

GOVT 2306.002 - State and Local Government Syllabus Spring 2023

Course Information

Institution: University of Texas at Dallas

School: Economic, Political, and Policy Sciences

Meeting Time: MWF from 10:00 AM to 10:50 AM

Term: Spring 2023

Class Location: HH 2.402

Modality: In-Person

Course Pre-requisites: None

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

Instructor Information

Instructor: Dr. Patrick Muenks

Email Address: patrick.muenks@utdallas.edu

Office Hours: Tuesdays from 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM on Teams.

Students can message or call during the timeframe or schedule an appointment using the link below:
[Click Here to Book an Appointment](#)

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. 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.

Required Textbooks and Materials

There are two required materials for this course: (1) a textbook, and (2) a subscription to a digital learning platform called TopHat. Our textbook is fully integrated into TopHat, which means that you cannot access the textbook without purchasing the TopHat subscription.

Both can be ordered via this link: *TopHat Course Registration*.

Click on the student portal and use the Join Code of **741900** to locate this course.

Accessing the Textbook and Required Materials

Upon purchasing your subscription to TopHat and the textbook (ISBN: 9781774127582), you will have full access to the necessary course materials.

Notes About Class Materials

- These materials are only available to order through the link above or in the invitation link sent to your UT Dallas email address; these items are not available through the UT Dallas bookstore.
- Use your UT Dallas email to subscribe to TopHat.
- If you already purchased a TopHat subscription the Spring 2023 term, you only need to purchase the textbook for this course.
- You only need to purchase the semester-length subscription to complete this course.

What about eLearning/Blackboard?

This section of GOVT 2306 uses Top Hat for its textbook (there is no print version of the text; it is only found on online through 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.

Modality: In-Person

The course is set to be taught as an in-person course meaning students are expected to attend class. If university policy requires the modality of course instruction to be adjusted, students will receive an email from the instructor with updated course information. Unless required by COVID-19 policy or through OSA, video recordings of the class will not be made available to students.

All times listed on the course calendar are in **CT (Central Time Zone)**.

Exam Schedule

Assignment	Date Available	Date Due	Content
Exam 1	February 15	February 17 at 11:59 PM	Chapters 1-5
Exam 2	March 29	March 31 at 11:59 PM	Chapters 6-10
Exam 3	May 3	May 5 at 11:59 PM	Chapters 11-15
Final Exam	May 8	Available for 24 Hours	Chapters 1-15

Homework Submission

All homework assignments are completed through TopHat. All homework assignments are due by 5:00 PM CT on the specified date.

Readings and Homework

Week	Readings	Assessment	Due Date
Week of January 16	Syllabus and Chapter 1	Homework 1	January 27
Week of January 23	Chapter 2 - State Constitutions	Homework 2	January 27
Week of January 30	Chapter 3 - Federalism, States	Homework 3	February 3
Week of February 6	Chapter 4 - Local Governments	Homework 4	February 10
Week of February 13	Chapter 5 - State and Local Government	Homework 5	February 17
Week of February 20	Chapter 6 - Citizen Participation	Homework 6	February 24
Week of February 27	Chapter 7 - Public Opinion, Lobbying	Homework 7	March 3
Week of March 6	Chapter 8 - Executive Branch	Homework 8	March 10
Week of March 13	No Class - Spring Break		
Week of March 20	Chapter 9 - State Legislatures	Homework 9	March 24
Week of March 27	Chapter 10 - State Judiciary	Homework 10	March 31
Week of April 3	Chapter 11 - Taxes and Spending	Homework 11	April 7
Week of April 10	Chapter 12 - Criminal Justice	Homework 12	April 14
Week of April 17	Chapter 13 - Social Welfare, Healthcare	Homework 13	April 21
Week of April 24	Chapter 14 - Education Policy	Homework 14	April 28
Week of May 1	Chapter 15 - Environment and Energy Policy	Homework 15	May 5
Week of May 8	No Class - Finals Week		

Assessment

Course assessment will be completed using homework and exams. Grades are not rounded and extra credit is not offered in the course. However, the course policy drops a student's lowest two homework assignments and lowest exam score when calculating final grades.

