

University of Texas at Dallas
GOVT 2306.001 Texas State and Local Politics
Fall 2013

Time: 3:00 pm – 3:50 pm; Days: MWF; Location: CN 1.120

Instructor: Dr. T Price Dooley

Office Location: TBA

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Email: tpd130130@utdallas.edu; Office Hours:

MW 1:30 pm – 3:00 pm and by appointment.

TA: Ms. Whitney Manzo

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MW 4:00 pm – 5:30 pm

Required texts:

Title: Governing Texas

Authors: Champagne and Harpham

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company; 1 edition (February 11, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0393920356

ISBN-13: 978-0393920352

Additional Reading Material:

Supplemental reading material will be provided by the professor periodically throughout the semester in-class or via electronic delivery on Blackboard.

Course Description

This course introduces students to the governance and politics of Texas State and local government with a particular focus on the constitution, institutions, culture, and history that have defined Texas state government. Additionally, the course will include an exploration of the cities, counties, special districts, and local school districts that impact Texas. Local governments, in Texas, all too often get shortchanged when people think about state politics. Yet, these governments provide most of the essential services to Texans. Students will gain an understanding of the shape and pattern of Texas government and its relationship to the United States government.

Course Objectives:

- 1) To provide students with an understanding of Texas government, thus enhancing the ability of students to participate in state-level public policy issues and debates.
- 2) To inform students of the many functions of Texas state government.
- 3) To allow students to critically analyze, in a comparative setting, the various laws, programs, and services provided by the State of Texas.
- 4) To inform how political culture impacts policymaking on both the state and local level in Texas.
- 5) To inform students of the many unique aspects of Texas governmental processes and structures.

Course Format:

The class format will consist of lectures by the instructor and class participation by students. This means that students must be prepared to discuss assigned readings in class.

Assignments:

1) Exam I, Exam II and Final Exam: The material covered on exams will come from class readings and class lectures. The exams may consist of a combination of multiple-choice, essay questions and short identification.

Exam Calendar:

Exam I: September 20th

Exam II: October 18th

Final Exam: December 13th – December 19th

2) Interview of a Texas State, local or administrative official: Each student will interview either an elected official or administrative official in Texas State government. The interview should consist of the following questions:

1. What is your educational and professional background?
2. Why did you choose to work in state government?
3. What are your primary job duties and responsibilities?
4. What are the positive aspects of your job?
5. What are the negative aspects of your job?
6. What are the most challenging aspects of your job?
7. What types of organizations and individuals do you routinely interact with? (other agencies within same level of government, other levels of government, private and/or non-profit sector, citizens, citizen groups, etc.)

Examples of elected officials:

State level: senator, representative, commissioner

Local level: County executive, justice of the peace, county clerk, county sheriff, city council member, mayor, school board member

Examples of administrative officials:

Secretary of state, City manager, assistant city manager, department head/director of any state, county, or city department; a superintendent or principal.

Format for the interview:

Each interview summary should be 2-3 pages in length. It should be typed, double-spaced with a 12 point font, with each page numbered. A cover page should accompany each assignment. The following should be centered on the cover page:

Student's Name
Title of Assignment
Professor's Name
Name of Course
Date of Assignment

Content for the interview:

The written summary should address the answers to the questions listed above in essay form.

Purpose of the interview assignment:

This assignment will familiarize students with a specific position within Texas state or local government and the roles and responsibilities of that position.

DUE DATE: October 25

HINT: Elected and administrative officials are very busy people. It is to your advantage to schedule the interview as early as possible in the semester to meet the due date for this assignment.

3) Blackboard discussion posts.

Students will review and post their thoughts, analyzes, ideas, and opinions relative to discussion topics posted by the professor concerning topics central to Texas State politics. Students should utilize supporting literature in their posts (either from the text, academic journals or other web-based resources).

Format for discussion posts:

Each post should be at minimum 2 to 3 paragraphs in length and should clearly reflect the student's own thoughts and perspectives. Cogent responses to other student posts of acceptable length will count toward the 2 to 3 paragraph minimum.

Content of the discussion posts:

The discussion post should include the following information in essay format:

- 1) A definitive statement of agreement or disagreement to the question detailed.
- 2) Supporting evidence/rationale as to why the student agrees or disagrees.
- 3) At least one source in support of the student's position (either from the text, academic journals or other web-based resources).
- 4) Maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect and academic integrity.

Purpose of Blackboard discussion board assignment:

This assignment will familiarize students with the variety, complexity, and controversial nature of issues in Texas politics.

DUE DATE: The Blackboard discussion posts will be due as assigned on Blackboard throughout the semester. Typically, they will be posted with a lead time of at least one week. Late posts will not be accepted.

