In our political system, the focus tends to be on the national government. At least since the civil war, it has been the centerpiece which has provided overall direction and a sense of political unity. However, state and local governments have been and still are essential partners in the experiment of federalism. In fact, most of us are more affected by the actions of governments at this level than by the huge federal government in Washington, D.C. Many of the issues that concern us most are issues that are played out at the state and local level. As we begin this course, one of the major issues impacting us nationally is illegal immigration. While the national government passes laws, the effects of these laws are felt (and sometimes fought against) closer to home. In Texas, the debate over illegal immigration has specifically translated into a debate regarding a fence at the border. The border fence, mandated by federal law, is widely opposed by local communities who argue that it will have major negative impacts in terms of the local economy, the environment and the political culture of the region. In broader terms, this debate represents a demand by state and local governments to have more control over federal policies implemented in their backyards. We will discuss this issue and others like it as we move through the course of the semester.

Learning objectives

By the end of the semester, I hope that you as students have met the following goals:

1. Recall basic facts related to the foundations of the Texas state government
2. Describe key political concepts related to U.S. institutions such as the legislature, the governor, and the judiciary
3. Demonstrate understanding of key concepts relating to political behavior in the state of Texas, such as voting, elections and political parties.

Text


Students should have access to this book because some of the exam questions will come from book material which is not covered in class lecture.
Course requirements and grading

The requirements for this course are designed to support the objectives previously stated in the syllabus. Students will demonstrate understanding of material in two ways. The first method of measurement will be through tests. There will be four tests (including a final) and each test will count for 100 points. The format for the exams will be multiple choice questions and all exams will be computer graded which means that students must bring a number 2 pencil on exam days. Students will be asked questions that require a knowledge of facts as well as questions designed to measure conceptual understanding.

Make-up policy for exams-Students are expected to be present and on-time for exams. Once a student has turned in an exam and left the room, the exam will be closed to late-comers. Students who miss an exam and have a university defined excuse will be given the opportunity for a make-up exam. However, they must contact me within one week of returning to class in order to schedule the exam.

The other means of measuring understanding will be through the use of in-class writing assignments. Each of these assignments is potentially worth 25 points toward the final grade. I will announce the topic for each writing assignment at least one week before it will take place.

Students will do research, primarily through the use of newspapers and the internet. On the writing day, a student may bring notes into class on a 5x7 index card but will write the essay in class. There are no make-ups on these writing assignments! However, I will drop the lowest grade in this area and count the two highest toward the final grade which means that a student can receive up to 50 points from this assignment area.

Grades in this class will be based on a point system. There are 450 possible points available and I will assign grades based on the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>450-405</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>404-359</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>358-313</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>312-267</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>266-0</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Class attendance and extra credit

In my many years of teaching political science, I have found very few students who routinely cut class and do well on the exams. Therefore, in order to encourage class attendance, I will do two things in this class: I will call roll at the beginning of each class and I will provide “bonus” points toward the final grade for regular attendees.
The “bonus” points incentive will work as follows: students who have three unexcused absences or less will receive an additional 20 points toward their final grade. This can provide a significant boost since it represents almost half of a letter grade on the grading scale.

Students have the responsibility of demonstrating that they have met the course attendance requirement. This means that they must be present when roll is called (or on rare occasions when late let me know that they were there in that class) and must provide me with proof of excused absences (as defined by the university) within one week of returning to class.

Additional course requirements

1. Do be on time for this class. Regular tardiness is a form of student behavior totally unacceptable to me. Late arrival distracts both the professor and the other students from the important business of learning.

2. Do not bring children to class. They also are a distraction, no matter how well behaved they may be. If you cannot make arrangements for child care, do not come to class.

3. Do turn off all cell phones before coming to class.

4. Do your own work on exams. Learning may be a shared endeavor but demonstrating knowledge is a solo effort. Cheating will not be tolerated. I will closely monitor exams and any wandering eyes or other attempts to cheat will result in the exam being picked up and the offender(s) reported for further disciplinary action.

5. If you need to leave class early, see me before class begins and explain why. Do not simply walk out of my class before you are dismissed.

6. Pay attention and take notes. Most of the questions on your exams come from lecture material. Talking to your neighbors or napping will be counterproductive to your final grade.

Academic advising

The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. The Academic Advisor will set up a degree plan, which must be signed by the student, a faculty mentor, and the department chair. The College’s Academic Advising Center is located in Driftwood 203E, and can be reached at 825-3466.
Notice to Students With Disabilities

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act in making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. If you suspect that you may have a disability (physical impairment, learning disability, psychiatric disability, etc.), please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities Office, located in Corpus Christi Hall, Room 116, phone number 825-5816. If you need disability accommodations in this class, please see me as soon as possible.

Grade Appeal Process

As stated in University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined on 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 Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, and University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Web site at http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/universityrules/index.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.
Course Outline (subject to change with notice)

January 23, Hand out syllabus and introduction to class

January 28, Introduction to state and local politics
Maxwell, Ch. 1

January 30, March 4, Federalism
(No assigned reading)

February 6, 11, State Constitutions
Maxwell, Ch. 2

Exam 1, February 13

February 18, 20, 25, State legislatures
Maxwell, Chs. 6, 7.

Writing assignment 1, February 27

March 4, 6, State governors
Maxwell, Ch. 8

Spring Break, March 11-15

March 18, The bureaucracy
Maxwell, Ch. 9

Exam 2, March 20

March 25, 27, State judges
Maxwell, Ch. 10

Writing assignment 2, April 1

April 3, 8, Law and due process
Maxwell, Ch 11

Exam 3, April 10

April 15, 17, Voting and elections
Maxwell, Chs. 3, 4.

April 15, 17, “Last Man Standing” (film)
April 22, 24, Local government
Maxwell, Ch 14.

April 29, Writing assignment 3

May 1, 6, State monetary policy
Maxwell, Ch. 12

May 6, Post test

Final exam, Wednesday, May 15 at 1:45 p.m.