

GOVT 2306.001: State and Local Government

Spring 2025

Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:00-11:15am
ECSW 1.315

Dr. Lauren Santoro
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TEACHING ASSISTANT

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will provide students with an introduction to Texas' state government in the context of the federal government and other US states. The course begins with an overview of federalism and the Texas Constitution. The course moves on to cover the political institutions of state governments, including the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, as well as political parties and interest groups. The course also covers political behavior, including culture, elections, and media. We will conclude with a discussion of public policy and local government.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

In this course, students will:

1. Learn about the interaction between federal, state, and local governments.
2. Identify, describe, and evaluate state political institutions and electoral processes.
3. Analyze and think critically about contemporary developments in Texas politics.
4. Apply course topics meaningfully to living in Texas.

COURSE MATERIALS

Students are **required** to purchase the following:

- 1) We will be using **Top Hat Pro** (www.tophat.com) for attendance, class participation, weekly quizzes, and exams. You will be able to submit answers to in-class questions using Apple or Android smartphones and tablets, laptops, or through text message. We will also be using Top Hat to access the digital interactive textbook, ***State and Local Government***, that we will be using in this class:
 - Thomas Brunell, et al. *State and Local Government*. ISBN 978-1-77412-285-3
 - Top Hat Classroom Subscription. ISBN 978-0-9866151-0-8

For instructions on how to create a Top Hat account and enroll in our Top Hat Pro course, please refer to the invitation sent to your school email address or consult Top Hat's Getting Started Guide (<https://bit.ly/31TGMlw>).

If you already have a Top Hat account, go to <https://app.tophat.com/e/751928> to be taken directly to our course. If you are new to Top Hat, follow the link in the email invitation you received or:

- 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: 751928

The cost of the textbook is \$45 and will be applied at checkout when enrolling in our Top Hat Pro course. Bear in mind that textbook material will be made available in our course throughout the semester, so do not panic if you do not see any in the course upon entry. Top Hat Pro may also require a paid subscription of \$24 if you do not already have one active.

Should you require assistance with Top Hat Pro 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.

GRADING POLICY

First and foremost, grades are earned – and not given – in this class. You *earn* your course grade according to the following policy. If you want a good grade in this class, you will have to put in the effort to earn it.

Students are responsible for doing the assigned readings, attending class, and applying course material outside of the classroom. I reserve the right to change the elements of this syllabus (such as adding pop quizzes) if students are not meeting these basic responsibilities.

There are two grading options for this class, one that includes attendance (**Option A**) and one that does not (**Option B**). I strongly encourage students to choose Option A as your attendance is necessary for mastery of the material for the exams. You should pick an option at the outset of class and stick with it. If you decide to do Option B but don't do well on Exam #1, even if you start attending class after the first exam (i.e., you switch to Option A), you will already be behind on attendance, and those points cannot be made up. At the end of semester, I will calculate your grade according to both options and give you whichever grade is higher.

Grade Item	Option A: Attendance Required	Option B: No Attendance Required
Attendance & Participation	20%	-
Weekly Reading & Engagement Quizzes	20%	25%
Three Exams	60% (20% each)	75% (25% each)
Total	100%	100%

Attendance & Participation (Option A = 20%; Option B = 0%): Classes will take place on campus in ECSW 1.315 during the scheduled time (M/W 10:00-11:15am) each week. The lecture will **not** be livestreamed, nor will it be recorded.

You are expected to be physically in person throughout the semester. Attendance will be taken each class via Top Hat. You will be prompted to enter a participation code. This code will be given out in class only. You are prohibited from sharing the code on group messaging apps, such as Discord or WhatsApp, or from texting it to your friends in the class. Students caught sharing the class attendance code will be reported to the university for violation of school policy. In-person attendance checks will take place randomly throughout the semester. Students who are not in person, but have inputted the online attendance code, will be immediately reported to the university.

You will have a 15-minute window to input the attendance code. After 15 minutes, the code will close, and you will be counted absent.

In addition, in class you will be asked several participation questions, which you will be required to answer. These questions mimic exam questions and are aimed to test your mastery of the material via Top Hat. They are for *completion only* and are not graded for the correct answer. Lecture slides will be posted on the corresponding eLearning Content folder after class.

