

**POLS 2312-002
Spring 2017**

**State and Local Government
MWF 10:00 – 10:50AM
Location: To be determined (TBD)**

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Office Hours: TBD
Graduate Teaching Assistant: TBD

I. Introduction:

This course is designed to provide students with a basic understanding of how decisions occur at the state and local levels of government. While the course will focus on Texas politics at times, it is designed to provide a comparative evaluation of state governments by looking at all fifty states. As its main objective, the course will help each student understand the activities and responsibilities of state and local government. At the completion of this course, you should be able to understand and discuss the major political actors and state institutions common among the American states. Beyond an understanding of the basic elements, structures, policies, and processes of state and local government, you should emerge with a greater appreciation of the role of subnational government including an understanding of the different complexities involved in governing from state to state.

II. Learning Outcome Objectives:

To identify (1) certain environmental, citizen participation, and institutional factors that affect state politics and policy choices; (2) and to identify certain analytical concepts that are useful for understanding politics and policy making; and (3) and to identify certain generalizations about the behavior of sub national governments generally, and Texas specifically, that are useful for understanding politics and policy making.

Among the (1) political processes, (2) analytical concepts and (3) generalizations that students might understand to accomplish, these learning outcomes are the following:

- (1) Political Processes: To identify some of the following processes about politics among the states and in Texas: (a) the effects of state contextual features on state politics and policies; b) the manner in which electoral processes, political parties, and interest groups influence state politics and policies; (c) the instruments and processes of policy making institutions such as state legislatures, executives, and judiciaries; (d) the similarities and differences among political institutions and state policy choices; (e) and the ways in which Texas governments are typical or atypical in comparison to other states;
- (2) Analytical Concepts: To identify some of the following concepts useful for analyzing state and local politics: demographics, political culture; federalism; state constitutional design; direct democracy; public opinion; direct referenda, political party systems; interest groups systems; legislative professionalism, representation, and policy making; executive powers including the role of the governor in policy making; the characteristics and roles of state agencies; the selection and structure of state judiciaries, judicial policy making and the key elements of the judicial process; and relationships among state branches of government;
- (3) Generalizations: To identify some of the descriptive generalizations about trends in state and local politics or comparisons of Texas politics with other states, or current issues or problems of state and local

governments, or research findings about the importance of certain explanatory variables on the policy choices of states or the politics of states.

III. Required Text:

There is one required textbook, which is available for purchase at the university bookstore or through an on-line bookseller. If purchasing on-line, be sure that it is shipped promptly as readings will begin immediately.

1. Todd Donovan, Daniel A. Smith, Tracy Osborne, and Christopher Z. Mooney. 2015. (4th Edition). *State and Local Politics: Institutions and Reform*. Belmont, CA: Cengage Learning. (ISBN – 9781285441405)

An alternative ebook version is also available by Cengage at <https://www.cengagebrain.com/shop/isbn/9781285441405&cid=APL1>.

IV. Course Requirements

Student grades in this course will be a function of three examinations (including two mid-term examinations and a final examination) and a research letter. Further, several (4-8) unscheduled quizzes will occur throughout the semester with points earned reflecting extra credit opportunities. The extra credit quizzes will occur at random throughout the semester and will be announced in class prior to the quiz. Each quiz will last a maximum of ten minutes and will be fully administered on Blackboard with students having access for 24 hours once the quiz begins. Questions on the quizzes will be formed from the lecture material and the textbook readings. Failure to take a quiz will result in a non-grade (0) for that quiz. There will be *no* make-up opportunities for missed quizzes regardless of the excuse.

Related to the three examinations, their format will consist of multiple-choice questions. With the multiple-choice format of the examinations, students are required to purchase and bring the official version of scantron form #882-E to each test, as well as a #2 pencil. Scantron form #882-E can be purchased at the university's bookstore. Wrong or non-official scantron forms will not be accepted since they sometimes cannot be scanned by the College of Liberal Art's scantron machine. If a student fails to bring the correct scantron form, that scantron will not be graded resulting in a grade of zero for the examination.

Each examination will cover both lectures and assigned readings. The midterm examinations are non-cumulative and will cover topics only from the beginning of the course or the most recent examination. The final examination, however, will be partially cumulative. All students will take the examinations in the classroom at the designated times with no make-up exams allowed except for situations such as a medical emergency or a death in one's family. In relation to examination absences caused by medical emergencies, students are required to contact me no later than the day of the exam and will be required to present proof of a physician's examination. Failure to do so will result in a grade of zero for that examination. When tests are returned, they will be brought to just two consecutive classes. Tests thereafter must be picked up from my office (UH, room 409) during office hours.

During the semester, there will also be a research letter assignment. With that assignment, each student will be required to write a one-page letter about a current state policy controversy. The letter will be addressed to any member of the Texas Congress (House of Representatives or Senate). The letter must be based on facts and ideas presented in class, the textbook, and from valid external sources; however, the purpose is for each student to express an idea that is both personal and well-researched. An assignment

handout with additional information will be distributed in class on TBD and letters will be due in class (not by email) on TBD.

Make-up Examination Policy

Where make-up exams are permitted, those examinations will be scheduled prior to the final examination on TBD at TBD. As such, make-up exams are generally more difficult due to the time that has passed since the discussion of the graded material. Further, make-up exams will include both essay and short answer questions, may be comprehensive, and will require specific, detailed answers. An additional disadvantage relates to the extra points sometimes added to the regular exam, since they are never applied to a make-up exam.

