

Texas Politics (POLS 2306)

Term: *Fall 2026*

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Office Hours: Friday 3:30-4 and by appointment

Course Dates: August 24, 2026- December 12, 2026

Course Times: Virtual

Classroom: Online/Virtual

Course Overview

This course provides an orientation to the actors, processes, and institutions that make up the Texas political system, with a focus on applied knowledge and analytical skills. Students will explore how Texas politics shapes its institutions, emphasizing the interplay between public opinion, elite conflict, and policy-making.

The course examines the historical and intellectual foundations of the Texas Constitution, as well as the roles of the Legislature, Executive, and Judicial branches. Additional topics include political parties, interest groups, the media, and their influence on policy-making.

This course offers a comprehensive understanding of Texas politics and fulfills statutory requirements for a baccalaureate degree.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Understand the Structure and Function of Texas Political Institutions
2. Explore the Dynamics of Texas Political Culture and Demographics
3. Evaluate the Role of Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Media
4. Examine the Electoral Process and Voter Behavior
5. Develop Skills in Policy Analysis and Critical Thinking
6. Foster Civic Engagement and Applied Knowledge

Required Textbooks and Readings

- **Primary Textbook:** Sterken, Jr., Robert, Marcus Stadelmann, and Eric Lopez. 2019. *Uncovering Texas Politics*. Tyler, TX: University of Texas at Tyler. This is a pdf that is provided in the course and the UT Tyler [Robert R. Muntz Library](#). It is also available for purchase on Amazon if you prefer a hardcopy. A hardcopy is not required for the course.
- **Additional Readings:** Throughout the semester, you will encounter insightful readings assigned and posted on Canvas.

Recommended Resources (Optional):

Newspaper subscriptions. Please visit [Robert R. Muntz Library](#) to see what subscriptions you have access to for free as a student.

Special Course Notes:

The exams in this course will be proctored using Lockdown Browser. LockDown Browser keeps you focused on your test by preventing you from visiting other websites, opening other programs, or switching tabs. The following rules explain what's allowed, what's not, and how it affects your grade.

1. Before You Start

- Close all other programs (messaging apps, browsers, documents, etc.).
- Have all allowed materials ready.
- Check your internet connection to avoid accidental disconnections.
- Plug in your device or ensure it's fully charged.
- Ensure you have enough time to complete the test before beginning.
- Do not put it off until the last day and hour.

2. During the Exam

- Stay in the exam window at all times.
- Clicking outside the test, switching tabs, or opening other apps is not allowed.
- Do not refresh or close the browser unless instructed.
- No unauthorized devices (phones, smartwatches, tablets) within reach.
- If using Respondus Monitor: Stay in camera view, avoid covering your face, and keep the room quiet.

3. Tracking & Logging

- Open Count: The system records how many times you open the test.
- Tab-Out Events: Any attempt to leave the exam window is logged.
- Video Review (if Monitor is on): Your session is recorded for instructor review.

4. Grading Consequences

- First Minor Violation (accidental click outside window): Warning noted in log.
- Repeated or Intentional Violations: Point deductions of -5% per event.
- In severe cases, the attempt may be invalidated (score = 0).
- Cheating or Unauthorized Materials: Automatic zero and academic misconduct report.

Course Structure

This course has weekly live-sessions via ZOOM that are optional. This does not require you to be in a specific location to participate; however, you must have access to a full-screen computer or tablet for each live session. (If you use a tablet for the live session, you must be comfortable typing responses on it.) The online nature of this class will push you to take an active role in the learning process. You will do this by engaging and collaborating with other students and the instructor on a regular basis, whether in live sessions, as well as through group work and activities. No quiz or test is open note or open book.

Tips for Success in this Course

1. **Participate.** I invite you to engage deeply, ask questions, and talk about the course content with your classmates. You can learn a great deal from discussing ideas and perspectives with your peers and professor. Participation can also help you articulate your thoughts and develop critical thinking skills.
2. **Manage your time.** I get it—students usually juggle a lot, and I know you've got commitments beyond this class. Still, doing your best often means carving out enough dedicated time for coursework. Try scheduling specific blocks of time and ensure you have enough room to finish assignments, allowing extra space for any tech issues that might pop up.
3. **Login regularly.** I recommend that you log in to Canvas several times a week to view announcements, discussion posts and replies to your posts.
4. **Do not fall behind.** This class moves at a quick pace and each week builds on the previous class content. If you feel you are starting to fall behind, check in with the instructor as soon as possible so we can troubleshoot together. It will be hard to keep up with the course content if you fall behind in the pre-work or post-work.
5. **Use Canvas notification settings.** Pro tip! Canvas can ensure you receive timely notifications in your email or via text. Be sure to enable notifications to be sent instantly or daily. ([Canvas Notification Guide](#))
6. **Ask for help if needed.** If you are struggling with a course concept, reach out to me and your classmates for support.

