

**GOVT 2306.006: State and Local Government  
University of Texas at Dallas—Spring 2022**

Instructor: Dr. Michelle Ramirez  
Email: Michelle.Ramirez@UTDallas.edu  
Phone: (972) 883-4928

Office: Cecil H. Green Hall 2.820  
Office hours: M,W 11:00-12:00  
(or by appointment)

**Location and Meeting Times:** Hoblitzelle Hall 2.402—M,W,F 2:00-2:50 pm

**Teaching Assistant:** Rahul Thakar—rahul.thakar@utdallas.edu  
Office Location and Hours: Virtual on Teams, Mondays and Fridays 2:00-4:00pm

**Course Description—**This course will provide students with a background in state and local government. We will explore topics including the Texas Constitution, the structure and powers of state and local government, federalism, inter-governmental relations, political participation, the election process, and public policy. The goals of this course are to have students critically examine their own political beliefs and the beliefs of others, and to provide students with an understanding of the methods in which they can get involved in politics.

**Learning Outcomes—**Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Explain the origin and development of the Texas constitution.
2. Describe state and local political systems and their relationship with the federal government.
3. Describe separation of powers and checks and balances in both theory and practice in Texas.
4. Demonstrate knowledge of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of Texas.
5. Evaluate the role of public opinion, interest groups, and political parties in Texas.
6. Analyze the state and local election process.
7. Identify the rights and responsibilities of citizens.
8. Analyze issues and policies in Texas

**Required Text and Materials:** Top Hat Subscription (\$75), which includes:

1. Subscription to Top Hat Pro (\$30) (See Blackboard for Join Code)
  - <https://app.tophat.com/e/676562>
2. Textbook subscription (\$45)
  - Thomas Brunell, Robert Lowery, Banks Miller, and Thomas Gray. 2021. *Introduction to State and Local Government*. (Top Hat ebook) ISBN: 9781774122853

**Assignments and Grading:**

1. Weekly Reader Quizzes (25%);
2. Four Exams (with the lowest grade dropped) (75%)

Grades are assigned in accordance to the following scale:

A+ (97%+), A (94-96.9%), A- (90-93.9%), B+ (87-89.9%), B (84-86.9%), B- (80-83.9%), C+ (77-79.9%), C (74-76.9%), C- (70-73.9%), D+ (67-69.9%), D (64-66.9%), D- (60-63.9%), F <60%

Due to the nature of the university grading scale, grades will *not* be rounded up (e.g. a 94.0 is an A, a 93.9 an A-)

**Reader Quizzes:** Each week, students will be assigned chapters from the required text book. There are about 15 chapters, each with quiz questions integrated within the text. The reader quiz questions provide an opportunity to apply the material covered in the textbook and will be helpful when studying for exams. Students should note that there are multiple opportunities to get the “right” answer for each question, so students have a number of opportunities to receive full credit on these assignments. Reader quizzes will be due each Friday at 11:59 pm. No late assignments will be accepted.

**Exams:** There will be a total of 4 exams (with one drop), each worth 25% of your grade. The first three exams will cover roughly one-fourth of the course material, and the final exam will be cumulative, covering material from the entire semester. The final exam is optional if you are satisfied with your first three exam scores. Exams will be taken online in Top Hat; therefore, you can take them from a remote location without coming to campus. All exams will be open book and open note and will consist of 50 multiple choice questions. Each exam must be completed during the assigned time period (60 minutes) between Friday at 8:00 am and Sunday at 11:59 pm. The best way to prepare for an exam is to review the reader quizzes, review the notes you take in class, and review the PowerPoint slides provided.

