POLS 2306: State & Local Government  
Fall 2019

Sections: 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435

Department of Social Sciences  
Texas A&M University Corpus Christi

1 Instructor Information

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Phone: 361-825-2168

Office Hours: TBA  
Tuesdays: TBA  
Thursdays: TBA and by appointment

Class Location: C I - 1 3 8  
Course Time: 2:00 to 3:15pm TR

2 Course Description and Purpose

When we think of politics, we often think of the national government in Washington, DC. While decisions made by the president, Congress, and the U.S. Supreme Court shape our lives in countless ways we are more often and more directly impacted by the decisions of state and local governments. Why is it, for instance, that the speed limit is 75 miles per hour in many parts of Texas, but 80 miles per hour in many parts of Utah? Why is it easier to vote absentee in Oregon than it is in Texas? Why is recreational marijuana legal in Colorado but not in Texas? Why does Texas lack an income tax? All of these questions are important to our daily lives; to answer any of these questions requires understanding how state & local governments work. This course serves as an introduction to how the state & local political systems work, and how people behave in those systems. We do so with an emphasis on Texas.

This course assumes little knowledge about politics, it is after all an introductory course. It functions almost like a buffet, we’ll explore lots of topics, including the structure of Texas government (the rules of the game) and the way people and groups behave in that system (how the players play the game). If find you’re interested in a topic we cover (and I hope you will!), we probably have other classes where you can learn more about it. Just talk to me and I’ll let you know what that course is so you can register for it next semester.

This is a big lecture class. In fact, I expect this is the largest class many of you have ever attended. The size of the class poses challenges; it is impossible for me to know all of your names. But, that doesn’t change the fact I would like to hear from you. Please feel free to ask questions in lecture, ask questions after class, drop by office hours, or reach out via e-mail. I do this job because I enjoy teaching; please don’t let the sheer size of the class keep you from interacting with me as you would your professors in smaller classes.

Additionally, this course is a part of the First Year Learning Community Program. So, do know that I will be meeting with and coordinating with your professors. Please know, the general theme
of our meetings is how we can help you succeed in our classes, in college, and in your eventual career.

**Student Learning Outcomes**

On completion of this course students will be able to:

1. Recall basic facts related to the foundations of Texas government
2. Describe key political concepts related to state institutions such as the legislature, the various executive actors, and the judiciary.
3. Demonstrate their understanding of key concepts relating to political behavior such as voting, elections, political parties, interest groups and the media.
4. Understanding of definitions, concepts, and theories of state government

**Core Objectives**

The Four Core Objectives related to this course are: Critical Thinking Skills, Communication Skills, Personal Responsibility, and Social Responsibility. By the end of the semester the course will have met these objectives:

1. By having the students engage in critical thinking activities related to the state constitution, the political and philosophical foundations of Texas, governmental institutions, and political behavior.
2. By having students engage in written, verbal, or visual activities related to the Constitution, the political and philosophical foundations of the state, governmental institutions, and political behavior.
3. By having students engage in course related activities that connect personal responsibility and political ideology to encourage ethical decision making.

**3 Course Format**

This course is heavily readings based, from both the text book and supplemental materials available on Blackboard. While the class is technically lecture based, I find class is more fun when we have a seminar discussion rather than me talking for 75 minutes. Please come prepared to discuss the readings and with any questions you might have. It is okay if you don’t understand them fully, but please give it your best effort and come to class with the questions you have.

**4 Requirements**

**Text**

There is one required book which the majority of our readings will come from. Other readings are posted on Blackboard and are noted on the course schedule.

The book is available at the campus bookstore, for both purchase and rental. However, you can purchase or rent the book for a substantially lower rate online. To this end, I provide the ISBN for
the book in the syllabus and will place all of the first week’s readings on Blackboard to allow for shipping time. After the first week I expect you to have the book and bring it with you to class.

   ISBN: 9780190928391

Assessment

This course is worth 100 points which are broken up over several different items. It is your responsibility to keep track of your grade over the course of the semester

- Participation and Attendance: 5 points
- Research Project: 20 points
- Quizzes: 15 points
- Exams: 60 points

1. Participation and Attendance (5 points)—Attending class is important since we will go over difficult concepts in class and you’ll have the opportunity to ask questions about parts of the readings and lectures which are not clear. However, coming to class is only half the battle. You also have to participate in class. Of course, asking informed questions or joining the classroom discussion is a part of participation, but so too is actively listening (i.e.: Are you taking notes and paying attention or are you sleeping and texting?).