Graded Course Requirements Information

Grading Structure

Assignment	Points	Percentage %
Quizzes (9 quizzes at 50 points each)	450	45%
Project Checkpoints (4 at 25 points each)	100	10%
Project (1 at 50 points)	50	5%
Exams (4 exams at 100 points each)	400	40%
Total	100	100%

Grading Scale

- A - (90% or higher)
- B - (80 - 89%)
- C - (70 - 79%)
- D - (60 - 69%)
- F - (Below 60%)

Late Work and Make-Up Policy:

Late work is accepted at 10% off per day late, no matter the reason. This is because the full course reading posted for scholars to prepare for an complete prior to the due date. You have ample time to complete each assignment, usually several weeks, and waiting until the last minute to do an assignment is not advised. If you have a computer issue, internet issue, or any other issue on the date an assignment is due is not an excuse for not completing an assignment and no additional time will be granted. If you do the work early and an issue presents itself, then there is time for us to work together and resolve it so that you can submit the work by the due date. The final for the course is optional and taking it can not negatively impact your grade. It will be used to replace your lowest test grade, if you decide to take it.

[***IMPORTANT***] There are no make-up exams or alternative assignments given once a test has been missed since credit is given for late work. If you are going to miss an exam because of a school activity, you must make arrangements to take the exam prior to the day the exam will be given, please contact me the week before the test to set up a date and time. In cases of emergency (i.e., a death in the family), however, students will be allowed to

take the exam early at the discretion of the Instructor, and the student must provide documentation. Missing an exam does not ensure the student will be able to take the test early, such a decision is ultimately the professor's prerogative. Please contact me as soon as possible if you miss something for an emergency and we will work out the details.

The late and missing work policy is instituted for the fairness of all scholars. It removes the professor bias of deciding which reasons are excusable and which are not for regaining points for late work.

University Policies & Student Resources:

University policies and student resources are available on the University website and in Canvas under "Syllabus". (You may copy or print the following information to include in your syllabus or use the links provided below.)

Academic Honesty

The UT Tyler community comes together to pledge that "Honor and integrity will not allow me to lie, cheat, or steal, nor to accept the actions of those who do." Therefore, we enforce the Student Conduct and Discipline policy in the Student Manual Of Operating Procedures (Section 8).

FERPA UT Tyler follows the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) as noted in University Policy 5.2.3. The course instructor will follow all requirements to protect your confidential information.

Absence for Official University Events or Activities This course follows the practices related to Excused Absences for University Events or Activities as noted in the Catalog.

Absence for Religious Holidays This course follows the practices related to Excused Absences for Religious Holy Days as noted in the Catalog.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Usage Statement:

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.

The written work submitted by students in this course will be generated by themselves. This includes all process work, drafts, brainstorming artifacts, editing, and final products. 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 (such as ChatGPT).

Incomplete Grade Policy

If a student, because of extenuating circumstances, is unable to complete all of the requirements for a course by the end of the semester, then the instructor may recommend an Incomplete (I) for the course. The "I" may be assigned in place of a grade only when all of the following conditions are met: (a) the student has been making satisfactory progress in the course; (b) the student is unable to complete all coursework or final exam due to unusual circumstances that are beyond personal control and are acceptable to the instructor, and (c) the student presents these reasons before the time that the final grade roster is due. The semester credit hours for an Incomplete will not be used to calculate the grade point average. The student and the instructor must submit an Incomplete Form detailing the work required and the time by which the work must be completed to their respective department chair or college dean for approval. The time limit established must not exceed one year. Should the student fail to meet all of the work for the course within the time limit, then the instructor may assign zeros to the unfinished work, compute the course average for the student, and assign the appropriate grade. If a grade has yet to be assigned within one year, then the Incomplete will be changed to an F, or NC. If the course was initially taken under the CR/NC grading basis, this may adversely affect the student's academic standing.

Grade Appeal Policy

Disputes regarding grades must be initiated within sixty (60) days from the date of receiving the final course grade by filing a Grade Appeal Form with the instructor who assigned the grade. A grade appeal should be used when the student thinks the final course grade awarded does not reflect the grades earned on assessments or follow the grading scale as documented in the syllabus. The student should provide the rationale for the grade appeal and attach supporting documents about the grades earned. The form should be sent via email to the faculty member who assigned the grade. The faculty

member reviews the rationale and supporting documentation and completes the instruction section of the form. The instructor should return the form to the student, even if a grade change is made at this level. If the student is not satisfied with the decision, the student may appeal in writing to the Chairperson of the department from which the grade was issued. In situations where there is an allegation of capricious grading,

discrimination, or unlawful actions, appeals may go beyond the Chairperson to the Dean or the Dean's designee of the college from which the grade was issued, with that decision being final. The Grade Appeal form is found in the Registrar's Form Library.

NOTE: The Grade Appeal Form is different from the Application for Appeal form submitted to the Student Appeals Committee, which does not rule on grade disputes as described in this policy.

