POLS 2306.003: State and Local Government

Dr. Joshua Ozmy
Fall 2012
Class time: T&TR: 12:30-1:45 BH-235
Office Hours (BH 304): 3:30-5:30 T&TR and W: 3:30-4:30
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Class Overview: This course will introduce students to the fundamentals of state and local government in the United States. We will cover the relationship between the federal government and states and also inter-state relationships. The class will concern itself with the primary political institutions and public policies of Texas, while attempting to situate these in a national context.

Grading:
Exams: (4) exams in multiple-choice format.
Exam 1: 20%
Exam 2: 20%
Exam 3: 20%
Exam 4: 10%
Research Paper and Group Presentation: 30%

*The exams will not be comprehensive. Scantrons will be provided, but pencils will not. Please bring one.

Learning Outcomes:
1. Students shall be able to recognize and recall fundamental facts related to the: foundations of the state and local government, state and local political institutions, state and local political behavior, and state and local public policy.

2. Students shall be able to express and interpret information concerning key political concepts related to the: foundations of the state and local government, state and local political institutions, state and local political behavior, and state and local public policy.

Method of evaluating outcomes:
These goals will be accomplished through formal testing via multiple-choice exams.

Format:
The class will be structured around instructor led lectures. The book will reinforce my lectures and students should read the corresponding chapters. Students should participate in class.

Attendance/PowerPoint: I will not check attendance everyday. I may issue random extra credit based on attendance at my discretion. Much of the material from lecture is not covered in the book so failure to attend will have deleterious consequences for your grade. Abridged lecture slides will be posted online prior to each exam.
Note on Exam 1: Your first exam will be no more difficult than those that follow. Students (especially freshman) tend to do much worse on the first exam than the latter exams. Bear this in mind ahead of time in case this applies to you after the first exam. I will post test reviews on Blackboard a week prior to each exam.

Makeup Exams: All makeup exams will be given on makeup exam day without exception, unless the absence is approved by the university.

Research Paper: Identify, discuss, and solve a state or local level public policy problem

Given the size of the class everyone will form groups of (4) and will attempt to solve a public policy problem in Texas, across the various U.S. states, or the United States as a whole (you will not want for problems because they are numerous and unsolved). You will work in groups that will write a research paper and provide a detailed PowerPoint presentation to summarize the findings that will include the following:

A. Search out your issue and do a good amount of research. What is the history of this particular public policy problem? Why has it manifested itself into a policy issue over time? What is the extent of the problem? How much money does the government spend to address this issue? What solutions have been tried to solve the problem (if any)?

B. How does government manage the problem at the local, state, and national level? How does federalism affect the implementation of the policy?

B. What are some of the available solutions to dealing with this issue you have found in your research? What are the pros/cons? Why have these solutions not been implemented? Do you have any novel solutions to offer? Tell us how and why it will work. You will be graded on the quality of your group’s presentation and paper.

Standards:
1. Must have at least 20 slides for the presentation
2. Must cite and use sources and APA or MLA citations
3. Must convey the points of the paper to a general audience
4. Must include a written paper on your topic in APA or MLA format, including: an original literature review with scholarly sources (minimum of 12 sources), that identifies a problem, provides a historical background on the issue, the current policy environment, how the policy is implemented and issues of federalism, and proposed solutions (minimum of 12 pages double-spaced of text, in addition to a title page, references, etc).
* Due on the university-approved final exam day

Possible topics (these are only suggestions and you may choose whatever you like, granted that the paper focuses on Texas or compares policies across a few or all of the states)
Death penalty
Colonias
Environmental justice
Water scarcity
The natural gas/fracking boom and its effects on the states
Privatized prisons
State budget crises after the Great Recession of 2008
Immigration
Medical marijuana/decriminalization
Homelessness
Poverty
Job prospects and economic advancement for "Generation Screwed"
Do judicial elections corrupt the bench?
Political corruption in state government
Do harsh punishments reduce crime?
The cancer epidemic
Do we need guns on campus?
Demographic change and the future of America
The cost of medical care
Gay Marriage
The War on Drugs
Implementing "Obamacare" in the U.S. States

