

State and Local Government Course Syllabus



Course	GOVT 2306.003
Course Title	State and Local Government
Professor	Katie Widner (she/her)
Term	Spring 2023
Meetings	Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9:00am - 9:50am, GR 3.420

Contact Information

Instructor: Katie Widner

Email Address: katie.widner@utdallas.edu

Office Location: GR 3.314

Office Hours: Monday, 10 – 11 am; Wednesday, 10 – 11 am; and by appointment

Other Information: Office hours will be held via MS Teams unless otherwise communicated

Course Description

Survey of state and local government with special reference to the constitution and politics of Texas.

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.
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Student Learning Outcomes

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

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the influence founding principles have on today's political structure, including current political and policy debates

2. Describe state and local political systems and their ever-changing relationship to the federal government.
 3. Assess the design and function of states' executive, legislative, and judicial branches in comparison to other states/the federal government.
 4. Examine the impact of evolving civil rights and civil liberties protections on state governance
 5. Analyze issues, public policies, and political culture in the U.S. from an empirical (e.g., evidence-based) rather than opinionated frame.
 6. Identify, describe, and analyze various mechanisms of citizen political involvement including public opinion, political parties, interest groups, and electoral processes.
 7. Apply important theoretical and scholarly approaches to understanding state and local institutions' behavior, citizen involvement, and interactions between citizens and institutions of government.
 8. Consider the above factors when designing, strategizing, and proposing workable policy solutions to complex governmental and societal problems facing state and local governments today.
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Required Textbooks and Materials

We will be using **Top Hat Pro** (www.tophat.com) to access the **digital interactive textbook** that we will be using in this class.

Go to <https://app.tophat.com/register/student>
Click "Search by school" and input the name of our school
Search for our course with the following **join code**: 910020

Note: You only need to purchase the semester-long Top Hat subscription to complete this course. Make sure to use your UTD email to register with Top Hat.

Why Top Hat? And what about eLearning/Blackboard?

Every section of GOVT 2306 uses Top Hat for its textbook (there is no print version of the text; it is only found on Top Hat). We will also use it to submit homework, complete exams, access lecture slides, and view unofficial homework and exam grades. eLearning/Blackboard is UTD's chosen LMS (Learning Management System) and thus where official grades are housed for every class at the university. All essential course documents will be posted on eLearning as well as Top Hat.

Students are expected to bring a phone, tablet, or laptop to class which can access Top Hat for attendance and participation purposes.

Homework

All homework is integrated into your textbook (all accessible via Top Hat). By completing the

questions embedded in the week's assigned reading (e.g., in each textbook chapter), you have completed the homework (assuming you have met the due date). 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 overall homework grade for the class. Homework will always be due the week we cover the material in class by Friday at 12:00pm. For example, the week we cover Chapter 3, the corresponding Ch 3 homework will be due after class on Friday. Homework is worth 30% of the total course grade.

Exams

There will be three exams throughout the semester, each worth 20% of the total course grade. Each exam will be open book/open notes and will be taken remotely on Top Hat. Students will be given 90 minutes to complete each exam. Students will have a 48 hour window to access the exam. For instance, Exam 1 will become available to students on February 22 after class and must be completed by February 24 at 11:59pm. Once you start the exam, you will have 90 minutes to complete and submit your answers. You are welcome to take the exam from home, a computer lab on campus, or anywhere else you feel comfortable. The exams will be open book/open notes, non-proctored, and will be taken on Top Hat. For these reasons, there are no exam makeups. Collaboration on exams is not allowed; make sure exams are completed independently. Please make sure where you choose to take the exam has a reliable internet connection. Exams are NOT cumulative.

Attendance

Students are expected to regularly attend class in person. Attendance will be taken via Top Hat. Attendance counts for 10% of the total course grade. Students are allowed **four** "freebie" absences which will not impact the attendance grade. Beyond this, students are expected to submit a written notice with an approved reason to the instructor if they miss class. Otherwise, attendance points will be deducted. Please see UTD attendance guidelines for further detail.

Note: This attendance policy is not meant to be punitive. I understand situations may arise during the semester which prevent in-person attendance. In these cases, communication is key. The earlier you let me know about a problem or concern, the easier it is for me to accommodate you. My ultimate goal is your success in this course, and this attendance policy is in place to help ensure your success. However, I cannot help you if you fail to communicate your circumstances.

