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.

Core objectives

1. Having the students engage in critical thinking activities related to the Constitution, the political and philosophical foundations of the nation, governmental institutions, and political behavior.
2. Having students engage in written, verbal, or visual activities related to the Constitution, the political and philosophical foundations of the nation, governmental institutions, and political behavior.
3. Having the students engage in course-related activities that connect personal responsibility and political ideology to encourage ethical decisionmaking.

4. Having students engage in course-related activities that connect social responsibility to civil rights, civil liberties, and to voting and voting behavior, and the policy making process.

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. Degree plans are prepared in the CLA Academic Advising Center. The University uses an online Degree Audit system. Any amendment must be approved by the Department Chair and the Office of the Dean. All courses and requirements specified in the final degree plan audit must be completed before a degree will be granted. The CLA Academic Advising Office is located in Driftwood#203. For more information please call 361-825-3466.

Disability Services

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 Corpus Christi Hall, Room #116.

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.

Grade Appeal Process

Students who feel that they have not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in this class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website cla.tamucc.edu/students/studentinfo.html. For assistance and or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean’s office.
Course Outline (subject to change with notice)

January 21, Hand out syllabus and introduction to state and local politics

January 23, 26. Introduction to state and local politics
Maxwell, Ch. 1

January 28, 30, February 2 Federalism
Maxwell, Ch. 2

February 4, 6, 9, State Constitutions
Maxwell, Ch. 3

Exam 1, February 11

February 13, 16, 18, State legislatures
Maxwell, Chs. 7, 8.

Writing assignment 1, February 20

February 23, 25, 27, State governors and bureaucracy
Maxwell, Ch. 9, 10.

Exam 2, March 2

March 4, 6, 9, 11, 13 State judges and the criminal justice process
Maxwell, Ch. 11, 12.

Spring break, March 16-20.

Writing assignment 2, March 23

Exam 3, March 25

March 27, 30, April 1, 3, 6 Voting and elections
Maxwell, Ch. 4.

April 8, 10, 13. Political Parties and Interest groups
Maxwell, Ch. 5, 6

April 15, 17, 20 Local government
Maxwell, Ch 14.

Writing 3, April 22
April 22, 24, 27,  State monetary policy  
Maxwell, Ch. 13

April 29, May 1, “The Unforeseen,” (film)

May 4, Last class day, Summary and review for final