

GOVT 2306.501 State and Local Government Spring 2025

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Meeting Time	Mon/Wed, 5:30 – 6:45 PM
Meeting Location	HH 2.402

Course Description

Survey of state and local government and politics 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

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:

- Online textbook: Brunell, et al. *State and Local Government*. (ISBN 978-1-77412-285-3.)
- Subscription for online learning platform "TopHat"

Both can be ordered via this link here: <https://app.tophat.com/register> (Join Code: 731531)

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 2025 term, you only need to purchase the textbook for this course.
- You only need to purchase the semester-length subscription to complete this course.

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 the Office of Student Affairs, 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).

Tentative Exam Schedule

Assignment	Date Available	Date Due	Content
Exam 1	Feb 27 Thu at 12:00 AM	Feb 28 Fri at 11:59 PM	Chapters 1-5
Exam 2	Apr 10 Thu at 12:00 AM	Apr 11 Fri at 11:59 PM	Chapters 6-10
Exam 3	May 8 Thu at 12:00 AM	May 9 Fri at 11:59 PM	Chapters 11-15
Final Exam	May 12 Mon at 12:00 AM	May 13 Tue at 11:59 PM	Chapters 1-15

Homework Submission

All homework assignments are completed through TopHat. All homework assignments are due on **Friday at 11:59 PM** of the assigned week listed below. **Late work is not accepted.**

Readings and Homework

Week	Readings	Assignment	Due Date
Week of January 21	Syllabus Module 1: Introduction	No HW	
Week of January 27	Module 1: Introduction	HW 1	Jan 31
Week of February 3	Module 2: State Constitutions	HW 2	Feb 7
Week of February 10	Module 3: Federalism and the States	HW 3	Feb 14
Week of February 17	Module 4: Local Governments	HW 4	Feb 21
Week of February 24	Module 5: State and Local Government Relations	HW 5	Feb 28
* Exam 1			
Week of March 3	Module 6: Citizen Participation, Parties, and Elections	HW 6	Mar 7
Week of March 10	Module 7: Public Opinion, Lobbying, and Interest Groups	HW 7	Mar 14
Week of March 17	No Class – Spring Break	No HW	
Week of March 24	Module 8: Executive Branch	HW 8	Mar 28
Week of March 31	Module 9: State Legislatures	HW 9	Apr 4
Week of April 7	Module 10: State Judiciary	HW 10	Apr 11
* Exam 2			
Week of April 14	Module 11: Taxes and Spending	HW 11	Apr 18
Week of April 21	Module 12: Criminal Justice	HW 12	Apr 25
Week of April 28	Module 13: Social Welfare and Health Policy	HW 13	May 2
Week of May 5	Module 14: Education Policy	HW 14&15	May 9
* Exam 3	Module 15: Environmental and Energy Policy		

Assessment

Course assessment will be completed using class participation, homework, and exams. When calculating final grades, the course policy is to drop a student's lowest three homework assignments and lowest exam score. **Grades are not rounded, and extra credit is not offered in the course.**

Assignment Weights

Assignment	Weight
Class Participation	10%
Homework	30%
Exam	60%
Total	100%

Grading Scale

Consistent with UT Dallas policy, students are graded on a plus/minus scale. Grades are not rounded 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 >	

Class Participation (10%)

Regular and punctual class attendance is expected. Absences will result in a deduction in your class participation grade and may affect your ability to answer the exam questions. Attendance will be taken randomly throughout the semester via TopHat. **For excused absences, the related documentation must be submitted to TA within one week of the absence.** You may not dispute your attendance or excused absence if more than one week has passed since the recorded date of absence.

For example, if the instructor has 15 attendance checks across the semester, you check in 13 times over 15.

- Participation Score in Final Score: $(13/15) * 10 = 8.66666$

Homework (30%)

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 percent average of a student's 12 highest homework assignment scores, weighted as 30% of the final grade.

This provides students the flexibility to miss up to three 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.

For example, if you work on a chapter with 10 questions

- Participation - Total number of questions attempted (participation): 10
- Correctness - Total number of correct answers (correctness): 9
- Calculation: $(10 * 0.5) + (9 * 0.5) = 9.5$
- Assignment Score: 95%
- Assignment Score in Final Score: $2.5 * 0.95 = 2.375$

Exams (60%)

There are four exams in this course: Exams 1-3 and a Final Exam. Final grades are calculated by adding student's three highest exam scores, weighted as 60% of the final grade. Students may miss up to one exam in the course without adversely impacting their grade. Alternatively, if a student completes all four exams, the three highest exam scores will be used to calculate their final grade. Students are given

multiple days to complete Exams and exam windows are posted at the start of the semester—please plan accordingly.

