

# POLS 2306: State & Local Government Summer 2020

## Sections: W02 & W03

Department of Social Sciences  
Texas A&M University Corpus Christi

## 1 Instructor Information

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Office Hours: Mondays: 3:00pm-5:00pm

Wednesdays: 1:00pm-3:00pm

Thursdays: 11:00am-1:00pm  
and by appointment

## 2 Course Description and Purpose

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 day 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 a brief discussion paper and participate in discussion forums. 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.

## 3 Course Format

This class is fully online. This means we may well 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).

## 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 each day of class 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 the e-mailed YouTube videos).

## Virtual Office Hours

I encourage everyone to practice social distancing. To this end, I will not meet with any students face-to-face. I will however hold virtual office hours for six hours weekly. ***Please note: Many things remain in flux with the University, so all of the office hours are subject to change... any changes will be communicated via e-mail.*** I am, as always happy to meet with you outside of normal office hours if needed.

You have several options to meet with me:

- **E-mail:** During office hours, I will answer student e-mails as soon as they come in. I will also reply to all student e-mails that remain from earlier in the day
- **Webex:** Think of this as kind of like Skype or Facetime (although it can also function like a phone call). Please see the next section on Webex for how to use it.
- **Alternatively:** If you want to talk with me and Webex isn't feasible, reach out via e-mail and we can figure something out. We can even set up a phone call.

## Using Webex for Virtual Office Hours

Webex is akin to Skype. To use it:

- One time: Install it!
  - Download “Cisco Webex Meetings” from either the Google Play or Apple App Store (Android, Mac, iOS). You can also download a Windows app from <https://www.webex.com/downloads.html>
  - When you go to login, use your TAMUCC e-mail address
  - When prompted for “site,” use `tamucc.webex.com`
  - Do the usual Duo thing
- Each time you would like to chat with me during office hours:
  - Click on this link **from the device you would like to talk with me on:** <https://tamucc.webex.com/meet/sgleason1>
  - Alternatively..... you can call: 1-877-668-4493. When prompted, enter access code: 803 861 771# (user ID, just enter #

## 4 Requirements

### Text

There is one required book which the majority of our readings will come from. Other readings are posted on Blackboard and are noted on the course schedule. Be sure to read all readings for each listed day *before* the lecture.

The book is available at the campus bookstore, for both purchase and rental. However, you can purchase or rent the book for a substantially lower rate online. To this end, I provide the ISBN for the book in the syllabus and will place all of the first week's readings on Blackboard to allow for shipping time. After the first week I expect you to have the book and bring it with you to class.

1. Rottingaus, Brandon. 2018. *Inside Texas Politics: Power, Policy, and Personality in the Lone Star State*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Oxford University Press: New York.  
**ISBN: 9780190928391**

### 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

- Discussion Forums: 9 points
  - Discussion Paper: 10 points
  - Quizzes: 21 points
  - Exams: 60 points
1. **Online Discussion Forum (9 points)**— For six days over the course of the semester, there will be a brief prompt in the online forums which asks you to take the concepts covered in the lecture and apply them to the “real world.” For instance, when we talk about the Texas Constitution, we might have a discussion about how the Texas Constitution would look if it were written today. You are required to participate in two of these forum discussions (you sign up for them on the first day of the semester). But, you should read the forums even on days where you are not required to participate as they will help illustrate the concepts in a concrete way. On days where you are scheduled, be sure to complete the reading, watch the lecture, and then post a reply of at least 150 words to my prompt by 6:00pm. You must then reply to two of your classmates posts with at least 75 words by 11:59pm. In this assignment, *it is okay to express opinion*, but be prepared to back it up with material from the readings & lecture. For more details, please see the Discussion Forum Handout.
  2. **Short Papers (10 points)**— Over the course of the semester, you will write a short paper (2-3 pages) applying the brief concrete example back to the book reading for that day. You must sign up for the cases study you want to write on at the start of the semester and cannot change your choice. The paper is due the day that reading is scheduled on the syllabus. A full list of these readings is available on Blackboard. By Friday July 10 at 12:00pm, be sure to rank order your choices in Blackboard. For more details, see the Discussion Paper handout.

3. **Quizzes (21 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). They are all listed on the Quiz Schedule handout on Blackboard. Quizzes cover material from the reading and the lecture for that day. The quizzes consist of five multiple choice questions. They are open note, but 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 1.5 points toward your final grade.
  
4. **Exams (60 points)**—There are three exams, each is worth 20 points, or two letter grades. None of the exams are cumulative and consist of 50 multiple choice questions. Before each exam I will provide a study guide. Exams will open at 12:01am and close at 11:59pm (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.

## 5 Course Policies

### Contacting the Instructor

I am happy to help you either via e-mail, or during virtual office hours. Virtual office hours are via WebEx. If my 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.

## 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.

## Extra Credit

The only extra credit I offer is a one point increase for the discussion paper (remember, the course is only worth 100 points) for consulting with the writing center for your paper. Appointments are usually necessary. Just screenshot your confirmation and place it at the end of your paper.

## 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](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**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Corpus Christi Hall 116.