Readings and Homework

Week	Homework	Due Date
Week of January 18	Syllabus	N/A
Week of January 23	Ch 1	January 27
Week of January 30	Ch 2	February 3
Week of February 6	Ch 3	February 10
Week of February 13	Ch 4	February 17

Week of February 20	Ch 5	February 24
Week of February 27	Ch 6	March 3
Week of March 6	Ch 7	March 10
Week of March 13	Spring Break	N/A
Week of March 20	Ch 8	March 24
Week of March 27	Ch 9	March 31
Week of April 3	Ch 10	April 7
Week of April 10	Ch 11	April 14
Week of April 17	Ch 12 & 13	April 21
Week of April 24	Ch 14 & 15	April 28
Week of May 1	none	N/A

Exams

Exam	Date Available	Content	Due Date
Exam 1	Feb 22	Ch 1 - 5	Feb 24 @ 11:59pm
Exam 2	April 5	Ch 6 - 10	April 7 @ 11:59pm
Exam 3	May 3	Ch 11 - 15	May 5 @ 11:59pm

Grading Scale

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

A+	97+	B+	87 – 89	C+	77 – 79	D+	67 – 69
A	94 – 96	B	84 – 86	C	74 – 76	D	64 – 66
A-	90 – 93	B-	80 – 83	C-	70 – 73	D-	60 – 63

Grading Policy

Grades in this course are weighted based upon their importance to your overall class grade. The chart below provides the assignment's value, along with a space for you to track your grade in the course (see example in first row). Sum the points in the Calculated Total column to attain your grade in the course, and enter it into the Total cell (see Grading Scale above for letter grade).

Assignment	Weight	Your Grade	Calculated Total
Example	10%	90	.10 x 90 = 9
Homework	30%		.30 x ____ = ____
Exam 1	20%		.20 x ____ = ____
Exam 2	20%		.20 x ____ = ____
Exam 3	20%		.20 x ____ = ____
Attendance	10%		.10 x ____ = ____
		Total =	

Course Policies

Communication

- Emails and MS Teams messages must have the course name and number (GOVT 2306) in the subject line.
- Emails and MS Teams messages will be responded to within 48 hours. If you do not receive a response within that time frame, please forward the original email to me (katie.widner@utdallas.edu) ... it is likely your email was simply overlooked.
- For more details, please visit the Student eLearning Tutorials webpage for video demonstrations on eLearning tools.

Late Work

Late work is not accepted without an approved excuse. If you have outstanding circumstances, please reach out to me and we can work something out. The earlier I know about something, the easier it is for me to make accommodations.

Extra Credit

Extra credit assignments may be offered at the professor's discretion.

Class Participation

Engaging in group or other activities during class that solicit your feedback on homework assignments, readings, or materials covered in the lectures and readings is essential to your success as a student, and our success as a class. Successful participation is defined as consistently adhering to University requirements, as presented in this syllabus. Failure to comply with these University requirements is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct.

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.

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. This course can also be accessed using your university email and chosen password on the Top Hat website. Should you require assistance with Top Hat at any time please contact their Support Team directly by way of email (support@tophat.com), the in-app support button, or by calling 1-888-663-5491. Specific user information may be required by their technical support team when troubleshooting issues.

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.

Student Accommodations

It is the policy and practice of The University of Texas at Dallas to make reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented disabilities. However, written notification from the AccessAbility Resource Center (ARC) is required. If you are eligible to receive an accommodation and would like to request it for this course, please discuss it with me and allow one-week advance notice. 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 ARC for a confidential discussion. ARC 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.

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.

Other Policies

Academic Support Resources	<i>The information contained in the following link lists the University's academic support resources for all students.</i> <i>Please go to http://go.utdallas.edu/academic-support-resources.</i>
UT Dallas Syllabus Policies and Procedures	<i>The information contained in the following link constitutes the University's policies and procedures segment of the course syllabus. Please review the sections regarding the credit/no credit grading option and withdrawal from class.</i> <i>Please go to http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies for these policies.</i>

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