Content for Exams 1-3 are primarily drawn from the lectures but will include some content from the text. For Exams 1-3, each exam covers five chapters worth of content. For example, Exam 1 will only include content from Chapters 1-5 and the accompanying lectures. The Final Exam is comprehensive and will draw on content from Chapters 1-15 in the text.

Exams are conducted online through TopHat. Exams 1-3 will consist of 40-55 questions, while the Final Exam will consist of at least 100 questions. Students are encouraged to use their notes from class during the exam.

- 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 final grade.

Final Exam

The Final Exam is comprehensive and will cover Chapters 1-15. It will exclusively draw on content from the text and will not cover content from the lectures. The Final Exam will be longer than Exams 1-3 but students will have more time to complete it. Again, 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 final grade.

Make-up Exams

Make-up exams are only scheduled for official UT Dallas-sponsored activities and religious holy days. Make-up exams will only be scheduled when the instructor is given sufficient notice of the absence prior to the exam. In this instance, sufficient notice is defined as written (email) notice sent at least 10 business days prior to the start of the exam period. If documentation is required, such as an excuse letter, then sufficient notice is not considered complete until all documentation is received. Plainly, all documentation and notice must be sent to the faculty member by email at least 10 business days prior to the opening of the exam. Students that have a religious holy day observance that conflicts with an exam must notify the faculty member by the end of the second week of the semester so that accommodations can be made. To qualify for a make-up exam, the excused absence event must cover the entire duration of the exam window. If the student can complete an exam during the normal exam window, they are expected to do so in lieu of scheduling a make-up exam. Since exam content is drawn from lectures, all make-up exams will be scheduled after the regularly scheduled exam has occurred.

- Make-up exams will cover the same content as the regularly scheduled exam.
- The make-up exam policy applies to Exams 1-3, it does not apply to the Final Exam.
- The excuse letter for UT Dallas-sponsored activities must come from the faculty or staff member serving as an organizational sponsor. If no such letter can be produced, then the event is not considered an official UT Dallas sponsored activity and is not covered by this policy.
- Pre-planned events including but not limited to vacations, family trip service trip, mission trip, or non-official UT Dallas sponsored activity, are not covered by this policy and therefore are not grounds for requesting a make-up exam.
- Unexpected events including but not limited to negligence, illness, car trouble, bereavement, technical issues are not covered by this policy and therefore are not grounds for requesting a make-up exam.

Additional Exam Information

- For exam availability and dates, please see the Exam Schedule in this document.

- Exams are available for review by request and only during an in-person office hour appointment with the faculty member. Exam reviews will be available one week after the exam has closed. Please note, Exam 3 will not be available for review prior to the Final Exam. Since Exam 3 will be based on the lecture and the Final Exam will draw from the text, this should not create issues when preparing for the Final Exam.
- During exam review, in order to protect exam integrity, copying down exam questions or answers is prohibited.
- If the exam window, the dates the exam is available, would include a class meeting, then we will not meet for class in observance of the exam. Students are expected and assumed to have used this time to complete the exam.
- Using AI (e.g., chat GPT) and Internet Search are prohibited.
- Coordination or taking the exam as a group is prohibited.
- It is the recommendation and assumption of the instructor that you complete the exam using a computer lab on-campus. This ensures the most reliable connection and reduces the likelihood of individual device settings from interfering with the exam.
- Technical issues attributed to individual device and device settings are not grounds for an exam exemption. This includes but is not limited to: internet dropping, device connectivity or internet drops, and images failing to load.
- To minimize technical issues, please see the [TopHat Support Center](#) for information including recommended browser and device settings.
- 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.
- If any academic misconduct is reported, I will change the format of the future exams (i.e., close-book and in-class).

Course Policies

Communication

- Emails about the course must be sent using your UT Dallas email and identify the class and section in the email subject (e.g., [GOVT 2306.501] Questions about today's lecture.) 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. Business days are defined as Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM while the university is open. Weekends and university closures are not considered business days. For example, if you email on Friday evening after 5:00 PM, then the expected reply window is up to 5:00 PM on the following Tuesday.
- You may also reach out to the instructor using e-Learning. Please see the e-Learning tutorials for additional information and guides.
- Office hours are confidential meetings. If meeting by Teams, students are expected to take the meeting in a private setting and the instructor will require the meeting to be rescheduled if they believe hosting the meeting may violate FERPA with the presence of a third party.