If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

Student Caregivers: If you have caregiving responsibilities (e.g., parent of a child or care for elderly parents) and you anticipate scheduling difficulties, please discuss this with me the beginning of the semester to work out an appropriate strategy in advance.

## **Sexual Assault & Gender Based Discrimination**

TAMUCC faculty is fully committed to supporting students and upholding an environment free of sexual violence and gender based discrimination. If a student chooses to confide in faculty (or other entities on campus) regarding an issues of sexual violence, dating violence, domestic violence and stalking it should be understood that faculty members are often obligated to report this information. Students can choose to disclose their experience confidentially to the following resources:

- University Counseling Center
- Student Health Center

## **Academic Advising (for students with a majors in the College of Liberal Arts)**

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. The University uses an online Degree Audit system. 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. The CLA Academic Advising Office is located in Driftwood #203. For more information please call 361-825-3466.

## 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 the Student Services Center and filling out a course drop form. Just stopping attendance and participation **WILL NOT** automatically result in your being dropped from the class. **July 27, 2020** is the last day to drop a class with an automatic grade of “W” this term.

## Grade Appeals

As stated in University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.03, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.03, Student Grade Appeals. These documents are accessible online at: [http://academicaffairs.tamucc.edu/rules\\_procedures/assets/13.02.99.C0.03\\_student\\_grade\\_appeals.pdf](http://academicaffairs.tamucc.edu/rules_procedures/assets/13.02.99.C0.03_student_grade_appeals.pdf). For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean’s office in the college in which the course is taught. For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal in CLA, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website, <http://cla.tamucc.edu/about/student-resources.html>.

## Statement of Academic Continuity

In the event of an unforeseen adverse event, such as a major hurricane and classes could not be held on the campus of Texas A&M University Corpus Christi; this course would continue through the use of Blackboard and/or email. In addition, the syllabus and class activities may be modified to allow continuation of the course. Ideally, University facilities (i.e., emails, web sites, and Blackboard) will be operational within two days of the closing of the physical campus. However, students need to make certain that the course instructor has a primary and a secondary means of contacting each student.

## Classroom Courtesies

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.

### **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.

## **6 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**

Monday July 6– Introduction to the Course

- *No readings*

## The Basic Structures of Government

Tuesday July 7– Texas Political Culture

- Rottinghaus Chapter 1

Wednesday July 8– The Constitution: The Rulebook

- Rottinghaus Chapter 2

Thursday July 9– Texas in Nation: Federalism

- Rottinghaus Chapter 3

Monday July 13– **EXAM ONE**

- *No readings*

## Political Institutions: The Rules of the Game

Tuesday July 14– The Legislature

- Rottinghaus Chapter 7
- Hung, Daniel. 2015. “OPINION: Texas Should Consider Adopting Full-Time Legislature.” *The Daily Texan*. 11 June 2015. (B)
- McNary, Chris. 2015. “Texas’ Every Two-Year Legislature Isn’t So ‘Part Time.’” *Dallas Morning News*. 16 February 2015. (B)

Wednesday July 15– The Governor

- Rottinghaus Chapter 8
- Garrett, Robert T. 2020. “Greg Abbott Confronts Coronavirus as Stronger Governor Than Texas Had 50 Years Ago.” *Dallas Morning News*. 22 March 2020. (B)

Thursday July 16– Other Executives & the Bureaucracy

- Rottinghaus Chapter 9

Monday July 20– The Judiciary

- Rottinghaus Chapter 10
- Platoff, Emma. 2019. “State Leaders Again Want to Review How Texas Elects Judges. Will They End Partisan Judicial Elections?” *Texas Tribune*. 15 July 2019. (B)

Tuesday July 21– Criminal Justice

- Rottinghaus Chapter 11
- Barajas, Michael. 2018. "In Texas, 3 Out of 4 County Jail Inmates Haven't Been Convicted of a Crime." *Texas Observer*. 25 July 2018. (B)
- Hall, Katie. 2020. "San Marcos Becomes First Texas City to OK Cite-and-release Law." *Austin Statesman*. (B).

Wednesday July 22– Local Government

- Rottinghaus Chapter 12

Thursday July 23– **EXAM TWO**

- *No readings*

## Political Behavior: How the Actors Behave

Monday July 27– Voting & Elections

- Rottinghaus Chapter 4
- Ura, Alexa. 2019. "Someone Did Not Do Their Due Diligence: How an Attempt to Review Texas' Voter Rolls Turned into a Debacle." *Texas Tribune*. 1 February 2019. (B)

Tuesday July 28– Political Parties

- Rottinghaus Chapter 5

Wednesday July 29– Interest Groups

- Rottinghaus Chapter 6

## Public Policy

Thursday July 30– Paying for it All: Budget & Finance

- Rottinghaus Chapter 13
- Isensee, Laura. 2020. "As COVID-19 Strains School Budgets, Texas' Historic Education Cuts Give Lessons." *Houston Public Media*. 18 June 2020. (B)

Monday August 4– Public Policy

- Rottinghaus Chapter 14

Tuesday August 5– Bringing Everything Together: Texas & Covid-19

- Reading TBA

Wednesday August 6– **NO CLASS: READING DAY**

- *Good luck studying!*

**FINAL EXAM: Friday August 7: Exam is open from 12:01am to 11:59pm**