4) Texas State Policy Brief

Each student or student group will research a governmental policy problem pertinent to Texas state government. Appropriate policy problem topics include policies on voting and elections, Texas government recession response and recovery efforts, Texas policies relative to implementation of federal laws. Texas economic and community development policies, school board governance and local school district issues, citizen participation in local government, local government finance and budget issues, evaluation of special assessment districts, local government collaboration, etc.

Purpose of Policy Brief:

The purpose of the policy brief is twofold: 1) to provide students with research and writing skills, and 2) to allow students to become knowledgeable on an important Texas state policy issue.

Partial Research Source list:

Texas Politics accessed at <http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu>

Governing accessed at <http://www.governing.com>

Texas Legislature Online accessed at <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us>

National Conference of State Legislatures accessed at <http://www.ncsl.org>

Texas Legislative Council accessed at <http://www.tlc.state.tx.us/policy.htm>

Politifacts Texas accessed at <http://www.politifact.com/texas>

The Texas Tribune accessed at <http://www.texastribune.org>

The Dallas Morning News accessed at <http://www.dallasnews.com>

See also the state of Texas website at <http://www.texas.gov/en/Discover/Pages/agency-finder.aspx> for a list of Texas state agencies.

Paper format:

From 1 to 7 students will produce a professional policy brief between 4 to 6 pages in length. Formatting should be consistent with a policy brief with spacing as appropriate. Font should be 12 point Times New Roman or 11 point Calibri. Margins should have 1 inch top, left, and right with a ½ inch bottom margin. Each student or group must get their topic approved by the professor and provide an executive summary of the policy to be discussed with a tentative list of sources by the 4th week of the semester. A minimum of 3 sources are required for the brief. Please cite sources appropriately as any improper citation may lead to charges of plagiarism. Please refer to the academic integrity policy noted on the university website.

Policy Brief Outline:

In addition to the title the student's or group of student's completed policy brief should have the following elements:

Title	Purpose	Notes
<i>Executive summary</i>	Convey the importance and relevance of the policy brief, and compel the reader to read on	Describe the problem. Outline why the current approach isn't working. Prescribe a new action. Maximum 150 words
<i>Context and importance of problem</i>	Convince the reader that a current and urgent problem exists and requires new action	Clearly state the problem or issue. Provide overview on the root causes of the problem. Describe implications of the problem
<i>Critique of policy option(s)</i>	Detail shortcomings of the current approach, to illustrate the need for change	- Outline policy options. Describe why/how the current (or proposed) approach is ineffective
<i>Policy recommendation(s)</i>	Describe the policy approach you recommend	- Rationalize your recommendation with evidence
<i>Policy actions</i>	Suggest concrete actions to address problem or issue	- Breakdown the specific practical steps or measures that need to be implemented, and by whom
<i>Endnotes</i>	To keep body of brief concise this section is necessary for additional support & citation.	- Statistics, graphs, legislation- Author information
<i>Sources</i>	To lead readers to further reading	3-5 sources, of greater depth and detail- Author contact information

DUE DATE: November 22

Course Evaluation:

Exam I	100
Exam II	100
Final Exam	100
Discussion Board Postings	50
Local gov't interview	75
Texas State Policy Brief	<u>100</u>
Total	525

Semester Grade Calculations:

There are 525 points possible in this course – three exams worth 100 points each, discussion board posts worth 50 points, a governmental individual interview project assignment worth 75 points and a policy brief worth 100 points. Your course grade will be calculated as follows:

Grading Scale:

A: 94-100	B-: 80-83	D+: 67-69
A-: 90-93	C+: 77-79	D: 64-66
B+: 87-89	C: 74-76	D-: 60-63
B: 84-86	C-: 70-73	F: below 60

Grading Rubric for Written Assignments:

Followed Instructions	10%
Grammar	20%
Organization	20%
Content	40%
Professional Appearance	<u>10%</u>
Total	100%

CLASSROOM POLICIES:**Policy on Attendance:**

Class attendance is critical to success in this course. Lecture material includes substantial information not found in the textbooks. Further, the professor will **NOT** administratively drop a student for non-attendance. As a student, it is your responsibility to be aware of the withdrawal deadlines and drop the course if you are no longer attending. Failure to drop the course will result in an F being awarded at the end of the semester.

Policy on Classroom Conduct:

- **Students are expected to arrive on time, be prepared to discuss reading material, and participate in class discussions.**
- **All cell phones must be turned off and stored out of sight – NO EXCEPTIONS.** The student will receive a warning the first time the cell phone rings in the classroom. The second time the cell phone rings, a grade of F will be awarded to the student.
- **Students are not to leave the classroom once class has started.** If a student must leave class early, the student must inform the instructor prior to the beginning of the class.
- **Students may use laptops in class only for note taking.** If a student is observed using the Internet or e-mailing a warning will be given. The second time the student is observed using the Internet or e-mailing a grade of F will be awarded to the student.