2. Research Project (20 points)—A key component of learning communities is an integrated assignment across the classes in the learning community. Moreover, writing is a skill that translates across majors and careers. To that end, you will use writing to explore a topic relevant to Texas politics. This project is unique to this class, but it will be very similar to the assignment you produce for the other classes in the triad. The assignment is broken up into an outline (due: September 19) and a final draft (due: October 28). More details on this assignment are provided in the Research Project section on Blackboard.

3. Quizzes (15 points)—Over the course of the semester there will be periodic quizzes. All quizzes are due on Thursdays at the start of class. They will open at midnight Saturday night/Sunday morning. Most weeks, except those with exams or Thanksgiving Break will have a quiz; they are all listed on the Quiz Schedule handout on Blackboard. Quizzes consist of a mix of material from the previous week’s lectures/readings and the current week’s readings. The quizzes consist of five multiple choice questions. They are open note, but are timed at ten minutes with just one attempt, so I recommend taking the time to review your notes before taking the quiz. If you do the readings, you should have no problem with the quizzes. There will be a total of ten quizzes, each is ultimately worth 1.5 points toward your final grade.

4. Exams (60 points)—There are three exams, each is worth 20 points, or two letter grades. Exams consist of 60 multiple choice questions. Before each exam I will provide a study guide and the seminar professors will help you with exam prep. Attending exams is imperative, if
you miss an exam and do not have a valid documented excuse on file with SEAS the make up exam will be a separate research paper. Should you miss the exam, the onus if on you to schedule a make-up with me. I will not seek you out to remind you that you missed the exam.

Assessment Scale

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<td>A</td>
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<td>80-89.9</td>
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<td>F</td>
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Sensitive Topics

Since politics is a reflection of the society in which we live, we will cover several topics which touch on topics which might be sensitive such as gay rights, protest movements, abortion policy, and sexual assault. These topics are included because we cannot adequately study Texas politics without covering them. My personal policy is to remain neutral (I’m a political scientist, emphasis on the second word). I encourage disagreement, but it must be done in a respectful way. You have my assurance that I will do everything reasonably related to keeping these discussions civil and academic. I know aspects of this course may be emotionally difficult. You may personally connect with or be affected by some of the material covered in this course, so I urge you to identify a support system outside of this class. I am happy to meet with you to discuss any concerns or accommodation needs, but I also encourage you to seek out confidential or other resources.

5 Course Policies

Contacting the Instructor

I am happy to help you either via e-mail, office telephone, or in-person during office hours. Of course, if office hours do not fit your schedule let me know and we can schedule a meeting at a time that is more convenient. If you come to office hours you should come prepared; bring your book, notes, and read the material in advance. If you contact me via e-mail, I will respond within 48 hours, though in most cases it will be less than six hours. Should you not hear from me after 48 hours, feel free to send a follow-up. However, in any e-mail you must identify yourself and use proper format which consists of an opening (As simple as the recipient’s name), a closing (as simple as your name), and a descriptive subject line. If you do not follow that convention or if you use Internet shorthand (ie: “u” instead of “you,”) I will not reply to the message. Telephone calls will be returned as soon as possible, though e-mail is usually quicker. Please note, the phone number listed is my office phone; it cannot receive text messages.

Make-up Exams and Assignments

To qualify for a make-up test a student must notify me of the absence in advance via e-mail and provide documentation. Make-up exams will be a written research paper. The onus is on the student for a make-up exam. I will not seek you out to let you know you missed an exam.

Papers are due in hard copy at the beginning of the class on the date indicated in the schedule. I will not accept e-mail copies or papers placed under my door. Please do not be afraid to print multiple rough drafts and revise them before turning them in. I am happy to look at drafts and
help you with crafting your final paper. I do not accept excuses about dogs, computers, or traffic. Be responsible.

**Academic Honor Code**

Students are expected to uphold the Academic Honor Code published in the University Student Handbook. The Academic Honor Code is based on the premise that each student has the responsibility (1) to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity in the student’s own work, (2) to refuse to tolerate violations of academic integrity in the university community, and (3) to foster a high sense of integrity and social responsibility on the part of the university community. Violations of the Academic Honor Code will not be tolerated.

