

State and Local Government Course Syllabus

Course Information

Course Number/Section GOVT 2306.0W3
Course Title State and Local Government
Term Spring 2021

Professor Contact Information

Professor Misty Dawn Parker, MLS, PhD
Email Address mistydawnparker@utdallas.edu
Office Location MS Teams
Online Office Hours Fridays from 11 am – 1:00 pm (CST), and by appointment
Other Information Live class sessions every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 3 – 3:50 p.m. (CST) on MS Teams [recordings of all class sessions will be available]

Teaching Assistant Contact Information

Teaching Assistant Ricardo Noé
Email Address ricardo.noe@utdallas.edu
Office Location MS Teams
Online Office Hours Tuesdays, 2 – 4 p.m. (CST)

Important Dates (see course schedule for course due dates)

Feb. 3 Last day to drop without a “W” / Census day
Mar. 15-21 Spring Break – no classes
Apr. 1 Last day to register to vote in Texas local elections
Apr. 5 Last day to withdraw from classes
Apr. 19 First day of in-person early voting in Texas
Apr. 20 Last day to apply for ballot-by-mail in Texas
Apr. 27 Last day of in-person early voting in Texas
May 1 Election Day (also last day to receive mail-in ballots)
May 8 Last day of classes
May 9 Reading day
May 10-15 Final exam week (note: we do not have a final exam in this class)

Course Pre-requisites, Co-requisites, and/or Other Restrictions

None.

Course Description

This course is designed to introduce you to the state and local government and politics of Texas within the wider context of the United States federal system. As an introductory course, an understanding of the broad concepts related to state and local governance is the focus. The information you receive in this course should provide you with the tools and skills necessary to participate in state and local government, think critically about government policies and programs, and appreciate the role state and local government plays in your everyday life.

Student Learning Objectives

- **Think critically about issues related to government and politics**—analyze and appreciate historical trends in the development of government institutions (constitutions, branches of

government, political parties, elections, etc.), and apply knowledge of government institutions and theoretical and scholarly approaches to understand government behavior and current events

- **Effectively communicate issues of societal and personal import with others**-meaningfully and respectfully express your positions and ideas on political and social issues to fellow students, community members, public officials, and representatives
- **Engage academically and professionally with a sense of social responsibility**-recognize that individual actions can have consequences for society just as government actions can have consequences for individuals, and engage with the world around you with awareness and empathy
- **Exercise personal responsibility in how government functions**-understand how to effectively interact with government to achieve desired outcomes, and begin a lifetime of active engagement with your state and local governments

Student Learning Outcomes

At the completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Describe the development and importance of Texas and other state constitutions.
2. Describe state and local political systems and their relationship to the federal government.
3. Understand the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of state governments.
4. Analyze issues, public policies, and political culture in Texas and other states.
5. Identify, describe, and analyze various mechanisms of citizen political involvement including public opinion, political parties, interest groups, and electoral processes.
6. Apply important theoretical and scholarly approaches to understanding state and local institutions' behavior, citizen involvement, and interactions between citizens and institutions of government.

Required Textbooks and Materials

You are not required to purchase any materials for this class. Learning materials will be a combination of online books, articles, podcasts, and videos. These materials, plus your assignments, will be available through links embedded in this syllabus, eLearning, the web, and the UTD Library.

Technical Requirements

In addition to a confident level of computer and Internet literacy, certain minimum technical requirements must be met to enable a successful learning experience. Please review the important technical requirements on the [Getting Started with eLearning](#) webpage.

Course Access and Navigation

This course can be accessed using your UT Dallas NetID account on the [eLearning](#) website.

Please see the course access and navigation section of the [Getting Started with eLearning](#) webpage for more information.

To become familiar with the eLearning tool, please see the [Student eLearning Tutorials](#) webpage.

UT Dallas provides eLearning technical support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The [eLearning Support Center](#) includes a toll-free telephone number for immediate assistance (1-866-588-3192), email request service, and an online chat service.

Communication

This course utilizes online tools for interaction and communication. Some external communication tools such as regular email and a web conferencing tool may also be used during the semester. For more details, please visit the [Student eLearning Tutorials](#) webpage for video demonstrations on eLearning tools.

Student emails and discussion board messages will be answered within 3 working days under normal circumstances.

Distance Learning Student Resources

Online students have access to resources including the McDermott Library, Academic Advising, The Office of Student AccessAbility, and many others. Please see the [eLearning Current Students](#) webpage for more information.

