POLS 2306: Introduction to Texas Politics

Fall 2025

Nickolas Rios-Professor

Pie-Rene Ikota Sr-Graduate Teaching Assistant

Course Time: MoWeFr 12:20PM - 1:15PM   Office Hours: MW 4:30-5:45pm via
Zoom & By Appointment

Classroom: CAS 158   Office: @ TJC in J127; no on campus office

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Course Description & Objectives

This course is designed to introduce students to the institutions of the Texas government, using the prior civic understanding each student has. The course investigates the behavioral trends that explain how individuals work within these institutions to change laws. The course also explores topics where students can challenge their understanding of government by comparing how state politics is unique from the federal government and identifying the dates of significant reforms to the lawmaking process.

Learning Objectives

The course is designed with the objective of obtaining a comprehensive knowledge of Texas's politics by the end of the semester. This can be reflected by the ability to:

- Analyze philosophical foundations of the state's political system by comparing the political culture of regions in Texas.
- Describe how branches of government in Texas interact with one another and what that means for the power one individual can have.
- Appraise current events to highlight the importance of both constitutions in today's society.
- Consider the formation of partisan preferences and how evaluate how partisanship has shaped Texas into a one-party state and the consequences of this affiliation.

Students who will do the best in the course will understand how political contexts shape how institutions function and identify the processes in which the public can influence how the government operates.

Required Book is a Free Open-Source Text

Sterken, Jr. Robert, Marcus Stadelmann, and Eric Lopez. 2019. Uncovering Texas Politics. Tyler, TX: University of Texas at Tyler.

[This is a free online textbook available on the course page.]

With Additional Newspaper and Articles to supplement [all free]

Computer with internet and Word processing capability.

Artificial Intelligence

UT Tyler is committed to exploring and using artificial intelligence (AI) tools as appropriate for the discipline and task undertaken. We encourage discussing AI tools' ethical, societal, philosophical, and disciplinary implications. All uses of AI should be acknowledged as this aligns with our commitment to honor and integrity, as noted in UT Tyler's Honor Code. Faculty and students must not use protected information, data, or copyrighted materials when using any AI tool. Additionally, users should be aware that AI tools rely on predictive models to generate content that may appear correct but is sometimes shown to be incomplete, inaccurate, taken without attribution from other sources, and/or biased. Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research. You are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate the guidelines specified for this course (see below) is considered a breach of academic integrity. The student will be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler's Academic Integrity Policy.

For this course, work submitted by students in this course will be generated by themselves. This includes all process work, drafts, brainstorming artifacts, editing, and final products. I expect all work students submit for this course to be their own. I have carefully designed all assignments and class activities to support your learning. Doing your own work, without human or artificial intelligence assistance, is best for your efforts in mastering course learning objectives. This extends to group assignments where students must create collaboratively create the project. Any instance of the following constitutes a violation of UT Tyler's Honor Code: a student has another person/entity do any portion of a graded assignment, which includes purchasing work from a company, hiring a person or company to complete an assignment or exam, using a previously submitted assignment and/or using AI tools/models (such as, but not limited to ChatGPT). Any violation of my personal policy on AI, will result with a 0 on the assignment and appropriate action with the university.

Technology Policy

I do **NOT** permit the use of technology in the classroom, **EXCEPT** for students who have documented disability accommodations through the school's Disability Services Office. Students without disabilities who wish to use technology in class must reach out to me via Canvas message prior to the start of class to request permission. In the message, students should clearly identify why they feel they need the technology or how it may enhance their learning experience. Additionally, students must agree to ensure that the use of technology will not become a distraction to themselves or others in the class. Requests will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, and, if granted, permission may be revoked at any time if the technology disrupts the classroom environment.

Communication Policy

Homework, test reviews, and announcements will be posted through Canvas. Students are expected to log into their Canvas accounts regularly, regardless of their current assignment status, to stay informed of updates or important information. All students are responsible for checking Canvas messages and announcements frequently.

If you have questions or concerns, you are encouraged to reach out to me via Canvas message or email at any time. I aim to respond within 24 hours or by the next working day. If you do not hear back within that time frame, please do not hesitate to follow up. Canvas message is the preferred method of communication.