Academic dishonesty, cheating, and plagiarism of any kind are unacceptable. There are no exceptions. Consequences for academic dishonesty, cheating, and plagiarism include, but are not limited to, a failing grade for an assignment or exam, a failing grade for the course, noncredit for an assignment or exam, additional work, and/or direct referral to university officials.

If academic dishonesty, cheating, or plagiarism is suspected on any assessment, the instructor reserves the right to impose restrictions and make changes on future assessments for an individual and/or the entire class as needed.

Please also note that the university requires that faculty members formally report all instances of academic misconduct. Here are the official procedures: http://judicialaffairs.tamucc.edu/assets/procedure_academicmisconductcases.pdf

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the use of unauthorized information during a quiz or exam, plagiarism, submitting the same paper for multiple courses without permission, or depriving another student of the ability to perform his or her work. The term cheating includes, but is not limited to: (1) use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; (2) dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments, plagiarism; or (3) the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a member of the university faculty or staff. The term plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the use by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment. Plagiarism also includes the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling or distribution of term papers or other academic materials. If you have questions about the university’s policy on academic dishonesty, please see the Student Code of Conduct at http://judicialaffairs.tamucc.edu/StudentCofC.html.

Please note “plagiarism” includes intentionally, knowingly, or carelessly presenting the work of another as one’s own. Additionally, the procedure has been updated to reflect the Academic Integrity Committee as the body to consider grade appeals and academic misconduct cases, as well as identifies the selection process of committee members. Detailed information can be found on the University Handbook of Rules and Procedures website. Contact for interpretation or clarification is the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs.
Students with Disabilities

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 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.

Student Caregivers: If you have caregiving responsibilities (e.g., parent of a child or care for elderly parents) and you anticipate scheduling difficulties, please discuss this with me the beginning of the semester to work out an appropriate strategy in advance.

Sexual Assault & Gender Based Discrimination

TAMUCC faculty is fully committed to supporting students and upholding an environment free of sexual violence and gender based discrimination. If a student chooses to confide in faculty (or other entities on campus) regarding an issue of sexual violence, dating violence, domestic violence and stalking it should be understood that faculty members are often obligated to report this information. Students can choose to disclose their experience confidentially to the following resources:

- University Counseling Center
- Student Health Center

Academic Advising (for students with a majors in the College of Liberal Arts)

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.

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 your academic advisor, the Financial Aid Office, and me, before you decide to drop this course. 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. November 8, 2019 is the last day to drop a class with an automatic grade of “W” this term.
Grade Appeals

As stated in University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.03, 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 Procedure 13.02.99.C2.03, Student Grade Appeals. These documents are accessible online at: http://academicaffairs.tamucc.edu/rules_procedures/assets/13.02.99.C0.03_student_grade_appeals.pdf. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean’s office in the college in which the course is taught. For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal in CLA, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website, http://cla.tamucc.edu/about/student-resources.html.

Statement of Academic Continuity

In the event of an unforeseen adverse event, such as a major hurricane and classes could not be held on the campus of Texas A&M University Corpus Christi; this course would continue through the use of Blackboard and/or email. In addition, the syllabus and class activities may be modified to allow continuation of the course. Ideally, University facilities (i.e., emails, web sites, and Blackboard) will be operational within two days of the closing of the physical campus. However, students need to make certain that the course instructor has a primary and a secondary means of contacting each student.

Classroom Courtesy

Classroom courtesy is an essential component of creating an effective learning environment. All students have the right to learn without unnecessary distractions. These distractions include: cell phones, talking during lectures (unless recognized by the instructor), reading newspapers, falling asleep, etc. If you need a cell phone for emergency purposes, leave it on vibrate. Entering and leaving are also significant sources of distraction. It is your responsibility to be on time and to stay for the entire period. In circumstances where you need to leave early, tell the instructor beforehand. Repeated disruptions of class will lead to a reduction in your final grade.

Most importantly, the syllabus includes many sensitive topics which can lead to strong feelings and heated debate. Because this is a college classroom, all discussion must be respectful and scholarly. This is to say you must be respectful, in both content and tone, of diverse opinions and not make personal or partisan attacks.

