

# **POLS 2306: Introduction to Texas Government Spring 2023**

Nickolas Rios- Professor

[nrios@uttyler.edu](mailto:nrios@uttyler.edu)

Course Time: MWF 10:10 a.m. – 11:05 a.m.

Office Hours: MW 11:45pm-2:45pm

Classroom: Stewart Hall 00127

Office: P204B @ TJC or via appt./zoom

## **Course Description & Objectives**

This course is designed to introduce students to the institutions of the American 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. Note: *This section of POLS 2305 is eligible for the Service-Learning Designation on your Transcript.*

## **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.]

[3] 886-E Scantrons and a pencil

Computer with internet and Word processing capability.

## **Student Conduct**

I have high expectations for each student in this class, which are based on your academic performance to get to this point and my belief that you will treat each of your fellow classmates with respect. My goal is to facilitate a supportive and engaging class experience for everyone and one part of that is eliminating disruptive behavior. Using technology in a way that distracts others and demonstrates a lack of respect for the instructor is unacceptable.

*Expectations for all work*

All work must be original - including only direct quotes without any analysis will result in a 0. Work that largely summarizes or only paraphrases work from other sources will not receive more than a B-. A paper

must synthesize arguments and facts to build justifications for the author's main point (or argument). Any work found to be AI generated including, but not limited to Chat GPT will result in an automatic 0.

All missed in-class activities will be counted as a zero, if not excused beforehand.

Should it be necessary for a student to make up either the exam, that will be done toward the end of the term. This is with the exception of arrangements with the professor are made.

All out of class assignments are due at the beginning of the class. Failure to turn in an assignment on time will result in a penalty of one letter grade per day. Assignments not received within three days of the deadline will no longer be accepted.

All readings are expected to be completed before class. Although not all readings will be discussed in class, this does not negate your responsibility to know the assigned material.

## **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.

### ***Active Discussion:*** 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. Points are accumulated with correct answers.

### ***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) include background information from surveys done by UT Tyler and your role to establish your expertise as an author.
- 5) 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.

### ***Simulation to Amend the State Constitution:*** 25 points

Texas has had the same constitution since 1876, which has been amended 507 times. Get to know what is in the state constitution and how it can be changed. This group project will include multiple assignments where you identify what to amend in the current Texas Constitution (what is missing or what needs to be changed) and present a new alternative. Once you are familiar with the structure of the constitution's articles, you will be able to work on clauses and identify concepts the state has not yet included in the constitution. At the end of the semester, as a group, you will propose a new constitution for the state of Texas (much like the state did in 1974, when the plan fell by 3 votes in the Legislature).

**Three Exams:** 300 points

Two exams are each worth 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. Each exam will offer different types of short-answer, matching, and multiple-choice questions. Each question will hold different point values. Missing an exam without the confirmation of an alternative test date, before the exam date, will result in a zero.

**Grading:**

Reflections & Quizzes	Weekly	100 points
Active Discussion	In-Class	50 points
Exam I	February 23 <sup>rd</sup>	100 points
Exam II	April 5 <sup>th</sup>	100 points
Letter to the Legislature	April 19 <sup>th</sup>	25 points
Constitution Amendment Simulation	April 22 <sup>nd</sup> -26 <sup>th</sup>	25 points
Final Exam	May 1 <sup>st</sup>	100 points
Total		500 points

**Class Schedule:**

Week 1  
 January 15  
 January 17- January 19

Course Intro & TX Population  
 No Class; MLK Day  
 Readings:  

- Barreto, Matt A. and Angela Gutierrez. 2019. "Party Coalitions and Demographic Change: How Latinos Change Politics in California and Texas." In Two Perspectives on Demographic Changes in the States Ahead of the 2020 Presidential Election. Washington, D.C.: Bipartisan Policy Center

Week 2  
 January 22- January 26  
 Week 3

Thinking about Texas  
 What is ahead for Texas Politics this term.  
 Texas Constitution & Frames all state and local actions.

January 29-February 2

Readings:  

- Lopez et al., Ch.2
- Smith, Jr., Griffin. "We the People. Texas Monthly, January 1974.
- Menon, Sangita. "Bill Seeks to Amend Texas Constitution to Ban Slavery. KUT, May 8, 2021.

Week 4

Voting and Elections in Texas

February 5- February 9

Week 5

February 12- February 16

Week 6

February 19- February 23

Week 7

February 26-March 1

Week 8

March 4-March 8

Spring Break

March 11- March 16

Week 9

March 18-March 22

Week 10

March 25-March 29

Week 11

April 1-April 5

Week 12

April 8-April 12

Week 13

April 15-April 19

Week 14

April 22-April 26

Week 15

Readings:

- Lopez et al., Ch. 3

Voting and Elections-Cont.