Server Unavailability or Other Technical Difficulties

The University is committed to providing a reliable learning management system to all users. However, in the event of any unexpected server outage or any unusual technical difficulty which prevents students from completing a time sensitive assessment activity, the instructor will provide an appropriate accommodation based on the situation. Students should immediately report any problems to the instructor and also contact the online [eLearning Help Desk](#). The instructor and the eLearning Help Desk will work with the student to resolve any issues at the earliest possible time.

Academic Calendar (note: I reserve the right to change readings, and will communicate these changes in advance if that decision is made)

WEEK/ DATES	TOPIC/LECTURE	READINGS	ASSESSMENT / ACTIVITY	DUE DATE
Unit 1: Foundations				
1 1/20	State and Local Governments in U.S. History	1: How to Fact-Check History 2: Emergence of Colonial Government 3: Loyalists during the American Revolution	Homework #1	1/21 @ midnight
1/22	Recap: Class Discussion			
2 1/25 – 1/27	Political Culture	1: State and Local Political Culture 2: Texas: The Myth vs. the Reality (UTD Library; skim Chapter 2)	Homework #2	1/28 @ midnight
1/29	Recap: Class Discussion			
3 2/01 – 2/03	Constitutions	1: State Constitutions 2: Let’s Mess with Texas (podcast) 3: The Founding Contradiction (podcast)	Homework #3	2/4 @ midnight
2/05	Recap: Class Discussion			

WEEK/ DATES	TOPIC/LECTURE	READINGS	ASSESSMENT / ACTIVITY	DUE DATE
4 2/08 – 2/10	Federalism	1: Why the US' Complex System of Federalism Will Blunt the Worst... 2: States' Rights (1948)	Homework #4	2/11 @ midnight
2/12	Recap: Class Discussion		Exam #1	2/12-2/14
Unit 2: Branches of Government				
5 2/15 – 2/17	Legislatures	1: Who Passes Business's "Model Bills"? (eLearning) 2: Big Sky, Big Money (video)	Homework #5	2/18 @ midnight
2/19	Recap: Class Discussion			
6 2/22 – 2/24	Governors	1: Governors' Powers and Authority 2: Are Governors Responsible for the State Economy? (eLearning)	Homework #6	2/25 @ midnight
2/26	Recap: Class Discussion			
7 3/01 – 3/03	The Courts	1: The Cycle of Judicial Elections: Texas as a Case Study 2: Gay Rights, the New Judicial Federalism, and State Supreme Courts (eLearning)	Homework #7	3/04 @ midnight
3/05	Recap: Class Discussion			
8 3/08 – 3/10	Municipal Governments	1: What does a traffic jam in Atlanta have to do with segregation? Quite a lot. 2: Cities in American Federalism: Evidence ...from a Survey of Mayors (eLearning)	Homework #8	3/11 @ midnight
3/12	Recap: Class Discussion			
9 3/15 – 21	SPRING BREAK – NO CLASSES			

WEEK/ DATES	TOPIC/LECTURE	READINGS	ASSESSMENT / ACTIVITY	DUE DATE
10 3/22 – 3/24	Political Parties	1: How Ballot Access Laws Affect the U.S. Party System (eLearning) 2: Political Polarization is about Feelings, Not Facts 3: Prospects for Partisan Realignment: Lessons from the Demise of the Whigs	Homework #9	3/25 @ midnight
3/26	Recap: Class Discussion		Exam #2	3/26-3/28
Unit 3: Public Policy				
11 3/29 – 3/31	Elections and Political Participation	1: Cost of Voting in the American States: 2020 2: On the Sidelines of Democracy 3: What if They Held an Election and Everyone Came?	Homework #10	4/01 @ midnight
4/02	Recap: Class Discussion			
12 4/05 – 4/07	Taxes and Spending	1: Jobs, Income, and Wealth in Texas (UTD Library; Ch. 4) 2: North Texas Cities Turn Incentives Arsenals Against Each Other...	Homework #11	4/08 @ midnight
4/09	Recap: Class Discussion			
13 4/12 – 4/14	Criminal Justice Policy	1: Slavery gave America...our prison system. 2: Crime and Punishment in Texas (UTD Library; Ch. 8)	Homework #12	4/15 @ midnight
4/16	Recap: Class Discussion			
14 4/19 – 4/21	Social Welfare and Healthcare Policy	1: Why doesn't the United States have universal healthcare? 2: Health and Human Services in Texas (UTD Library; Ch. 7)	Homework #13	4/22 @ midnight
4/23	Recap: Class Discussion			