### **Important Due Dates and Exam Dates**

February	11	Exam 1 Opens Friday, Feb. 11 8:00am, Due Sunday, Feb. 13 11:59pm
March	11	Exam 2 Opens Friday, Mar 11 8:00am, Due Sunday, Mar. 13 11:59pm
April	8	Exam 3 Opens Friday, Apr. 8 8:00am, Due Sunday, Apr. 10 11:59pm
May	7	Final TBA

\*\*\*Quizzes are due every Friday at 11:59 pm\*\*\*

### **Top Hat**

We will be using Top Hat ([www.tophat.com](http://www.tophat.com)) for quizzes, exams, and to access the digital interactive textbook (see above). To register and start your subscription, go to <https://app.tophat.com/register/student>. If you already have a TopHat account, go to <https://app.tophat.com/e/676562> to be taken directly to our course. To gain access to the materials, you will be required to purchase two access codes. They can be purchased at the UT Dallas bookstore, a local bookstore, or directly through TopHat (cheapest). If you are waiting for financial aid, you can sign up for a short trial, but you will need to purchase the materials soon. You cannot expect to succeed in this class if you do not have access to Top Hat.

### **Blackboard**

This course has a Blackboard site, which is available through eLearning at <https://elearning.utdallas.edu>. The Blackboard site contains administrative information about the course, announcements, and student grades. At the beginning of the semester you will be required to sync your Top Hat account to Blackboard so that you can track your overall grade throughout the semester, and so that I can properly submit final grades. Keep in mind, you are responsible for checking Blackboard regularly for up-to-date announcements about the class.

### **Technology Support**

You will be required to familiarize yourself with some technology for this class. Technology often involves dealing with the inconveniences and frustration that arise when it does not perform as expected. Here at UTD we have OIT that can assist with these issues. They are available via live chat, phone, and walk-in service. **Neither the instructor nor the teaching assistant are technical support resources.** If you experience technical problems, contact:

### **Office of Information Technology (OIT)**

TechKnowledgy Bar—Student Union 1.204  
972-883-2911—assist@utdallas.edu

### **For issues with Top Hat, contact them directly at**

1-888-663-5491—support@tophat.com (M-F 9am-9pm)

### **For issues with Blackboard/eLearning, contact:**

866-588-3192 (<https://ets.utdallas.edu/elearning/helpdesk>)

### **Communications**

Email is the best way to reach me. If you contact me between Monday and Friday, I will do my best to respond within 24 hours. When you send an email, please follow standard email etiquette by including a proper salutation, a signature, and **your class section** with your message. If you need to get in touch with me about a grade, please be aware that I am not allowed to discuss grades over email, so you must see me during office hours. Substantive questions about the material or concerns about the class, are also best addressed during my office hours. If you have a conflict with my office hours, please e-mail me to make an appointment. I am happy to help!

### **Extra Credit**

I do not provide individual opportunities for extra credit. If extra credit is offered, it will be available to the entire class. To be successful in this class, students should focus on completing the required assignments to the best of their ability. If you do not do well on your assignments, I encourage you to see me for assistance as soon as possible. I will be happy to work with you to improve your grades, but it is your responsibility to seek out help if you need it.

### **Late Work Policy and Make-ups**

Please make note of all of due dates for the quizzes and exams and plan accordingly. All assignments must be completed by the due date if you want to receive credit. If you have a medical or family emergency, contact me immediately and let me know what your situation is. I will need documentation, but assuming you can provide that (a doctor's note, an obituary, etc.), I will find a way to accommodate your problem. Do not let assignments slide and plan to catch up later. Let me know as soon as humanly possible that you have a problem. Make-up exams will not be given unless you have a documented university-excused absence or emergency (UTD activities, religious holidays, or any reason that is considered excused). Students must arrange for a make-up BEFORE they miss an exam, and it must be taken within one week of the original test date. If you do not have written documentation, you must take the exam as scheduled. If you miss an exam for a non-documented, non-excused absence (e.g., you forgot, had the exam time wrong, etc.), you will not be able to make it up.