Grading Scale

Consistent with UT Dallas policy, students are graded on a plus/minus scale. Grades are not be rounded in this course. Extra credit is not offered in this course. Please see the grade table below:

Grade	Top of Range	Bottom of Range
A+	100	97
A	< 97	>= 93
A-	< 93	>= 90
B+	< 90	>= 87
B	< 87	>= 84
B-	< 84	>= 80
C+	< 80	>= 77
C	< 77	>= 74
C-	< 74	>= 70
D+	< 70	>= 67
D	< 67	>= 64
D-	< 64	>= 60
F	< 60	

Assignment Weights

Assignment	Weight
Homework	40%
Exams	60%
Total	100%

Homework - 40%

There are 15 homework assignments in the course. Homework is integrated into the textbook via TopHat and is completed by answering the questions embedded in the weekly readings in each chapter. Final grades are calculated by taking the average of a student's 13 highest homework assignment scores, weighted as 40% of the final grade.

This provides students the flexibility to miss up to two homework assignments without penalty. In order to receive full credit for the homework assignments, students must answer all of the questions in each chapter. The questions are worth one point each and evaluated equally on two factors: participation and correctness. Participation is whether you progressed through the chapter and attempted

each question. Correctness is whether you provided the right answer to the question. Questions cannot be reopened after a submission is made. Below is a sample calculation for figuring out a grade on a homework assignment.

- Total number of questions in the chapter: 10
- Total number of questions attempted (participation): 10
- Total number of correct answers (correctness): 8
- Calculation: $(10 * 0.5) + (8 * 0.5) = 9$
- Assignment Score: 90%

Exams - 60%

There are four exams in this course: Exams 1-3 and a Final Exam. Exams will be conducted online through TopHat and students are welcome to use course materials and notes. Exams will feature a variety of questions which test your recollection of topics and concepts covered in class along with your ability to critically analyze and apply those topics to the U.S. governmental system. Final grades are calculated by taking the average of a student's three highest exam scores, weighted as 60% of the final grade.

For Exams 1-3, each exam covers five chapters worth of content from the textbook and lecture. The Final Exam is comprehensive and will draw on content from over the course of the semester. Since the final grade is calculated using a student's three highest exam scores, students may miss up to one exam in the course without adversely impacting their grade. Students are given multiple days to complete the exam and exam windows are posted at the start of the semester - please plan accordingly.

- It is the recommendation of the instructor and the design of the course that students plan to complete Exams 1-3 and use the Final Exam to cover unexpected emergencies or as an attempt to improve their grade.

Make-Up Exams

Students are given multiple days to complete an exam and the lowest exam score is dropped from final grade calculations. Documented emergencies and school-sanctioned activities are the only acceptable reasons for make-up exams. Documentation of the absence is required to schedule a make-up exam and approval is subject to the instructor's discretion. All make-up exams must be completed within one week of the scheduled due date.

Additional Exam Information

- For exam availability and dates, please see the Exam Schedule in this document.
- Exams 1-3 will be available after class meets on Wednesday.
- We will not meet for lecture during the exam window. Students are expected and assumed to use this time to take the exam.
- Once you begin the exam, you will have 75 minutes to complete the exam. If you start the exam within 75 minutes of the due date and time, you will not be allotted extra time.
- Exams are online meaning students can select the location where they will complete the exam.
- Coordination or taking the exam as a group is prohibited.
- **It is strongly recommended that you take the exam on-campus in a computer lab or in the library to ensure stable internet access.**
- If your internet connection drops during the exam, the 75 minute timer will continue to run and extra time will not be allotted. Again, it is strongly recommended you complete the exam using a computer on-campus to ensure a stable connection.
- As a precaution, after the exam is available, ensure you are able to view the exam. You can view the exam as an assignment even if you do not start the exam.
- For compatibility, TopHat recommends using FireFox over other browsers.

Final Exam

The Final Exam is comprehensive and will cover Chapters 1-15. The Final Exam will be longer than Exams 1-3 but students will have more time to complete it.

The date and time for the final exam will be updated once the schedule for finals week has been announced.

Course Policies**Communication**

- Emails about the course must be sent using your UT Dallas email and have GOVT 2306 in the subject line. Failure to do so may result in a delayed response from the instructor. Per UT Dallas policy, I will not respond to student emails sent from non UT Dallas email accounts.

- Expect all email messages to be responded to within two business days.
- You may also reach out to the instructor using e-Learning. Please see the e-Learning tutorials for additional information and guides.