WEEK/ DATES	TOPIC/LECTURE	READINGS	ASSESSMENT / ACTIVITY	DUE DATE
15 4/26 – 4/28	Education Policy	1: Societies, School, and Culture 2: Public Education in Texas (UTD Library: Ch. 5)	Letter Project	4/29 @ midnight
4/30	Recap: Class Discussion			
16 5/03 – 5/05	Environmental and Energy Policy	1: Energy and the Environment in Texas (UTD Library: Ch. 10) 2: Flint's Deadly Water (video)	Homework #14	5/06 @ midnight
5/07	Course Recap		Exam #3	5/08-5/10

Grading Policy

- Homework (due dates in course schedule) = 40%
- Letter to Elected Official (due April 29 @ midnight) = 15%
- Exam 1 (due Feb. 12 – 14 @ midnight) = 15%
- Exam 2 (due Mar. 26 – 28 @ midnight) = 15%
- Exam 3 (due May 8 – 10 @ midnight) = 15%
- Extra Credit (due May 11 @ midnight) = +2 points on final grade

Final course grades will be based on total points earned throughout the course.

A+	97 – 100%	A	93% - 96%	A-	90% - 92%
B+	87% - 89%	B	83% - 86%	B-	80% - 82%
C+	77% - 79%	C	73% - 76%	C-	70% - 72%
D+	67% - 69%	D	63% - 66%	D-	60% - 62%
		F	< 60%		

Homework

Weekly homework assignments are posted in the corresponding week's folder on eLearning, and will be a combination of multiple choice, true/false, and multiple answer questions. Each homework assignment is graded on correctness (50%) and participation (50%) – thus, as long as you answer each question, regardless of the correctness of your answer, you are guaranteed a grade of '50'. All homework grades will be averaged together to produce your total homework grade for the class.

Letter Project

This assignment will provide you the opportunity to engage in democratic participation by contacting one of your state or local elected officials about a state or local issue of importance to you; to back up your stated position with thorough research; and to demonstrate your ability to follow proper letter-writing and citation style guidelines. Details about this assignment will be made available to you after the first exam.

Exams

Each exam will consist of multiple choice, true/false, and multiple answer questions, will be taken on the designated days at a time of the student's choosing, and will consist of questions covered in the unit being tested (meaning, no exam will be comprehensive). Exams will be taken on eLearning.

Course Policies

Communication

- Emails should have the course name and number (ex: GOVT 2306) in the subject line.
- Emails about technical difficulties and/or homework should be directed to the TA, Ric (ricardo.noe@utdallas.edu). Emails about all other aspects of the course should be directed to me (mistydawnparker@utdallas.edu).

Make-up exams

- Because you are given a 72-hour window within which to complete the exams, medical emergencies and school-sanctioned activities are the only acceptable reasons for make-ups. Both require documentation and are allowed at my discretion.
- Make-ups must be scheduled with me and completed within one week of the original exam (so, by the following Friday), or a “0” will be earned.

Extra Credit

An additional 2 points will be added onto your final grade should you volunteer for an election campaign during the semester and submit a ~500 word essay about your experience. To be eligible for extra credit, the essay must be submitted by midnight on November 25.

Late Work

Due dates and deadlines are integrated into the MS Teams course calendar; however, you should also input due dates and deadlines into a personal calendar and set meaningful reminders (e.g., a reminder three days before, one day before, one hour before, etc.). If you anticipate that you will not meet a deadline, please contact me or the TA immediately and we can work together to find an equitable and fair solution.

Class Participation

As this class that is designated ‘online,’ there is no grade awarded for participation. That being said, you are highly encouraged to attend class meetings on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Friday class meeting, in particular, will be heavily discussion-based.

Classroom Citizenship

This class is a great opportunity to practice engaging politically with people from diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and opinions. Democracy cannot work if we are unwilling to listen to one another or unable to exchange ideas respectfully. This course will cover some topics that may prove controversial. It is incumbent upon each and every one of us to maintain civil discourse in the classroom. If at any time you do not feel this standard is being upheld, come talk to me.

Comet Creed

This creed was voted on by the UT Dallas student body in 2014. It is a standard that Comets choose to live by and encourage others to do the same:

“As a Comet, I pledge honesty, integrity, and service in all that I do.”

Academic Support Resources

The information contained in the following link lists the University’s academic support resources for all students.

Please go to [Academic Support Resources](#) webpage for these policies.

UT Dallas Syllabus Policies and Procedures

The information contained in the following link constitutes the University’s policies and procedures segment of the course syllabus.

Please go to [UT Dallas Syllabus Policies](#) webpage for these policies.

The descriptions and timelines contained in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.