Class Participation

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. 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.

- Office hour appointments are not designed to be used as a substitute for class lectures. If the instructor believes a student to be abusing office hours as a means of not attending the lectures, the instructor reserves the right to limit office hour usage.
- To incentivize attendance, there will be content covered and made available through the lecture which will not appear in the textbook but will appear on the exam. Partial notes are provided through the slides. To support the attendance policy, annotations or additions to the slides which are used in the lecture are not provided—students are expected to engage in note-taking during the lecture.
- Consistent with the incentive outlined above, if a student misses class, they are encouraged to seek notes from a fellow classmate or to schedule an appointment during office hours. **Lectures are not recorded and copies of class notes will not be sent by the instructor if a student misses class.**
- A student's attendance record will be determined by the official roll (sign-in) taken during class. It is the student's duty to sign-in at the beginning of class. That means being in-class prior to the start of class. **If a student misses the sign-in, then they will not be recorded as having attended class—emails or communications claiming attendance are not accepted.**
- If a student is experiencing difficulty utilizing the sign-in portal, they should reach out to the instructor as soon as possible to resolve the issue.

Late Work

Late work is not accepted. The student's lowest three 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, contact the instructor ASAP.

Extra Credit

There is no extra credit offered in this course.

Grade Calculations

All assignment grades are exported into eLearning and converted by the Learning Management System (LMS) into a percentage. Grades for the course will be calculated and assigned using LMS; alternative calculations of grades are not accepted. Grades are assigned based on the Grading Scale table found in this syllabus and it is the policy of the instructor and the course to not adjusted up, round up, or "bump up" final grades.

Beginning the first exam, a projection of the student's grade, without drops applied, will be posted to eLearning. This will allow students to track their progress in the course. Drops will be applied after the semester has ended. The lowest three homework scores and the lowest exam score are dropped when final grades are calculated. If a student seeks additional relief beyond what is described in the syllabus, then the instructor encourages the student to consider a non-academic withdrawal or to withdraw from the course.

Incomplete Grades

Incomplete grades are at the discretion of the instructor AND may only be considered if a student has completed at least 70% of the coursework. In this course, 70% of the coursework is determined based on the number of assignments completed, not the relative weight of the assignments to the final grade. Additionally, when determining whether 70% of the assignments are completed, the assignment drop policies DO NOT apply and any recorded 0 on assignments will be treated as incomplete coursework. By default, if the course drop policies provide sufficient relief, then an incomplete grade will not be awarded. Additionally, students are not entitled to an incomplete grade and the instructor will exercise discretion

based on the circumstances and totality of the student's participation in class including efforts to complete exams, homework, and attending class. See the UT Dallas Undergraduate Catalog for additional details.

Classroom Citizenship

This course is meant to serve as an introductory survey of the U.S. State and Local 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. All work submitted in this course must be your own; you may not engage in unauthorized collaboration or make use of ChatGPT or other AI composition software. If a student is thought to be engaging in academic dishonesty, they will be referred to the Office of Community Standards and Conduct (OCSC). For additional details on what may constitute academic dishonesty, please refer to the [university's webpage](#).

The syllabus outlines drop policies for homework and exams. Any student found to have engaged in academic misconduct or dishonestly by the Office of Community Standards and Conduct will be unable to utilize the drop policies to cover academic sanctions. For example, if the OCSC recommends a student receive a zero on an exam, the syllabus policy which drops a student's lowest exam score will not cover that zero. In this example, the student will have earned a zero on the sanctioned exam and the student's lowest exam score from the remaining three exams will be dropped. Put another way, any sanctioned issued by the OSCS for an assignment will be reflected in a student's final grade and will not be covered by or subject to the course assignment and exam drop policies.

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 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. Failure to have a current letter on-file is not sufficient grounds to reopen or make-up assignments that would otherwise be covered by an OSA accommodation.

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.

Academic Support Resources

Please visit the [Academic Support Resources](#) page to view the University's academic support resources for all students.

Mental Health Services

Students experiencing anxiety or distress, either from the topics discussed in this class or from other stressors, are encouraged to seek self-care via the on-campus services provided:

- Student Counseling Center Phone: 972-883-2575
- Location: Student Services Building SSB 4.600

If you are having a mental health crisis you can call the 972-UTD-TALK (972-883-8255) or 911

University Syllabus Policies

Please visit the [Syllabus Policies](#) page to view the University's policies and procedures segment of the course syllabus.

Please review the catalog sections regarding the credit/no credit or pass/fail grading option and withdrawal from class.

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