Exam Tardiness Policy

Students entering late disturb other students and will not be allowed to take the exam. Further, tardiness permits students to ask exiting students about the content of an exam – that is obviously not fair for students that have arrived on time. Unless a prior arrangement has been made, students will receive a grade of zero when tardy for an examination.

V. Grading

Grades will also posted on Blackboard. To access the extra-credit quizzes and your grades on Blackboard, log in with your UTA NetID and password at <https://elearn.uta.edu/webapps/login/>. If you have difficulty with Blackboard, visit <http://www.uta.edu/blackboard/students/index.php> or contact the Office of Information Technology Help Desk at 817-272-2208. The grade components of the course are:

1. Midterm Examination #1 – 25%
2. Midterm Examination #2 – 35%
3. Final Examination – 35%
4. Research Letter Assignment – 5%
5. Extra Credit Quizzes – Up to 10 extra points added to the semester grade
 - a. E.g., if a student earns an 88 as a semester grade based on their midterm and final examinations performance, they may earn up to a 98 semester grade with their extra credit points added.
 - b. The value for the extra credit sum reflects the average quiz performance. For example, if five quizzes are given and 12 of 15 questions (80%) are answered correctly, then 8 extra credit points (the product of 80% multiplied by 10) will be earned.

The grading scale is as follows:

90-100	A
80-89	B
70-79	C
60-69	D
0-59	F

VI. Class Schedule:

Topic 1: Introduction to State and Local Politics

Topic 2: American Federalism

Topic 3: State Constitutions

Midterm Examination #1: TBD

Topic 4: Political Participation and Elections

Topic 5: Political Parties

Topic 6: State Legislatures

Topic 7: Governors

Midterm Examination #2: TBD

Topic 8: State Courts

Topic 9: Local Governments

Topic 10: Finance and Budget Policy

Final Examination: TBD

VII. Core Expectations and Citizenship

Expectations of Students

While an introductory course, I have strong yet reasonable expectations for students. To perform well, students are expected to work - meaning a combination of recurrent attendance, frequent class participation, and careful attention to the readings is required. Students that do not attend class regularly, do not take careful class notes, and do not carefully read the assigned material will have a more difficult time with the exams. Additionally, I encourage students to see me during my office hours. Where questions arise about the content of the course or a student's grade, office hours represent important opportunities for interaction between students and their instructor.

Citizenship

While each student pays a significant cost to attend this course, sometimes an individual is less interested in learning, and disturbs others during class by talking, reading newspapers, listening to music, receiving or making phone calls, or text messaging. As a result of student complaints, use of cell phones during class will result in a two-point deduction from a student's final semester grade for each offense (one offense equals 2 points, two offenses equals 4 points, etc.). The instructor also reserves the right to ask the students to leave class when cell phone use is observed. Otherwise, do not walk in late, leave early, or push around others to find a seat once class has begun - it disturbs others! Be careful with laptop computers. Unfortunately, a majority of students use their laptops to access the web for non-related material, play games or read email rather than paying attention to the lecture. Where I see a laptop being used, I assume (rather accurately) that it is being used for something other than class purposes.

VIII. Special Notes

1. Cell Phones and Electronic Devices – Students are instructed to turn off their cell phones prior to class. See the comments about cell phone usage in the Citizenship section. Usage of a cell phone or other non-permitted electronic device during an examination or quiz will result in a grade of zero on that examination or quiz.

2. Test Conduct – All materials must be removed from one’s desk during an examination or quiz. Additionally, headwear (e.g., hats), sunglasses, and earphones are not permitted during an examination.
3. Academic Integrity - All students are expected to obey the civil and penal statutes of the State of Texas and the United States, the Regents’ Rules and Regulations of The University of Texas System, the rules and regulations of the University, and the orders or instructions issued by an administrative official of the University or U.T. System in the course of his/her duties, and to observe standards of conduct that are compatible with the University’s function as an educational institution. Any student found to engage in cheating, plagiarism, or collusion will be sanctioned.
4. Inclement Weather – If a class is canceled due to inclement weather, its subject will be delayed until the following class. Similarly, all tests canceled because of inclement weather will be delivered during the following class. For information related to weather related class cancellations please call (972) 601-2049.
5. Emergency Exit Procedures - Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit, which can be found to the left and right behind the lecture podium. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator, but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist individuals with disabilities.
6. Campus Carry - Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes as prohibited. Under the new law, openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/news/info/campus-carry/>.
7. Students with Disabilities - Any student with a documented disability needing academic accommodations is requested to speak with the instructor during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain confidential.
8. Discrimination Policy – The University of Texas at Arlington does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, genetic information, and/or veteran status in its educational programs or activities it operates. For more information, visit uta.edu/eos.
9. Title IX Policy - The University of Texas at Arlington is committed to maintaining a learning and working environment that is free from discrimination based on sex in accordance with Title IX of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs or activities; Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), which prohibits sex discrimination in employment; and the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (SaVE Act). Sexual misconduct is a form of sex discrimination and will not be tolerated. For information regarding Title IX, visit www.uta.edu/titleIX or contact Ms. Jean Hood, Vice President and Title IX Coordinator at (817) 272-7091 or jmhood@uta.edu.
10. Student Support Services - The University of Texas at Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. These resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. Among the support services on campus, the IDEAS Center (2nd Floor of Central Library) offers free tutoring to all students with a focus on transfer students, sophomores, veterans and others undergoing a transition to UT Arlington. To schedule an appointment with a peer tutor or mentor email IDEAS@uta.edu or call (817) 272-6593. For more information, students may contact the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107 or visit www.uta.edu/resources.
11. Syllabus Changes – The instructor reserves the right to change the syllabus at any time during the semester.