I aim to have all assignments graded within 7 days of submission. Students are welcome to message me with questions about grading timelines or feedback as needed.

Academic Dishonesty

The student is responsible for providing work produced wholly by themselves. The use of collusion, plagiarism, or A.I., such as, but not limited to, ChatGPT, is strictly prohibited. Any incidence of cheating, or suspicion of, will result in an automatic 0 on the assignment where the incident occurred. This will also result in notification of the incident to the college.

Students who are found to be, or suspected to be, academically dishonest are required to have a conference with the professor. **This meeting must be scheduled within 48 hours of notification.**

Conflicts with a student's personal, academic, or work schedule will not be accepted as valid reasons for failing to comply with course requirements, deadlines, or academic integrity procedures. Students are expected to plan accordingly (with the exception of school events).

Test Taking Policy

When taking a test, students are responsible for ensuring there is no question of academic dishonesty. Failure to follow test-taking policy may result in an automatic **0** for the assignment in question and notification of the incident to the college.

- During an exam proctored in-person, students must-

    o **not** have access to their phone, notes, or any outside materials.

    o be in appropriate classroom attire.

    o **not** leave the test area for any reason such as, but not exclusively, restroom breaks.

    o have phones turned off.

    o have their ears clear of headphones, earbuds, or any electronic devices.

    o have no electronic devices such as smartwatches.

    o **not** disturb other students who may still be taking their test.

    o have their head clear of any head coverings, with the exception of religious headwear.

Student Athletes Policy

Student athletes are eligible for make-up assignments, but it is their responsibility to inform the professor of any scheduled absences **at least 1-2 class days in advance**. The

preferred method of communication is through Canvas message. Students must provide their athletic schedule as early as possible, preferably at the beginning of the semester.

Assignments should be made up prior to the due date or as agreed upon by the professor. Work is expected to be completed in advance unless otherwise stated by the professor, unless not possible.

Assignment Groups

Reflections & Quizzes: 100 points

To have an engaging conversation, we have to start with a common understanding about a topic each week. This will start by answering questions from the reading and your existing knowledge or quiz questions to recall specific details. Each of these assignments will be worth 10 points (excellent, sufficient, lacking detail, incorrect, poor, incomplete) or percentage of quiz questions correct. The top ten will count towards your overall grade.

Additionally, students should be prepared for a quiz *MINIMUM* once a week sporadically provided in the first half of a random day of class. This does not necessarily grant there to be no quiz for the remainder of the week. Additionally, reflections or quizzes can take a variety of forms outside of the traditional question format. This can include a self-reflection essay of the reading, group work, or other format and/or styles.

Participation: 50 points

Class discussions will mostly operate as an open floor for discussion, sparked by questions that transition between topics, and if need be, will use the Socratic Method if participation is uneven or lacking on a topic.

Additionally, attendance is not wholly the source of points; however, it is impossible to participate, if one is not in class. Furthermore, attending class but choosing not to participate or be engaged does not necessitate a good grade in participation. This includes being off task.

Letter to State Legislator: 25 points

A key to representation is communication your interests to those with the authority to make a decision. You have the freedom to select a policy related topic that interests you and fits within the scope of state law. The purpose of this assignment is that you:

1) identify the appropriate recipient of your request, by addressing the letter to someone who has authority in the Texas government.

2) communicate your thoughts with a person who has the power to effectively address your concern, by realizing who you write to matters.

3) describe the action you want to be taken on the issue and justify why the action should be taken. This is important, because you can see if the action you advocate for was attempted and the legislator is able to evaluate the strength of your request by how well it aligns with your information and their goals.

4) recognize the limited power of each government position and each legislative action. This means your language should be precise and not defer to the reader to interpret what the parameters of your objective is.

Letter Requirements: Format your letter as a professional correspondence with appropriate placement of addresses (letterheads are acceptable), salutations, date, and single spaced. Additionally, staff and representatives receive a great deal of correspondence so the letter needs to be short (not more than two pages). Be clear, concise, and descriptive as you specify what goal you seek, why, and how that should be done.