Disability/Accessibility Services

In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA), the University of Texas at Tyler offers accommodations to students with learning, physical, and/or psychological disabilities. If you have a disability, including a non-visible diagnosis such as a learning disorder, chronic illness, TBI, PTSD, ADHD, or a history of modifications or accommodations in a previous educational environment, you are encouraged to visit

<https://hood.accessiblelearning.com/UTTyler/> and fill out the New Student application.

The Student Accessibility and Resources (SAR) office will contact you when your application has been submitted and make an appointment with the Assistant Director Student Accessibility and Resources/ADA Coordinator. For more information, including filling out an application for services, please visit the SAR webpage at

<https://www.uttyler.edu/disability-services>, the SAR office located in the Robert Muntz Library, LIB 460, email saroffice@uttyler.edu, or call 903.566.7079."

Military Affiliated Students

UT Tyler honors the service and sacrifices of our military-affiliated students. If you are a student who is a veteran, on active duty, in the reserves or National Guard, or a military spouse or dependent, please stay in contact with your faculty member if any aspect of your present or prior service or family situation makes it difficult for you to fulfill the requirements of a course or creates disruption in your academic progress. It is important to make your faculty member aware of any complications as far in advance as possible. Your faculty member is willing to work with you and, if needed, put you in contact with university staff who are trained to assist you. The Military and Veterans Success Center (MVSC) has campus resources for military-affiliated students. The MVSC can be reached at MVSC@uttyler.edu or via phone at 903.565.5972.

Students on an F-1 Visa

To remain in compliance with Federal Regulations requirements you must do the following:

- Traditional face-to-face classes: Attend classes on the regular meeting days/times.
- Hybrid Classes: Attend all face-to-face classes convened by the instructor according to the schedule set for your specific course.
- Online course: Only one online course can count toward your full-time enrollment. Students are expected to be fully engaged and meet all requirements for the online course.

Absence for Pregnant Students

This course follows the requirements of Texas Laws SB 412, SB 459, SB 597/HB 1361 to meet the needs of pregnant and parenting students. Part of the supports afforded pregnant students includes excused absences. Faculty who are informed by a student of needing this support should make a referral to the Parenting Student Liaison. NOTE: Students must work with the Parenting Student Liaison in order to receive these supports. Students should reach out to the Parenting Student Liaison at parents@uttyler.edu and also complete the Pregnant and Parenting Self-Reporting Form.

Campus Carry

We respect the right and privacy of students who are duly licensed to carry concealed weapons in this class. License holders are expected to behave responsibly and keep a handgun secure and concealed. More information is available at <http://www.uttyler.edu/about/campus-carry/index.php>.

Calendar of Topics, Readings, and Due Dates

The last date to drop the course is October 30, 2026. The final exam will be due no later than December 9, 2026, online.

Project

In your project, you will become a Texas historian by creating a small archive that answers the question, "What should future Texans know about life in Texas today?" Rather than simply reporting information, your goal is to tell one clear historical story using evidence. You will choose a topic, gather and explain sources that support your message, create a physical product that visually communicates your ideas, and reflect on

why your topic matters and how your thinking developed throughout the project. By the end, your archive should help future Texans understand an important part of life in Texas today. This will develop over the course of the semester and we will walk through the pieces together.

Course Outline

Module	Dates Module Opens	Topic, Reading, Quizzes	Due
Intro	August 24	Course Introduction Intro Quiz Due	August 30
1	August 31	A State of Diversity: Demographics, Culture, and the Struggle for Identity - Read Chapter 1 - Quiz #1	September 6
1	September 7	A State of Diversity: Demographics, Culture, and the Struggle for Identity Project Checkpoint #1	September 13
2	September 14	The Texas Constitution in the Federal System - Read Chapter 2 - Quiz #2	September 20
2	September 21	Test 1	September 27
3	September 28	Voting and Elections in Texas - Read Chapter 3 - Quiz #3	October 4
4	October 5	Political Parties - Read Chapter 4 - Quiz #4 - Project Checkpoint #2	October 11
4	October 12	Midterm Exam Test 2	October 18
5	October 19	Interest Groups - Read Chapter 5 - Quiz #5	October 25

6	October 26	The Texas Legislature • Read Chapter 6 • Quiz # 6 • Project Checkpoint #3 • Last day to drop is October 30, 2026	November 1
6	November 2	• Test 3	November 8
7	November 9	The Executive Branch in Texas • Read Chapter 7 • Quiz #7 • Project Checkpoint #4	November 15
8	November 16	The Judicial Department • Read Chapter 8 • Quiz #8 • Project draft due for feedback	November 22
8	November 23	Thanksgiving Week - School is Closed	November 29
8	November 30	• Test 4 • Project Due	December 6
	December 7	Finals Week	December 9

Note: This is a tentative schedule, and subject to change as necessary – monitor the course page for current deadlines and updates. In the unlikely event of a prolonged university closing, or an extended absence from the university, adjustments to the course schedule, deadlines, and assignments will be made based on the duration of the closing and the specific dates missed.