## ETHICS AND CONDUCT

### Acceptable Student Behavior

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UTD. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Student Code of Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

As an instructor, I believe that students learn best when they are able to engage with each other (and the professor!) in a respectful and open-minded manner. Since the topics in this course will encourage lively and energetic discussions and debates, it is also important for you to show respect for others' opinions and points of view, even when you disagree. So, please practice the Golden Rule and treat others as you would like to be treated. Specifically, I ask that you avoid disruptive behaviors by:

- Silencing all disruptive electronic devices;
- Refraining from texting, tweeting, checking email, browsing the internet, or reading irrelevant materials during class;
- Avoiding side conversations with others during class;
- Not falling asleep

**Academic Honor Code:** Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this class. All students are expected to uphold the Comet Creed: *As a Comet, I pledge honesty, integrity, and service in all that I do.* Incidents of plagiarism and/or cheating will result in a failing grade for the class and further penalties per the University's judicial process. Students are advised to review the policies established in the UTD Student Code of Conduct (<https://policy.utdallas.edu/utdsp5003>). If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, see the professor. Finally, students agree that, by taking this course, all required assignments may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) or a similar plagiarism prevention system.

### Academic Misconduct: Cheating and Plagiarism

According to UT Dallas Policy UTDSP5003, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University. The School of Economic, Political, and Policy Sciences adheres to and enforces UTD's policy on academic integrity. Violations of academic integrity in this course will be addressed in compliance with the penalties and procedures laid out in this policy. Students may appeal any decision under this policy by following the procedures laid down in Section G of UTDSP5003 (subsection 20).

Students should note that according to the UTD policy, "cheating" includes, but is not limited to: "the use, attempted use, or providing of unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise; the use of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in completing

any academic exercise. Any type of discussion about questions and answers on assignments/tests, including those held in social media platforms and other electronic chat groups, may be considered cheating. Failure to submit a test within the timeframe allocated by the professor, whether in the classroom or in the University testing center, may be considered cheating. Academic exercise includes all forms of work submitted for credit or hours. According to UTD policy, “plagiarism” is defined as “the adoption or reproduction of ideas, words, statements, images or works of another as one's own or work offered for credit without appropriate attribution. This includes self-plagiarism which occurs when a student submits academic work, exact or substantially similar, that was used to satisfy requirements in a different class and fails to use proper citation or approval from their professor.

### **Sexual Discrimination, Harassment, and Assault**

UTD is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct. Federal laws and UTD policies (UTDBP3102) prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex as well as sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. The Title IX Coordinator can be reached at [TitleIXCoordinator@utdallas.edu](mailto:TitleIXCoordinator@utdallas.edu) or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 972-883-6391.

### **Mandatory Reporter**

As a UTD faculty member, I am required to share information regarding sexual assault and retaliation and sexual harassment with the university. Therefore, I want to be transparent that while I will seek to keep information that you share with me about your life in classroom discussions, your written work, one-on-one meetings, and/or emails private, I am required to disclose information about sexual misconduct to UTD's Title IX Coordinator. For more information on reporting sexual misconduct at UTD, please see: <https://institutional-initiatives.utdallas.edu/title-ix/faq/>

## **ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

It is the policy and practice of UT Dallas to make reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented disabilities. If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need academic accommodations for this class, you are encouraged to register with the Office of Student AccessAbility (OSA). Some aspects of the course, the assignments, the in-class activities, and the way the course is typically taught may be accommodated to facilitate your participation and progress. OSA will assist you in determining academic accommodations that are appropriate for your situation. Any information you provide is private and confidential and will be treated as such. To avoid any delay, please contact OSA as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and disability accommodations cannot be provided until an OSA Letter of Accommodation has been given to the instructor. Students who have questions about receiving accommodations, or those who have, or think they may have, a disability (mobility, sensory, health, psychological, learning, etc.) are invited to contact OSA for a confidential discussion. OSA is located in the Administration Building, AD 2.224 They can be reached by phone at 972-883-2098, or by email at [studentaccess@utdallas.edu](mailto:studentaccess@utdallas.edu).