While you are expected to physically be at each class, I understand that things happen. Each student is permitted three absences – for which no penalty will occur – no questions asked (meaning that you do not have to obtain approval for missing these classes). After that, you will lose participation points for continued absences. Do NOT email me or the TA if you will be missing class. The only exception is if you have an excused absence due to:

- Religious holy day (@ least 7 days in advance)
- Death in the immediate family (@ least 24 hours in advance)
- University sponsored event (@ least 7 days in advance)
- Illness requiring a doctor's note (which will be verified; 24 hours)

If this applies to you, you must get **advance written** approval for missing class – if you don't want it to count against your attendance grade. To get written approval, e-mail me, the Professor, at least 7 days in advance for religious holy days and university sponsored events to request the absence and provide the appropriate documentation (for sponsored events). For a death in the immediate family or illness requiring a verified doctor's note, approval must be secured 24 hours in advance via email and with appropriate documentation (when applicable). See the 'religious holy day' policy below for more information.

If you choose Option A, you are expected to be fully engaged in the class. This means no talking, surfing the internet, or being on your phone, etc.

If you choose Option B, you should still come to class and enter the attendance code each time to get credit for your attendance in case you want to switch to Option A after Exam #1.

Weekly Reading & Engagement Quizzes (Option A = 20%; Option B = 25%): You will be responsible for answering 5-10 reading and lecture comprehension questions each week. **This includes a mandatory syllabus and policy agreement quiz during the first week.** These quizzes will take place on Top Hat. Questions are graded for completion only and NOT for correctness. You will have the full week to take the quiz. Specifically, the weekly quizzes will be available each Monday at 7am. You'll have until Sunday by 11:59pm to complete them. For example, the reading quiz for the Texas Constitution will be available on Monday, 2/3, at 7:00am, and you'll have until Sunday, 2/9, at 11:59pm to complete it. **Because you have a full week to complete these quizzes, no make-ups will be permitted for any reason,** including technical issues.

Exams (Option A = 60%; Option B = 75%): You will take three exams over the course of the semester. Each exam is mandatory and worth 20% (for Option A) or 25% (for Option B) of your final grade. These exams will assess your understanding of class and reading material.

Each exam will consist of 60 multiple choice and True-False questions. Approximately forty of those questions will be drawn directly from the lecture material, and at least twenty will be drawn directly from your class readings. Thus, it is imperative to attend and actively participate in all class sessions. You will have 55 minutes to complete the exam.

Exams will be taken on-line via the Top Hat platform during the scheduled class time (10:00-11:15am on Wednesdays). You will need to access Top Hat on Google Chrome on your computer or other smart device. If you'd prefer, you are welcome to come to take the exam in the classroom at the scheduled time – I will be in class to answer questions and help with any issues that occur.

If you want the full 55 minutes to take the exam, you will need to start by 10:20am. No matter when you start, the exam will close at 11:15am.

You **are** allowed to use your notes and readings for the exam, but please remember that you have limited time (<1 minute per question) so advanced preparation will still be necessary.

While exams will primarily focus on material since the last exam, you'll need to draw on your knowledge of past course material; thus, each exam is cumulative.

- **Exam #1** will occur on-line from 10-11:15am on Wednesday, February 19th and will cover material from Weeks 1-4.
- **Exam #2** will occur on-line from 10-11:15am on Wednesday, April 2nd and cover material from Weeks 1-10, with *primary* focus on material from Weeks 6-10.
- **Exam #3** will occur on-line from 10-11:15am on Wednesday, May 7th and cover material from Weeks 1-15, with *primary* focus on material from Weeks 12-15.
- There is NO final exam. Exam #3 is the last exam you will take in the class.

An optional review session will take place the class period before each exam. Attendance will be taken at these review sessions, but your absence (if doing Option A) will not be counted against you.

No make-up exams will be permitted. There are some exceptions to this, however. The exceptions include a death in your immediate family, a religious holy day, a university sponsored event, or sickness requiring a doctor's note (see: Attendance and Participation). To grant an exception due to the reasons previously listed, you'll need to give 7 days written notice (for religious holy days or university sponsored event) or a 1-day (full 24 hours) written notice in the other instances. No make-up exams will be given without prior written consent for ANY reason (even those listed above) if not secured 7 days/24 hours in advance. Accordingly, NO exceptions will be made on the day of the exam; please do not ask for one. See 'last chance' policy for further information.