Acceptable Comments

• are respectful of diverse opinions and open to follow up questions and/or disagreement
• are related to class and/or the course material
• focus on advancing the discussion about issues related to the course and/or course material rather than personal beliefs, and
• are delivered in normal tones and a non-aggressive manner.

Unacceptable Comments
• are personal in nature. This includes attacks on a person’s appearance, demeanor, or political beliefs.
• include interrupting the instructor or other students. Raise your hand and wait to be recognized.
• often use the discussion to argue for political positions and/or beliefs. If political discussions arise, they must be discussed in a scholarly way (see above).
• may include using raised tones, yelling, engaging in arguments with other students and being threatening in any manner.
• include ignoring the instructor’s authority to maintain the integrity of the classroom environment.

Syllabus Change Policy
This syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice. These changes may come via e-mail. Make sure to check your university supplied email regularly. You are accountable for all such communications.

6 Tentative Course Schedule
A few notes about reading the course schedule:
• “Rottinghaus” refers to the required Rottinghaus book
• “(B)” means that reading can be found on Blackboard.

Course & University Basics
Tuesday August 20– Introduction to the Course
  - No readings
Thursday August 22– Making the Most Out of Your Time at TAMUCC
  - Class presentation by Career Services

The Basic Structures of Government
Tuesday August 27– Texas Political Culture
  - Rottinghaus Chapter 1
Thursday August 29– Texas Political Culture (cont.)
  - Rottinghaus Chapter 1
Tuesday September 3– The Constitution: The Rulebook
  - Rottinghaus Chapter 2
Thursday September 5 – The Constitution: The Rulebook (cont.)
   - Rottinghaus Chapter 2

Tuesday September 10 – Texas in Nation: Federalism
   - Rottinghaus Chapter 3

Thursday September 12 – Texas in Nation: Federalism (cont.)
   - Rottinghaus Chapter 3

Tuesday September 17 – **EXAM ONE**
   - *No readings, bring a #2 pencil to class*

**Political Institutions: The Rules of the Game**

Thursday September 19 – The Legislature
   - Rottinghaus Chapter 7

Tuesday September 24 – The Legislature (cont.)
   - Rottinghaus Chapter 8

Thursday September 26 – The Governor
   - Rottinghaus Chapter 8

Tuesday October 1 – The Governor (cont.)
   - Rottinghaus Chapter 8

Thursday October 3 – Other Executives & the Bureaucracy
   - Rottinghaus Chapter 9

Tuesday October 8 – Other Executives & the Bureaucracy (cont.)
   - Rottinghaus Chapter 9

Thursday October 10 – The Judiciary
   - Rottinghaus Chapter 10
Tuesday October 15 – The Judiciary (cont.)
- Rottinghaus Chapter 10

Thursday October 17 – Criminal Justice
- Rottinghaus Chapter 11

Tuesday October 22 – Criminal Justice (cont.)
- Rottinghaus Chapter 11

Thursday October 24 – The Judiciary & Criminal Justice in Perspective
- Guest Speaker: Hon. Missy Medary, Judge 347th District Court, Presiding Judge 5th Administrative Judicial Region

Tuesday October 29 – Local Government
- Rottinghaus Chapter 12

Thursday October 31 – Local Government
- Rottinghaus Chapter 12

Tuesday November 5 – EXAM TWO
- No readings, bring a #2 pencil to class

Political Behavior: How the Actors Behave

Thursday November 7 – Voting & Elections
- Rottinghaus Chapter 4

Tuesday November 12 – Voting & Elections (cont.)
- Rottinghaus Chapter 4

Thursday November 14 – Political Parties
- Rottinghaus Chapter 5

Tuesday November 19 – Interest Groups
- Barbour Chapter 6
Public Policy

Thursday November 21– Paying for it All: Budget & Finance
   - Rottinghaus Chapter 13

Tuesday November 26– Paying for it All: Budget & Finance (cont.)
   - Rottinghaus Chapter 13

Thursday November 28– **NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK**
   - *Enjoy your day!*

Tuesday December 3– Public Policy
   - Rottinghaus Chapter 14

Thursday December 5– **NO CLASS: READING DAY**
   - *Good luck studying!*

**FINAL EXAM: TBA in our usual classroom**