Congressional Simulation: 25 points

Texas has had the same constitution since 1876, since then we have passed a variety of policies. The goal of this assignment is to achieve a more advanced understanding of what is needed in order to pass a bill to a law. Students will meet with peers and work hard to address the concerns of their constituency. This will be an entirely in-class assignment.

Three Unit Exams: 200 points

Three exams are each worth 100 points. Each exam will offer different types of questions: short-answer, true/false, definition, importance/significance, and multiple-choice questions. Each question will hold different point values. Missing an exam will result in an automatic 0. There will be a no make-up policy; however, only the top two exams will be counted towards a student's final grade.

*Final Exam:*100 points

The final exam, worth 100 points will be cumulative in that you are asked to draw connections across topics covered throughout the class. The final exam will follow a similar structure to that of prior exams with added questions to account for the additional time.

Extra Credit: *To Be Determined*

At minimum students may expect an opportunity to receive an additional 5 points added to a Unit Exam and Final Exam. Extra credit assignments must be completed by the week prior to the exam week. This meaning Friday for assignments involving discussion with the professor and Saturday for online submitted assignments. There will be no late submissions for partial credit for extra credit. Additionally, there may be other opportunities; however, only the 5 points are guaranteed to be offered. Lastly, any student who receives a 0 for academic dishonesty will be ineligible and/or forfeit any potential extra credit points as well.

Make-Up Assignments:

As this class is classified as a face-to-face course, the expectation is students will attend all classes; however, it is understood that emergencies and situations will inevitably arise. It is for this very reason students will be offered a reasonable amount of make-up or alternative assignments. Students are expected to communicate absences with efficient evidence to receive a replacement assignment.

Grading:

Reflections & Quizzes	Weekly	100 points
Participation	In-Class	50 points
Unit Exam I	Feb. 12th	100 points
Unit Exam II	March 12th	100 points
Unit Exam III[1]	April 16th	100 points
Letter to the Legislature	March 5th	25 points
Constitution Amendment Simulation	April 7th & 9th	25 points
Final Exam	April 30th	100 points
Total		500 points

Class Calendar:

Week 1	Thinking About Texas
August 25th – August 29th	Syllabus, Introductions, Course Intro, Class Discussion
Week 2	Texas Overview
September 1st – September 5th September 1st	Reading: -Chapter 1 Labor Day [No Class]
Week 3	Texas Constitutions
September 8th – September 12th	Readings: -Chapter 2
Week 4	Voting and Elections
September 15th – September 19th	Reading: -Chapter 3
Week 5	Exam Week
September 22nd – September 26th	Article Discussion - Monday Review Day - Wednesday Unit Exam I – Friday

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[1] Only the highest two "Unit Exams" will go towards your final grade.

Week 6	Political Parties
September 29th – October 3rd	Reading: -Chapter 4
Week 7	Interest Groups
October 6th – October 10th	Reading: -Chapter 5 Interest Group Assignment
Week 8	Texas Legislature
October 13th – October 17th	Readings: -Chapter 6 Assignment Due: -Letter to the Legislator Due
Week 9	Exam Week
October 20th – October 24th	Article Discussion - Monday Review Day - Wednesday Unit Exam II – Friday
Week 10	Executive Branch and Governorship
October 27th – October 31st	Reading: -Chapter 7
Week 11	Judicial Branch & Justice System
November 3rd – November 7th November 3rd	Reading: -Chapter 8 Last Day to Drop
Week 12 [Class-Vote]	Exam Week
November 10th – November 14th	Article Discussion - Monday Review Day - Wednesday Unit Exam III – Friday
Week 13 [Class-Vote]	Congressional Simulation
November 17th – November 21st	In Class: Congressional Workshop

Thanksgiving Break	
November 24th – November 28th	No Classes
Week 14	Final Review Week
December 1st – December 5th	Final Review Lecture – Monday Final Review Game – Wednesday Work Day - Friday
Week 15	Final Exam Week
December 8th – December 12th	Final Exam