To obtain advanced approval to take the make-up exam, reach out to me via e-mail to request the absence and provide appropriate documentation (where applicable). You will need to read and sign the "Make-up Exam Policy" document before permission to take the make-up exam is granted (available on eLearning).

The make-up exam for everyone will consist of **six short answer questions**. You will be asked to answer at least three of them. You will hand write your answers to this exam. Accordingly, you'll need to bring a writing utensil and exam booklet. You will be able to bring one page of notes. You will have 60 minutes to complete the make-up exam. This exam will be completed during the Monday class period immediately following the exam in Professor Santoro's office. This is the **only time** the make-up exam will be offered. Accordingly, if you miss this opportunity, you have no other opportunity to take the exam. You can bring a one-page (front and back) sheet of notes. Notes can be typed or handwritten but must be no more than a single page.

Extra Credit Opportunities: Extra credit WILL NOT be offered over the course of the semester. Please don't ask for additional extra credit opportunities.

GRADING SCHEME

A = 94 or above; A- = 90-93
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 = 59 or below

COURSE POLICIES

Students should familiarize themselves with official UTD course policies and procedures, which can be found here: <https://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>

Technology Requirements:

Cell Phones: As adults, I expect you to monitor your cell phone use accordingly. Cell phones may only be used for in-class activities only (e.g., Top Hat).

If I see your phone outside of those approved times, I will provide a verbal warning and/or ask you to leave the classroom. In addition, you will lose attendance points for the day. After two warnings, each student will lose two points on their final course grade each time a phone is seen or heard. If a phone is answered in class, no warnings will be given, and a student will automatically lose two points on their final grade. I reserve the right to escalate this policy if it becomes a problem in the classroom and/or with a certain individual.

Laptops: You are welcome to use your laptop or tablet to take notes for class, and at times we may use multiple laptops to look up information and watch or listen to course material. However, I expect these items to only be used for class-related purposes and not for your amusement or distraction.

You should be aware that there is a growing body of evidence that indicates students take better notes by hand and so learn more (<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>), and that laptop users' tendency to "multitask" during class negatively affects the learning outcomes of those sitting around them (<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0360131512002254>).

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. Any recordings will be available to all students registered for this class as they are intended 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.

OSA Accommodations: If you are a student with OSA Accommodations that you will be using for the course, please reach out to me via e-mail as soon as possible so that I can make sure that we are meeting your needs.

Communication: In this class, e-mail will be used to communicate course deadlines and important announcements. You are responsible for checking your official UT Dallas e-mail every

day for class work and announcements. All course communication will be either through eLearning or UTD email.

All e-mails must be sent through your UTD e-mail address. University policy dictates this, and we do not deviate from this. **We will not discuss grades over e-mail; grades can only be discussed face-to-face.**

You are expected to follow these guidelines when constructing your e-mail:

- Be respectful and polite.
- Include an appropriate salutation (greeting).
- Use complete sentences and follow standard grammar rules. Do not use slang words, acronyms or other informal language.
- End the e-mail with your first and last name.

If you follow the guidelines above, you should expect a response from us within a 24-hour period during normal business hours (8am-5pm on Monday through Friday).

Sending a professional e-mail is a good skill to develop early on in your career. I encourage you to consult the guides found on the following webpages:

- <http://www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor>
- <https://chrisblattman.com/blog/2020/11/08/students-how-to-email-to-your-professor-employer-and-professional-peers/>

Email Response Policy: Both myself and the TA are committed to responding in a timely manner during normal business hours (8am-5pm on Monday through Friday). Due to the nature and extent of our responsibilities, an immediate response is not always possible. We commit to responding to your emails within 24 hours on business days. Accordingly, do not expect an immediate response, especially the day of class.

Class Discussion Guidelines: Discussion and critical engagement of material with others is an imperative, life-long skill. Disagreement is not a bad thing; it provides opportunities to learn, engage, and grow. Given the volatile nature of politics and political issues today, discussion can be emotionally charged. I expect students to keep an open mind, seek to learn about “the other side,” and evaluate information considering their own biases.

Guidelines for Class Discussion

1. *Be helpful:* Is your comment helpful? Remarks and responses should add to the discussion by articulating a different perspective, expanding on class material, or asking a question that is useful for other students. Debate is encouraged if you respond to the **ideas** shared by other student(s) and not attack the students themselves.
2. *Be polite:* Is your comment polite? Remarks and responses should respect fellow users and not include insulting or abrasive language. Foul language is not permitted.

