed an exam.

Papers are due in hard copy at the beginning of the class on the date indicated in the schedule. I will not accept e-mail copies or papers placed under my door. Please do not be afraid to print multiple rough drafts and revise them before turning them in. I am happy to look at drafts and help you with crafting your final paper. I do not accept excuses about dogs, computers, or traffic. Be responsible.

Academic Honor Code

Students are expected to uphold the Academic Honor Code published in the University Student Handbook. The Academic Honor Code is based on the premise that each student has the responsibility (1) to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity in the student's own work, (2) to refuse to tolerate violations of academic integrity in the university community, and (3) to foster a high sense of integrity and social responsibility on the part of the university community. Violations of the Academic Honor Code will not be tolerated.

Academic dishonesty, cheating, and plagiarism of any kind are unacceptable. There are no exceptions. Consequences for academic dishonesty, cheating, and plagiarism include, but are not limited to, a failing grade for an assignment or exam, a failing grade for the course, noncredit for an assignment or exam, additional work, and/or direct referral to university officials.

If academic dishonesty, cheating, or plagiarism is suspected on any assessment, the instructor reserves the right to impose restrictions and make changes on future assessments for an individual and/or the entire class as needed.

Please also note that the university requires that faculty members formally report all instances of academic misconduct. Here are the official procedures: http://judicialaffairs.tamucc.edu/assets/procedure_academicmisconductcases.pdf

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the use of unauthorized information during a quiz or exam, plagiarism, submitting the same paper for multiple courses without permission, or depriving another student of the ability to perform his or her work. The term cheating includes, but is not limited to: (1) use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; (2) dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments, plagiarism; or (3) the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a member of the university faculty or staff. The term plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the use by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment. Plagiarism also includes the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling or distribution of term papers or other academic materials. If you have questions about the university's policy on academic dishonesty, please see the Student Code of Conduct at <http://judicialaffairs.tamucc.edu/StudentCofC.html>.

Please note "plagiarism" includes intentionally, knowingly, or carelessly presenting the work of another as one's own. Additionally, the procedure has been updated to reflect the Academic Integrity Committee as the body to consider grade appeals and academic misconduct cases, as well as identifies the selection process of committee members. Detailed information can be found on the University Handbook of Rules and Procedures website. Contact for interpretation or clarification is the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Students with Disabilities

I fully adhere to the University policy at <https://www.tamucc.edu/faculty/faculty-affairs/assets/syllabi-statements.pdf>

Student Grade Appeals

I fully adhere to the University policy at <https://www.tamucc.edu/faculty/faculty-affairs/assets/syllabi-statements.pdf>

Campus Emergencies

I fully adhere to the University policy at <https://www.tamucc.edu/faculty/faculty-affairs/assets/syllabi-statements.pdf>

Civil Rights Reporting

I fully adhere to the University policy at <https://www.tamucc.edu/faculty/faculty-affairs/assets/syllabi-statements.pdf>

Academic Advising

The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. Degree plans are prepared in the CLA Academic Advising Center using DegreeWorks. Any amendment must be approved by the Department Chair and the Office of the Dean. All courses and requirements specified in the final degree plan audit must be completed before a degree will be granted.

- **For all students with 0-45 hours earned** you will be advised by the **Islander Advising Center**: University Services Center (1st Floor), 361-825-3453.
- **For CLA students with more than 45 hours earned** you will be advised by the **CLA Academic Advising Office**: Faculty Center 148, 361-825-3466.

For all other colleges with more than 45 hours earned, you will be advised by the Advising Center that oversees your major:

- **College of Business**: OCNR 120, 361-825-2653
- **College of Education and Human Development**: FC 201, 361-825-2662
- **College of Nursing and Health Sciences**: IH (3rd Floor), 361-825-2799
- **College of Science and Engineering**: CI 350D, 361-825-3928

Dropping a Class

I hope that you never find it necessary to drop this or any other class. However, events can sometimes occur that make dropping a course necessary or wise. **Please consult with your academic advisor, the Financial Aid Office, and me, before you decide to drop this course.** Should dropping the course be the best course of action, you must initiate the process to drop the course by going to **University Center 324** and filling out a course drop form. Just stopping attendance and participation WILL NOT automatically result in your being dropped from the class. You may also submit a PowerFormSigner online. **April 8, 2024** is the last day to drop a class with an automatic grade of “W” this term.

Statement of Academic Continuity

In the event an unforeseen academic disruption, such as a major hurricane, prevents class from being held on the campus of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi; this course would continue via Blackboard and/or university email. In addition, the syllabus and class activities may be modified to allow continuation of the course. University email accounts will be the official mode of communication for this course and campus announcements. Students should be checking their university email account and opt into the University Code Blue emergency alert system.