Readings:

- Lopez et al., Ch. 3

Review and Unit 1

- Review

Exam 1:

- Friday, February 23

Parties & Interest Groups

Readings:

- Lopez et al., Ch. 4 -5
- Huerta, Juan Carlos and Beatriz Cuartas. 2021. "Red to Purple: Changing Demographics and Party Change in Texas." Social Science Quarterly

Texas's Legislature

Readings:

- Lopez et al., Ch. 4 -5
- Huerta, Juan Carlos and Beatriz Cuartas. 2021. "Red to Purple: Changing Demographics and Party Change in Texas." Social Science Quarterly.

No Classes

Texas's Legislature

Drop Day-March 25<sup>th</sup>

Texas's Legislature

Readings:

- Lopez et al., Ch. 6

Exam:

Friday, April 5<sup>th</sup>

Texas's Executive

- Lopez et al., Ch. 7

Courts in Texas

Readings:

- Lopez et al., Ch. 8
- Rubin, Griffin. 2019. "Liable for Libel - The Texas Supreme Court's Opinion on Opinions and Implications." S.M.U. Law Review 72(2): 335-342.

Assignment Due:

- Letter to the Legislature
  - Friday, April 19<sup>th</sup>

Constitutional Amendment Workshop & Simulation

Constitutional Amendment Workshop & Simulation

Recap/Flex Week

April 29  
May 1  
May 3

No Class  
Final Exam- 10:15 a.m.-12:15 p.m.  
No Class

### **Academic Honesty:**

It is your responsibility to avoid plagiarism, cheating, and dishonesty. The University of Texas at Tyler Policies and Procedures for Student Affairs will be strictly followed and can be found here at:

<http://www.uttyler.edu/mopp/documents/8Student%20Conduct%20and%20Discipline.pdf>. Tests and assignments are designed to assess your understanding of the material—do not reference another student’s answers.

Violations of academic integrity are serious and will have a negative consequence on your classroom performance. In each instance a violation occurs, a failing grade will be assigned for the assignment or the course, require work to be redone, and have you identified what the cause of the violation was. The matter will be referred to the Dean of Students if institutional action is necessary. Reference the rights and responsibilities of students:

<http://www.uttyler.edu/wellness/rightsresponsibilities.php>.

### **Student Standards of Academic Conduct:**

Disciplinary proceedings may be initiated against any student who engages in scholastic dishonesty, including, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts.

- i. “Cheating” includes, but is not limited to:
  - a. copying from another student’s test paper;
  - b. using, during a test, materials not authorized by the person giving the test;
  - c. failure to comply with instructions given by the person administering the test;
  - d. possession during a test of materials which are not authorized by the person giving the test, such as class notes or specifically designed “crib notes”. The presence of textbooks constitutes a violation if they have been specifically prohibited by the person administering the test;
  - e. using, buying, stealing, transporting, or soliciting in whole or part the contents of an unadministered test, test key, homework solution, or computer program;
  - f. collaborating with or seeking aid from another student during a test or other assignment without authority;
  - g. discussing the contents of an examination with another student who will take the examination;
  - h. divulging the contents of an examination, for the purpose of preserving questions for use by another, when the instructors has designated that the examination is not to be removed from the examination room or not to be returned or to be kept by the student;
  - i. substituting for another person, or permitting another person to substitute for oneself to take a course, a test, or any course-related assignment;
  - j. paying or offering money or other valuable thing to, or coercing another person to obtain an unadministered test, test key, homework solution, or computer program or information about an unadministered test, test key, home solution or computer program;
  - k. falsifying research data, laboratory reports, and/or other academic work offered for credit;
  - l. taking, keeping, misplacing, or damaging the property of The University of Texas at Tyler, or of another, if the student knows or reasonably should know that an unfair academic advantage would be gained by such conduct; and
  - m. misrepresenting facts, including providing false grades or resumes, for the purpose of obtaining an academic or financial benefit or injuring another student academically or financially.
- ii. “Plagiarism” includes, but is not limited to, the appropriation, buying, receiving as a gift, or obtaining by any means another’s work and the submission of it as one’s own academic work offered for credit.
- iii. “Collusion” includes, but is not limited to, the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing academic assignments offered for credit or collaboration with another person to commit a violation of any section of the rules on scholastic dishonesty.
- iv. All written work that is submitted will be subject to review by plagiarism software.