3. *Be sensitive*: Is your comment sensitive? Remarks and responses should take care to be sensitive to users with different cultures and backgrounds.
4. *Be appropriate*: Is the content of your remark appropriate? Users are not allowed to discuss inappropriate (e.g., obscene) material.

Because some of our communications may occur on-line, please be mindful of class and university guidelines, including being respectful, helpful, and appropriate in all communications with the professor, teaching assistant(s), and other students. All students who do not adhere to these guidelines will be removed from the class session and reported to the university.

Disruptive Behavior: Disruptive behavior is defined as “behavior that interrupts or interferes with daily functions of the University of the education processes” by the Dean of Students at UTD. To create a safe and welcoming environment for learning, no disruptive behavior is allowed in this class. Students who make inappropriate (e.g., hostile or threatening) remarks on-line or in class will be reported to the Dean of Students.

No Plagiarism: In particular, you should familiarize yourself with the concept of plagiarism – see the “Academic Integrity” section from the link above. Plagiarism is NOT tolerated in this course. If you have any questions about this, ask me before you turn in an assignment or take an exam. As previously mentioned, sharing the attendance code with individuals who are not in class is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct as well as inputting an attendance code when you are not physically present in class. Each violation will be immediately reported to the university. The use of ChatGPT or any other form of AI is strictly prohibited in this course.

Contesting your Grade: It is understandable that, at times, you have questions or concerns about a grade you received on one of your exams. To turn questions about your grade into a learning experience, your grade dispute will be received in the following way:

- **Cooling off period:** Neither I nor your TA will consider any grade related inquiries within the first 48 hours after the grades have been handed out. This ‘cooling off’-period provides the opportunity to let the initial emotions subside and think more clearly about the issue at hand.
- **Office hour review:** You can review your exams in the Professor’s office hours. If you have a question(s) about one of the questions on the exam, I am happy to address them there. If you do not agree with me, you’ll be required to write a short memo.
- **Written memo:** Write a short memo explaining why you believe that your answer is correct, and why you therefore should have received full points. It is expected that you address the comments that I have provided for you in class or office hours. This step serves the purpose of encouraging you to critically re-evaluate the answer you gave on the exam. Looking through your notes and developing a case for your answer is an additional learning opportunity.
- **Meeting and resolution:** Send the written memo to me and the Teaching Assistant via e-mail, and we will decide if an in-person meeting is necessary to move forward.

Calculating Your Grade: First, grades on eLearning (not Top Hat) are always your final grades. Calculating your grade in this class is straightforward.

- For Option A: Consider each portion of your grade out of 20 points (100 points total for the class); it's 20 points for attendance, 20 for weekly quizzes, and 20 for each exam ($20 \times 3 = 60$). You will need to calculate your exam scores out of 20 points.
- For Option B: Consider each portion of your grade out of 25 points (100 points total for the class); it's 25 for weekly quizzes, and 25 for each exam ($25 \times 3 = 75$). You will need to calculate your exam scores out of 25 points.
- If you need help, you can refer to this resource:
<https://www.rapidtables.com/calc/grade/grade-calculator.html>

Midterm Grades: I am required to provide a midterm grade to the university. The midterm grade is not an actual grade; it only serves as indication of your progress in the course. Your Exam #1 grade will be reported to the university as your midterm grade.

Class Dismissal: Class will be dismissed when the Professor says so. Do not start packing up and gathering your things until you are dismissed.

Religious Holy Days: UT Dallas will excuse a student from class or other required activities, including examinations and travel time for the observance of a religious holy day for a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property tax under Section 11.20, of the *Texas Tax Code*.

Approval to miss class or an exam for observance of a religious holy day must be obtained in writing at least 7 days in advance of the absence so that appropriate accommodations can be made. To request approval, please e-mail me at least 7 days in advance and kindly and respectfully inform me of the nature of your absence. **Advanced approval must be obtained**, or I cannot excuse your absence.

Syllabus Quiz: All students must complete a mandatory syllabus quiz during the first week of class. Specifically, it should be completed by 11:59pm on Wednesday, January 29th on Top Hat. This quiz serves as formal recognition that you've read the syllabus and agree to class requirements.