## COVID-19 GUIDELINES AND RESOURCES

### Class Modality

Due to the current circumstances surrounding COVID-19, we will not meet in person for the first three weeks of class. I will schedule a reoccurring Teams meeting where I will lecture remotely. Starting Monday, February 7th, we will transition to in-person class and students will be expected to attend regularly. Unless otherwise noted, I will not be offering remote options for students after February 4th. When in class, I ***strongly encourage*** you to wear a mask when possible. I realize this is a very difficult time for many of us, but I ask for your patience and understanding as we all adapt to the changing circumstances throughout the semester.

### Classroom Safety and COVID-19

To help preserve the University's in-person learning environment, UT Dallas recommends that we all adhere to the University's CDC Updated Guidelines. ***All Comets are strongly encouraged to wear face coverings indoors regardless of vaccination status.*** Vaccinations and boosters are widely available, free and not billed to health insurance. The vaccine will help protect against the transmission of the virus to others and reduce serious symptoms in those who are vaccinated. You are encouraged to get a COVID-19 vaccine and register your vaccination status through the voluntary vaccine report form. Student safety remains an important part of the UT Dallas' efforts to protect our community. All students will adhere to the Comet Commitment. Unvaccinated Comets will be expected to complete the mandatory Required Daily Health Screening (<https://www.utdallas.edu/covid/response/daily-health-check/>). Those students who do not comply will be referred to the Office of Community Standards and Conduct for disciplinary action under the Student Code of Conduct ( <https://policy.utdallas.edu/utdsp5003>). All students are encouraged to read the "Recommendations for Students Returning to Campus" issued on August 2, 2021 (<https://evites.utdallas.edu/studentaffairs/return/protective-measures.html>).

### Verifying COVID-19 Isolations or Quarantines

Students need to self-report COVID-19 positive results or exposures via an online form (<https://veoci.com/v/p/form/tqeyzbbexcyf?c=131560#tab=entryForm>) so that university campus tracers can verify, record, and take necessary campus precautions. When faculty are notified by students rather than by the Dean of Students' Office that the students are isolating or quarantining, the faculty should remind students to self-report via the form; students should not attend class until cleared by campus tracers. ***Students who have tested positive for COVID-19 or may have been exposed should not attend class*** in person and should instead follow required disclosure notifications as posted on the university's website (see "What should I do if I become sick?" at <https://www.utdallas.edu/covid/response/faq/#students>).

### COVID-19 Resources

Comets United webpage: <https://utdallas.edu/covid/>

FAQ: <https://utdallas.edu/covid/response/faq/>

Student Resources: <https://utdallas.edu/covid/students-families-info/student-resources/>

## **Class Schedule**

Week 1 (1/19-1/21): Introduction/Syllabus, Chapter 1: Socioeconomic and Political Context

Week 2 (1/24-1/28): Chapter 2: Federalism and the States

Week 3 (1/31-2/4): Chapter 3: Local Governments

Week 4 (2/7-2/11): Chapter 4: State and Local Government Relations, **Exam 1**

Week 5 (2/14-2/18): Chapter 5: Citizen Participation, Parties, and Elections

Week 6 (2/21-2/25): Chapter 6: Public Opinion, Lobbying, and Interest Groups

Week 7 (2/28-3/4): Chapter 7: The Executive Branch

Week 8 (3/7-3/11): Chapter 8: The State Legislative Branch, **Exam 2**

(3/14-3/18): Spring Break

Week 9 (3/21-3/25): Chapter 9: The State Judiciary

Week 10 (3/28-4/1): Chapter 10: Taxes and Spending (we will skip Chapter 11 next week)

Week 11 (4/4-4/8): Chapter 12: Criminal Justice Policy **Exam 3**

Week 12 (4/11-4/15): Chapter 13: Social Welfare and Healthcare Policy

Week 13 (4/18-4/22): Chapter 14: Education Policy

Week 14 (4/25-4/29): Chapter 15: Environmental and Energy Policy

Week 15 (5/2-5/6): Reading Day is Friday 5/6; Final Exams begin Saturday 5/7

**Final Exam:** TBA (last day of finals is Friday, May 13th)

***Please note, the syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the Professor***