Classroom/Professional Behavior

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, as an academic community, requires that each individual respect the needs of others to study and learn in a peaceful atmosphere. Under Article III of the Student Code of Conduct, classroom behavior that interferes with either (a) the instructor's ability to conduct the class or (b) the ability of other students to profit from the instructional program may be considered a breach of the peace and is subject to disciplinary sanction outlined in Article VIII of the Student Code of Conduct. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior may be instructed to leave the classroom. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including classrooms, electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

Classroom Courtesy

Classroom courtesy is an essential component of creating an effective learning environment. All students have the right to learn without unnecessary distractions. These distractions include: cell phones, talking during lectures (unless recognized by the instructor), reading newspapers, falling asleep, etc. If you need a cell phone for emergency purposes, leave it on vibrate. Entering and leaving are also significant sources of distraction. It is your responsibility to be on time and to stay for the entire period. In circumstances where you need to leave early, tell the instructor beforehand. Repeated disruptions of class will lead to a reduction in your final grade.

Most importantly, the syllabus includes many sensitive topics which can lead to strong feelings and heated debate. Because this is a college classroom, all discussion must be respectful and scholarly. This is to say you must be respectful, in both content and tone, of diverse opinions and not make personal or partisan attacks.

Acceptable Comments

- are respectful of diverse opinions and open to follow up questions and/or disagreement
- are related to class and/or the course material
- focus on advancing the discussion about issues related to the course and/or course material rather than personal beliefs, and
- are delivered in normal tones and a non-aggressive manner.

Unacceptable Comments

- are personal in nature. This includes attacks on a person's appearance, demeanor, or political beliefs.
- include interrupting the instructor or other students. Raise your hand and wait to be recognized.
- often use the discussion to argue for political positions and/or beliefs. If political discussions arise, they must be discussed in a scholarly way (see above).
- may include using raised tones, yelling, engaging in arguments with other students and being threatening in any manner.
- include ignoring the instructor's authority to maintain the integrity of the classroom environment.

Timeline for Assignment Return

Generally, I will return assignments to you at the next class period (e.g. if the assignment is due on a Friday, you will get it back the following Monday). Should I not be able to return the assignment by the next class period I will advise the class via e-mail about the timeline (it should never exceed one week).

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice. These changes may come via e-mail. Make sure to check your university supplied email regularly. You are accountable for all such communications.

5 *Tentative* Course Schedule

A few notes about reading the course schedule:

- “*Rottinghaus*” refers to the required Rottinghaus book
- “(B)” means that reading can be found on Blackboard.

Course & University Basics

Tuesday January 16– Introduction to the Course

- *No readings*

The Basic Structures of Government

Thursday January 18– Texas Political Culture

- Rottinghaus Chapter 1

Tuesday January 23– The Constitution: The Rulebook

- Rottinghaus Chapter 2

Thursday January 25– Texas in Nation: Federalism

- Rottinghaus Chapter 3

Political Institutions: The Rules of the Game

Tuesday January 30– The Legislature

- Rottinghaus Chapter 7

Thursday February 1– The Governor

- Rottinghaus Chapter 8

Tuesday February 6– Other Executives & the Bureaucracy

- Rottinghaus Chapter 9

Thursday February 8– The Judiciary

- Rottinghaus Chapter 10

Tuesday February 13– Criminal Justice

- Rottinghaus Chapter 11

Thursday February 15– Local Government

- Rottinghaus Chapter 12

Political Behavior: How the Actors Behave

Tuesday February 20– Voting & Elections

- Rottinghaus Chapter 4

Thursday February 22– Political Parties

- Rottinghaus Chapter 5

Tuesday February 27– Interest Groups

- Rottinghaus Chapter 6

Thursday February 29– Paying for it All: Budget & Finance

- Rottinghaus Chapter 13

FINAL EXAM: Monday March 4: Exam is due 11:59pm

6 Due Dates & Assignments

- **Week One (01/14)**
 - R January 18: *Quiz 1, Applied Assignment 1*
- **Week Two (01/21)**
 - M January 22: *Paper Preferences*
 - T January 23: *Quiz 2, Applied Assignment 2*
 - R January 25: *Quiz 3, Applied Assignment 3*
- **Week Three (01/28)**
 - Sun January 28: *Exam 1*
 - T January 30: *Quiz 4, Applied Assignment 4*
 - R February 1: *Quiz 5, Applied Assignment 5*
 - Sat February 3: *Paper A1 (half of class)*
- **Week Four (02/04)**
 - T February 6: *Quiz 6, Applied Assignment 6*
 - R February 8: *Quiz 7, Applied Assignment 7*
 - Sat February 10: *Paper B1 (half of class)*
- **Week Five (02/11)**
 - T February 13: *Quiz 8, Applied Assignment 8*
 - R February 15: *Quiz 9, Applied Assignment 9*
 - Sat February 18: *Paper A2 (half of class)*
- **Week Six (02/18)**
 - Sun February 18: *Exam 2*
 - T February 20: *Quiz 10, Applied Assignment 10*
 - R February 22: *Quiz 11, Applied Assignment 11*
- **Week Seven (02/25)**
 - T February 27: *Quiz 12, Applied Assignment 12*
 - R February 29: *Quiz 13, Applied Assignment 13*
 - Sat March 2: *Paper B2 (half of class)*
- **Week Eight (03/03)**
 - M March 4: *Exam 3*