Attendance

As an in-person course, attendance is expected and taken at the beginning of each class. While attendance is not directly tied to a student's final grade, the lectures will contain content which is not covered in the textbook but will appear on course assignments. For context, based on historical performance, students that attend class on a regular basis perform up to 13% better on exams and 10% better in the course overall compared to students that do not attend class.

Late Work

Late work is not accepted. The student's lowest two homework grades and lowest exam score will be dropped.

To accommodate the start of the semester, graded assignments do not begin until the second week of class. However, all students are expected to have access to TopHat and the textbook by the end of the first week of class. Inability to access the platform and textbook are not acceptable reasons for failing to access the material in the course. **If a student is experiencing issues accessing TopHat, the textbook, or exams, email the instructor ASAP.**

Extra Credit

There is no extra credit offered in this course and grades are not rounded.

Courseroom Citizenship

This course is meant to serve as an introductory survey of the U.S. Federal Government. Course material may cover topics that some considered to be controversial or provocative - the instructor will do their best to present this material in the context of the subject being discussed. It is incumbent on students to treat all members of the classroom with respect and to maintain a cordial atmosphere as we engage in discussions.

Academic Integrity

Every student at UT Dallas is expected to exercise independent thought and expression as he or she strives for academic achievement. Incorporated in the quest for intellectual growth are the expectations of honesty, originality in written and oral expression, a respect for the exchange of ideas, and

acknowledgement and recognition of the abilities and contributions of others. Please see the university's [academic integrity](#) page for details and tips.

Academic dishonesty is unacceptable under any circumstances. This includes but is not limited to plagiarism, collusion, cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, failure to contribute to a collaborative project, and sabotage. If a student is thought to be engaging in academic dishonesty, they will be referred to the Office of Community Standards and Conduct. For additional details on what may constitute academic dishonesty, please refer to the [university's webpage](#).

Academic Accommodation Information

It is the policy of The University of Texas at Dallas to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and state and local regulations regarding students and applicants with disabilities. In compliance with these laws, the Office of Student AccessAbility (OSA) is dedicated to maintaining an environment that guarantees students with disabilities full access to educational programs, activities and facilities.

It is the student's responsibility to identify himself/herself to OSA and to provide documentation of a disability. Strict documentation guidelines exist for different types of disabilities. See the [OSA website for details](#). The student meets with OSA, who determines appropriate accommodations after reviewing documentation prepared by a licensed professional.

Instructors are under no obligation to provide accommodations for a student who does not identify himself/herself as a student with a disability. If a student requests accommodations for a disability but has not provided the faculty member with an Accommodation Letter from OSA, the instructor will immediately refer the student to OSA. Any documentation received from OSA must cover the current semester. Letters from OSA which do not cover the current semester must be updated before the accommodations will be implemented.

Classroom Conduct Requirements Related to Public Health Measures

UT Dallas will follow the public health and safety guidelines put forth by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), and local public health agencies that are in effect at that time during the Fall 2021 semester to the extent allowed by state governance. Texas Governor Greg Abbott's Executive Order GA-38 prohibits us from mandating vaccines and face coverings for UT Dallas employees, students, and members of the public on

campus. However, we strongly encourage all Comets to get vaccinated and wear face coverings as recommended by the CDC. Check the [Comets United: Latest Updates webpage](#) for the latest guidance on the University's public health measures. Comets are expected to carry out [Student Safety](#) protocols in adherence to the Comet Commitment. Unvaccinated Comets will be expected to complete the [Required Daily Health Screening](#). 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 – UTSP5003](#).

Class Recordings

Students are expected to follow appropriate University policies and maintain the security of passwords used to access recorded lectures. Unless the Office of Student AccessAbility has approved the student to record the instruction, **students are expressly prohibited from recording any part of this course**. Recordings may not be published, reproduced, or shared with those not in the class, or uploaded to other online environments except to implement an approved Office of Student AccessAbility accommodation. Failure to comply with these University requirements is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct.

The instructor may record meetings of this course. These recordings will be made available to all students registered for this class if the intent is to supplement the classroom experience. If the instructor or a UTD school/department/office plans any other uses for the recordings, consent of the students identifiable in the recordings is required prior to such use unless an exception is allowed by law.

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.”