Last Chance Policy: I understand that life happens – sometimes you sleep through an exam or car trouble prevents you from getting to class for the exam. Accordingly, I offer each student ONE 'last chance' exception each semester. If you miss an exam for any reason (other than the exceptions listed in the "Attendance & Participation" section that were secured *in advance*), you are eligible to take a 'last chance' make-up exam. But, again, this option is only for students to use one time per semester and one time only.

The 'last chance' exam for everyone will consist of **six short answer questions**. You will be asked to answer at least three of them. You will hand write your answers to this exam. Accordingly, you'll need to bring a writing utensil and exam booklet. You will have 60 minutes

to complete the make-up exam. **This exam will be completed during the Monday class period immediately following the exam in Professor Santoro's office.** This is the **only time** the 'last chance' exam will be offered. Accordingly, if you miss this opportunity, you have no other opportunity to take the exam.

You do not have to let us know you will be taking your 'last chance'. Simply show up at Professor Santoro's office on the Monday immediately following the exam you missed with a writing utensil and exam booklet. You can bring a one-page (front and back) sheet of notes. Notes can be typed or handwritten but must be no more than a single page.

As this 'last chance' option is offered as a courtesy to you, no other opportunities will be given for any reason. You are only eligible to take one 'last chance' exam each semester. Additionally, your grade on the 'last chance' exam is final and not open to debate for any reason. You are not eligible for this 'last chance' if you participated in the on-line exam; your grade cannot be "swapped". Your attendance at the class period that you miss to take the 'last chance' exam cannot be excused. Students who attempt to game the system will be penalized a full letter grade on their exam. Additionally, the final course grade will be reduced for any student who requests any additional exceptions outside of the 'last chance' and make-up policies.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Following this schedule is imperative to your success in this class. You should familiarize yourself with it. While the topics will remain, some of the dates and readings may need to change depending on how much material we are able to go through together. To ensure that the class is flexible, this schedule is subject to change. In the cases where it does change, I will communicate it both in class and via e-mail.

Week	Date	Topics	Reading Assignment
1	Wednesday, 1/22	Course Introduction*	SALG: Chapter 1, Intro and Section 1.1 *Complete Syllabus Quiz
2	Monday, 1/27	Texas Political Culture	State and Local Political Culture: http://bit.ly/3njrzCW
	Wednesday, 1/29	Federalism	SALG: Chapter 2, all
3	Monday, 2/3	Texas Constitution	Declaration of Causes: http://bit.ly/2PcxWrW
	Wednesday, 2/5		SALG: Chapter 1, Sections 1.4 & 1.4.1
4	Monday, 2/10	Legislature	SALG: Chapter 3, all
	Wednesday, 2/12		
5	Monday, 2/17	Review #1	
	Wednesday, 2/19	Exam #1	
6	Monday, 2/24	Executive & Governor	SALG: Chapter 4, all
	Wednesday, 2/26		
7	Monday, 3/3	Judiciary	SALG: Chapter 5, all
	Wednesday, 3/5		

8	Monday, 3/10	Capital Punishment	The State of Capital Punishment: https://bit.ly/3CUgYsX
	Wednesday, 3/12	Political Parties	SALG: Chapter 6, 6.2 (6.2, 6.2.1 – 6.2.3)
9	No Class: Spring Break		
10	Monday, 3/24	Interest Groups	SALG: Chapter 7, 7.2-7.3
	Wednesday, 3/26		
11	Monday, 3/31	Review #2	
	Wednesday, 4/2	Exam #2	
12	Monday, 4/7	Voting	SALG: Chapter 6, 6.0-6.1 (6.1.1 – 6.1.4)
	Wednesday, 4/9		
13	Monday, 4/14	Campaigns & Elections	SALG: Chapter 6, 6.3 (6.3.1 – 6.3.3) - 6.4
	Wednesday, 4/16		
14	Monday, 4/21	Policy	Disaster Surveillance in the U.S.: https://bit.ly/35GOXUZ (pg. 1-8; 28-29); SALG: Chapter 8, all
	Wednesday, 4/23		
15	Monday, 4/28	Local Government	SALG: Chapter 9, all
	Wednesday, 4/30		
16	Monday, 5/5	Review #3	
	Wednesday, 5/7	Exam #3	