Policy on Class Participation:

Students are expected to participate in class discussions. This means that students must read assignments and be prepared to answer questions and ask questions in class.

Policy on Make-Up Exams and Projects:

Make-up work is given **only** in cases of serious illness or death in the family, verified by a written note from physician or other appropriate party.

Policy on Late Assignments:

Assignments must be turned in on the date and time the assignment is due. 10 points will be deducted for each day an assignment is late. An assignment is late if not turned in by the specified date and time.

NO EXCEPTIONS!

Note: Students should familiarize themselves with the various policies of the University as outlined in the University of Texas at Dallas Student Handbook.

Academic Policies:

Students should familiarize themselves with the policies on admissions, academic appeals, departments, and services offered at UTD.

The information contained in the following link constitutes the University’s policies and procedures segment of the course syllabus.

Please go to <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies> for these policies.

Class Schedule

DATE	TOPIC/ASSIGNMENT
Week 1: August 26 – 30	TOPIC: Course introduction and syllabus review. The nature and theories of power. Metrics associated with TX culture and government. Geographic regions, demographics and the economy. READ: Champagne and Harpham, Chapter 1 – The Political Culture, People, and Economy of Texas
Week 2: September 2 – 6	TOPIC: The changing population dynamic and its implications. What factors influenced early development in Texas (industrialization, immigration, other changing demands)? Federalism and the changing relationship between Texas and the United States central government. What can be learned? READ: Champagne and Harpham, Chapter 1 – The Political Culture, People, and Economy of Texas; Chapter 2 – Texas and the Nation
Week 3: September 9 – 13	TOPIC: The Texas Constitution. What Texas government does and why it matters? How has the Texas Constitution evolved over time? What are the key features of each of the 7 Texas Constitutions? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the modern Texas Constitution? READ: Champagne and Harpham, Chapter 3 – The Texas Constitution
Week 4: September 16 – 20	TOPIC: Political Parties in Texas READ: Champagne and Harpham, Chapter 4 – Political Parties in Texas EXAM I: September 20 (Covers material both lecture and text from Weeks 1 – 3)
Week 5: September 23 – 27	TOPIC: Elections in Texas. The impact of interest groups on the political process in Texas. READ: Champagne and Harpham, Chapter 5 – Elections in Texas; Chapter 6 – Interest Groups and Lobbying

Week 6: September 30 – October 4	TOPIC: The Impact of Interest groups on the political process in Texas. The Texas Legislature. READ: Champagne and Harpham, Chapter 5 – Elections in Texas; Chapter 6 – Interest Groups and Lobbying; Champagne and Harpham, Chapter 7 – The Texas Legislature DUE: Paper topic, outline, and source list
Week 7: October 7 – 11	TOPIC: The Texas Legislature READ: Champagne and Harpham, Chapter 7 – The Texas Legislature
Week 8: October 14 - 18	TOPIC: The Texas Executive Branch. READ: Champagne and Harpham, Chapter 8 – The Texas Executive Branch EXAM II: October 18 (Covers material both lecture and text from Weeks 4 – 7) Midterm Grades Due: Friday October 18
Week 9: October 21 – 25	TOPIC: The Texas Judiciary READ: Champagne and Harpham, Chapter 9 – The Texas Judiciary DUE: Interview with elected administrative official – October 25
Week: 10: October 28 – November 1	TOPIC: Crime and Corrections Policy READ: Champagne and Harpham, Chapter 10 – Crime and Corrections Policy
Week 11: November 4 – November 8	TOPIC: The Budgetary Process READ: Champagne and Harpham, Chapter 11 – Public Finance in Texas
Week 12: November 11 – November 15	TOPIC: Public Policy in Texas READ: Champagne and Harpham, Chapter 12 – Public Policy in Texas
Week 13: November 18 – 22	TOPIC: Local Government in Texas specifics and comparative analysis. READ: Champagne and Harpham, Chapter 13 – Local Government in Texas DUE: Policy Brief – November 22
Week 14: November 25 – 29	TOPIC: Optional Policy Brief Presentations (worth 20 % of policy brief). Texas Bureaucracy READ: Lecture PowerPoint on Texas Bureaucracy
Week 15: December 2 – 6	TOPIC: Community and Economic Development in Texas READ: Selected readings on Blackboard.
Week 16: December 9 – 11	TOPIC: Review, wrap up and closing remarks. What have we learned? READ: Selected Readings on Blackboard.
Week 17: December 13 – 19	Final Exams (Covers material both lecture and text from Weeks 8 – 16)

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