Course Objectives

The essential question in politics is: Who has the power? One of the key course objectives is to analyze who participates politically as well as assess how they participate. Both have a tremendous impact on the type of policy that results from the political process. The course is designed to familiarize the students with the basic structures and functions of state and local government. It will also emphasize the process of government, as well as the political culture. The students will gain a vocabulary of key concepts in political science which will allow them to actively engage in analyzing current political events.

This is an introductory course in State and local politics. The politics of Texas and it’s cities often reflect the interests of economic and political elites. The policies that emerge from this system often benefit those very same elites who participate in the political process. The course will stress the importance of the formal institutions that make up Texas government. We will cover these institutions with the specific purpose of examining how policy is made. We will look at current legislation to see which political actors and institutions are using power to influence the contents of a particular piece of legislation. A politically responsible judiciary reflects the prevailing norms of the state, as evidenced by its rulings and we will look at some of these cases. How laws are implemented and enforced is the task of the bureaucracy. The course will spend time analyzing various efforts in this area. Interest groups play a crucial role in the construction of politics, with business groups dominating the political landscape in the state. The course will examine their attempts to influence policy. We will also spend time discussing how less powerful, less resourceful groups attempt to affect policy; seeking to address the question of why they are often not very influential. Finally, the course will spend significant time discussing the operation of city and county government.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

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 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 Format

Class and classroom discussions are based on a presumed familiarity with the text: therefore, it is required that reading be done beforehand. Active learning will be a primary benefit of the course. The class is part of the American Democracy Project, which seeks to enhance student engagement in political debates as well as involvement in the community. One goal of the learning community is to develop student skills, specifically those related to language communication, and rhetoric. The refining of these skills will allow students to become more effective participants in whatever communities they choose.

Course Requirements

Grading will be done on a conventional scale (90-80-70-60). There will be four exams over the course of the semester and each will be worth 100 points. In addition, there will be several opportunities for class writing and assignments.

Summary:

4 exams @ 100 points each
Final Exam…100 points
Class participation including attendance…100 points

Attendance, make up exams and plagiarism

Regular attendance will be necessary. Given the class assignments, as well as the important role that discussion will play, it will be very important for you to be in class prepared and ready to discuss. Make up exams must be arranged with the instructor. They must be taken within one week of the assigned date. If you must be away when an exam is scheduled, it is best to take it early. I encourage you to work together in preparing for exams. Group efforts can help performance and is a good way to discover new study strategies as well as sharing information. Finally, cheating or plagiarism on an assignment, or on a test, will result in a zero grade for the assignment. Further actions may be taken in accordance with university rules.
Grade Appeals

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.

Class discussion and the classroom environment

Often students feel shy about asking questions or having points clarified. Remember that if you did not understand something, it may be because I did not explain it clearly the first time. If you have a question, chances are ten others have the same one. One of the greatest difficulties in class is talking while the lecture is proceeding, or talking while other students are talking. Please be considerate and respectful of others. It only takes away from the learning experience when you do not. Keep in mind that there will not always be consensus on a point and that we all need to be respectful of the opinion of others. Please make sure that you are in the room and ready to go when class is scheduled to begin. If you know that you are going to be more than 20 minutes late think about getting lecture notes from a fellow student. Please turn off all electronic communication devices before you enter the classroom. Please do not bring things to eat into the classroom, drinks are OK. Take your trash with you when you leave the classroom. Students who are unable to abide by these rules of academic etiquette and normal civility will be asked to leave the class.

Special Needs-Students with special needs are required to file their paperwork with the Special Populations Office (Driftwood 101). Students in this course, who have paperwork on file with Special Populations and have needs that may prevent them from fully demonstrating their abilities, should inform me as soon as possible.

Electronics-Please turn off all cell phones, and please do not spend time text messaging during class. Use laptops for legitimate academic purposes. No electronic devices will be permitted during exams.
Accommodations

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.

Advising

If you are majoring or planning to major in a field taught in the College of Liberal Arts, and if you have not yet obtained a signed degree plan, you should see your Academic Advisor immediately who 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 I Driftwood 203E and can be reached at 825-3466

Required Text


Class Schedule
    Jan.  27…Chapter 1
    Feb.   3…Chapter 2
    Feb. 10…Chapter 3-First Exam
    Feb. 17…Chapter 4
    Feb. 24…Chapter 5
    Mar.   3…Chapter 6-Second Exam
    Mar. 10…Chapter 7
    Mar. 24…Chapter 8
    Mar. 31…Chapter 9
    Apr.   7…Chapter 10-Third Exam
    Apr.  14…Chapter 11
    Apr.  21…Chapter 12-Fourth Exam
    Apr.  28…Chapter 13
    May  5…Chapter 14
    May 12…FINAL EXAM