State & Local Government

Course Description

“We, the people, are empowered by our Constitution to establish and maintain a representative form of democratic government. This requires involved citizens with some degree of faith in the legitimacy of the system and their own political ideology. Without a clear understanding of our federal system and how state policies are integrated with those on the national level, the creation of an educated, thoughtful political ideology is impossible. As citizens and recipients of the “good, bad & ugly” that our government offers, we must not lose sight of our responsibility to form more than opinions, but hopefully “a more perfect Union”. It is the primary objective of this course that you will gain an understanding of how our state and national policies are intertwined and often co-dependent, how the state’s political institutions work and who (and what) oils their machines, and how you, the educated and empowered citizen, can impact your government on a variety of levels.

Learning Objectives

1. To analyze the effects of historical, social, political, economic, cultural, and global forces on the area under study.
2. To comprehend the origins and evolution of the Texas political system, with a focus on the growth of political institutions, the Texas constitution, political parties and interest groups.
3. To analyze, critically assess, and develop creative solutions to public policy problems.
4. To understand the functions of county and city government.
5. To recognize and assure ones responsibility as a citizen in a democratic society by learning to think for oneself, by engaging in public discourse and by obtaining information through the news media and other appropriate information sources about politics and public policy.

On completion of this course students will be able to:

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

Course Evaluation

Student performance will be evaluated based on grades on two tests, quizzes / research assignments, and a final exam. Frequent quizzes and research assignments will be used to assess students’ reading comprehension and will serve as valuable preparation tools for the exams. Research assignments will
require an attached summary and/or critical analysis, please read attached guidelines for all written assignments. Optional extra credit assignments / essays may be offered to interested students.

Test 1 – 25%
Test 2 – 25%
Final Exam - 25%
Quizzes / Research assignments – 25%

Exams

The material covered will come from the texts, class notes, speaker’s notes, and handouts. Tests 1 & 2 will include multiple choice and short answer questions worth 70% of the grade and include an in class essay worth 30% of the final grade. Essay study guides will be made available before these tests. All essays must be answered thoroughly in complete sentences, with regard to proper grammar, punctuation and spelling. The final exam will be primarily objective.

Required Text


Supplements

- Daily newspapers (international, national and state political issues, editorials, letters to the editor)
- News magazines (Time, Newsweek, U.S. News & World Report, The Economist..)
- Radio Programs (All Things Considered – PBS, 1360, 1440 AM etc.)
- Television newscasts – CSPAN, CNN, FOX, MSNBC, etc.
- On-line political sites

Course Policies

“When in the course of human events”, it becomes “necessary and proper” to take POLS 2306, students should realize they have certain responsibilities and requirements in order to be successful.

1. **Attend Class!** Students who make class attendance a priority are rewarded with increased knowledge, better comprehension and higher grades. If you are absent, you will miss interesting class discussion, informative speakers and exciting lectures. Students are required to not only attend, but actively involve themselves in class discussions as well. We learn from each other and your input in the academic process may be significant for your classmates. Quizzes missed due to absence may not be made up. The lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

2. Read all assignments and take thorough notes in and out of class! Students who fall behind will be greatly challenged to catch up. Form or join a study group to review assignments and maintain accountability. Take advantage of test review sessions when they are available. Exams will include material not discussed in class, so your reading is a significant factor in your success.

3. Be an active participant in a positive learning environment! In other words, be on time, prepared and not part of distracting others from learning. Talking to one’s neighbor during class lectures or general discussions, cell phone usage, chronic lateness, leaving class before it has been dismissed is disruptive and interferes with the academic rights of others to learn. Laptops are allowed only if they are used to take notes. Inappropriate use of your laptop is
NOT allowed in my class. Appropriate behavior and respect for your instructor and fellow students is not only expected, but required. Students who are unable to respect the rights of others to learn will be asked to leave.

4. Exams and assignments are due **on time**. University policy on plagiarism will be enforced. This policy makes it fair for all students. However, if a student misses an exam, a makeup exam may be scheduled at the convenience and discretion of the instructor. Students, in such dire circumstances, should inform the instructor in advance of a missed exam. If the student doesn’t request a make-up exam prior to the test, the grade will be recorded as a zero. Papers/assignments that are turned in after the due date will be penalized 10 pts. /day.

**Academic Integrity/Plagiarism.**

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, falsification, forgery, complicity or plagiarism. (Plagiarism is the presentation of the work of another as one’s own work.) In this class, academic misconduct or complicity in an act of academic misconduct on an assignment or test will result in failure for that assignment or test and potential failure for this course.

**Dropping a Class**

I hope that you never find it necessary to drop this or any other class. However, events can sometimes occur that make dropping a course necessary or wise. Please consult with me before you decide to drop to be sure it is the best thing to do. Should dropping the course be the best course of action, you must initiate the process to drop the course by going to the Student Services Center and filling out a course drop form. Just stopping attendance and participation WILL NOT automatically result in your being dropped from the class.

**Preferred methods of scholarly citations**

Please refer to handout “Guidelines for Preparing Written Assignments”

**Classroom/professional behavior**

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, as an academic community, requires that each individual respect the needs of others to study and learn in a peaceful atmosphere. Under Article III of the Student Code of Conduct, classroom behavior that interferes with either (a) the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or (b) the ability of other students to profit from the instructional program may be considered a breach of the peace and is subject to disciplinary sanction outlined in article VII of the Student Code of Conduct. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior may be instructed to leave the classroom. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including classrooms, electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

**Grade Appeals**

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

**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.

**Accommodations Policy**

**Disabilities Accommodations**

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.

**Class Outline**

State and Local Government - All dates and assignments are subject to change. Regular attendance is the key to a student’s success.

- **Jan. 20**  
  Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday

- **Jan. 22**  
  Course Introduction

- **Jan. 29**  
  Chapters 1 - Introduction to Texas History & Politics

- **Jan. 29**  
  Last day to register or add a class

- **Feb. 5**  
  Chapters 2 - The Texas Constitution and the American Federal System

- **Feb. 12**  
  Chapter 3 - The Texas Legislature

- **Feb. 19**  
  Exam I – Chapters 1-3

- **Feb. 26**  
  Chapter 4 – The Executive Department & the Office of the Governor of Texas

- **March 5**  
  Chapter 5 - The Court System in Texas

- **March 10-14**  
  Spring Break

- **March 19**  
  Chapter 6 – Local Governments in Texas

- **March 26**  
  Chapter 7 – Voting and Political Participation in Texas

- **April 3**  
  Exam II - Chapters 4-7

- **April 9**  
  Chapter 8 & 9 – Elections and Campaigns in Texas & Political Parties in Texas

- **April 11**  
  Last Day to Drop a Class
April 16  Chapter 10 - Interest Groups and Lobbying in Texas
April 30  Chapter 11 – Public Policy in Texas 12 - Financing State Government
May 5    Last day to withdraw from the University
May 7    Reading Day
May 14   Final Exam

**Withdrawing from Class**

If you feel you must drop the course for whatever reason, please speak with me first, and if no other recourse is available, take the appropriate steps to drop the course. Do not assume that you will be dropped from the course if you simply stop attending class. If you fail to follow proper procedure, you will appear on class rolls at the conclusion of the semester and will receive a failing grade.

It is my hope that this semester will better prepare you to be an active citizen in this community, in this state, in this nation, or wherever you choose to live. The future will be impacted by knowledgeable, concerned constituents who realize their potential in our government. Let me know how I can assist you in this process.

**See you in class!**

    Heather Hallock