Books:
Maxwell/Crain text on Texas Politics available in the campus bookstore or online; previous editions will suffice. (TAMUCC ISBN# 9780495909484)

Class Schedule:

Section I: Public Policy

Week 1: Introduction
August 23: Cover the syllabus/class policies/expectations/Blackboard

Week 2: Political Ideology and Texas Political Culture
28: Foundations of Political Ideology
30: Foundations of Texas Political Culture and the Texas Constitution
*Read chapters on Texas history and the Texas Constitution in your textbook

Week 3: Gun Control Policy
4: The moral right to own weapons
6: The right to carry in public places

Week 4: Prisons and Criminal Justice Policy in Texas
11: Prisons and Crime policy
13: Courts (review sheet for exam 1 distributed)
*Read chapter in your textbook on due process

Week 5: Test 1 is upon us.....
18: Exam 1 review (PowerPoint plus Q&A session)
20: Exam 1

Section II: Political Actors and Behavior

Week 6: Elections and Texas Political Campaigns
25: Elections in Texas
27: Watch Last Man Standing
*Read chapter on voting and elections in your textbook

Week 7: Political Parties and Party Organization
2: Functions of Political Parties
4: History of Political Parties in Texas
*Read chapter on political parties in your textbook

Week 8: Interest Groups and Lobbying
9: Lobbyists and Influence in Texas Politics (review sheet for exam 2 distributed)
11: Vote for me
*Read chapter on interest groups in your textbook

Week 9: Exam 2
16: Exam review (PowerPoint plus Q&A session)
18: Exam II

Section III: Political Institutions

Week 10: Federalism
23: How federalism is structured in the U.S. Constitution
25: Federalism between states/policymaking in modern America
*Read chapter on the Governor in your textbook

Week 11: The Judiciary and Executive Branches
30: The judicial system in Texas
1: The Plea bargaining process in Texas
*Read chapter on the Judiciary in your textbook

Week 12: Legislative and Administrative Branches
6: The Texas legislature in comparative perspective
8: The Texas Bureaucracy (exam III review sheet distributed)
*Read chapters on the legislative branch and the bureaucracy in your textbook

Week 13: Exam III- Local Government
13: Exam 3
15: The structure and problems of local government
*Read chapter on local government in your textbook

Week 14: Local Government Continued
20: Local government
22: No class (Thanksgiving holiday)
Week 15: Civil Rights
27: The quest of equal treatment in Texas: The case of Mexican Americans
29: Makeup exam day

Week 16:
4: Exam 4

Student Responsibilities:
TURN OFF CELL PHONES!!!
Pay attention during class. Private conversations, sleeping, and reading non-class related material will not be tolerated.
Learn something! Participate in class discussions.

Students with Disabilities/Religious Needs:
If you are a student with a disability or have special needs, please let me know during the first week of class. In addition, students observing religious holidays that conflict with class exams/presentations must let me know during the first week of class.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Driftwood 101.

If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

Academic Honesty:
University students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty. Academic misconduct for which a student is subject to penalty includes all forms of cheating, such as illicit possession of examinations or examination materials, forgery, or plagiarism. (Plagiarism is the presentation of the work of another as one’s own work.) If unsure of what honesty entails or if for more information regarding the penalties for academic dishonesty, please refer to the University Catalog.

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.

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 in 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. If the problem cannot be resolved at this level, the student may take the steps below.

1. Presentation of grievance to instructor. (This step must be taken within fourteen calendar days after the beginning of the next term.)

2. Appeal to department chair or area coordinator.

3. Written appeal to the University Academic Standards Grievance Committee.

4. Preliminary review and advising by an ombudsman appointed by the Provost.

5. Submission of file by department chair to the chair of the University Academic Standards Grievance Committee.

6. Review of file by committee chair and submission of case to committee.

7. Proceedings of the University Academic Standards Grievance Committee. (Committee holds hearing, reviews data, presents findings to all parties, and makes recommendation to Provost.)

8. Decision by Provost.

9. Final appeal in writing to the Provost if student or instructor thinks appropriate procedures have not been followed.

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/university_rules/index.htm.

For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.