

POLS 2306: Introduction to Texas Government

Fall 2023

Nickolas Rios – Professor

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Course Time: MWF 10:10am-11:05am

Office Hours: MW 12:00pm-1:30pm & Appointment

Classroom: Braithwaite Bldg. Room 01030

Office: CAS 114

Course Description & Objectives

This course is designed to introduce students to the institutions of the Texas government, using the prior civic understanding each student has. The course investigates the behavioral trends that explain how individuals work within these institutions to change laws. The course also explores topics where students can challenge their understanding of government by comparing how state politics is unique from the federal government and identifying the dates of significant reforms to the lawmaking process.

Learning Objectives

This course is designed with the objective of obtaining a comprehensive knowledge of Texas's politics by the end of the semester. This can be reflected by the ability to:

- Analyze philosophical foundations of the state's political system by comparing the political culture of regions in Texas.
- Describe how branches of government in Texas interact with one another and what the means for the power one individual can have.
- Appraise current events to highlight the importance of both constitutions in today's society.
- Consider the foundation of partisan preferences and evaluate how partisanship has shaped Texas into a one-party state and the consequences of this affiliation.

Students who will do best in the course will understand how political contexts shape how institutions function and identify the processes in which the public can influence how the government operates.

Required Reading Materials

Sterken, Jr. Robert, Marcus Stadelmann, and Eric Lopez. 2019. *Uncovering Texas Politics*. Tyler, TX: University of Texas at Tyler.

Sterken, Jr. Robert. 2016. *Bill Ratliff: A Profile of Courage and Leadership in American Politics*.

Owens, Mark, Kenneth A. Wink, and Kenneth Bryant, Jr. 2022. *Battle for the Heart of Texas: Political Change in the Electorate*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

With Additional Newspaper and Articles to supplement

Student Conduct

I have high expectations for each student in this class, which are based on your academic performance to get to this point and my belief that you will treat each of your fellow classmates with respect. My goal is to facilitate a supportive and engaging class experience for everyone and one part of that is eliminating disruptive behavior. Using technology in a way that distracts others and demonstrates a lack of respect for the instructor is unacceptable.

Expectations for all work

All work must be original - including only direct quotes without any analysis will result in a 0. Work that largely summarizes or only paraphrases work from other sources will not receive more than a B-. A paper must synthesize arguments and facts to build justifications for the author's main point (or argument).

All missed in-class activities will be counted as a zero, if not excused beforehand.

Should it be necessary for a student to make up either the exam, which will be done toward the end of the term.

All out of class assignments are due at the beginning of the class. Failure to turn in an assignment on time will result in a penalty of one letter grade per day. Assignments not received within three days of the deadline will no longer be accepted.

All readings are expected to be completed before class. Although not all readings will be discussed in class, this does not negate your responsibility to know the assigned material.

Assignments

Reflection and Quizzes:

To have an engaging conversation, we have to start with a common understanding about a topic. This will start by answering questions from the reading and your existing knowledge or quiz questions to recall specific details. Each of these assignments will be worth 10 points based on quality (excellent, sufficient, lacking detail, incorrect, poor, incomplete) or quantity, percentage of quiz questions correct. The top ten will count towards your overall grade.

Three Exams:

The first two exams are each worth 100 points. The final exam, worth 100 points *will be* cumulative in that you will be asked to draw connections across topics covered throughout the class. Each exam will offer different types of short-answer, matching, and multiple-choice questions. Each question will hold different point values. *Missing an exam without the confirmation of an alternative test date, before the exam date, will result in a zero.*

Active Discussion:

Class discussion will mostly operate as an open floor for discussion, sparked by questions that transition between topics, and if necessary, will use the socratic method if participation is uneven or lacking on a topic. *Points are accumulative with correct answers.*

Letter to the Legislator:

A key to representation is communication your interest to those with the authority to make a decision. You have the freedom to select a policy related topic that interest you and fits within the scope of state law. The purpose of this assignment is that by the end you:

- 1) Identify the appropriate recipient of your request, by addressing the letter to someone who has authority on an appropriate level of Texas government.
- 2) Communicate your thoughts with a person who has the power to effectively address your concerns, by realizing who you are writing to matters.
- 3) Describe the action or stance you desire to be take on this issue and justify your position. This is important, as a clear argument better helps the reader and writer understand and communicate the strength of the argument and thoughts.
- 4) Include background information gathered in class, as well as possible information provided by the UT Tyler polling lab.
- 5) Recognize the limitation of individual government actors and legislation action. This should be reflected by your provided argument.

Format: Your letter should be professional with appropriate addresses (letterheads when acceptable), salutations, dates, and single spaced. Additionally, given that staff and representatives receive numerous correspondences this letter will be required to be ***NO LONGER THEN TWO PAGES***. It is important to be clear, concise, and descriptive as you specify your goal from writing this letter, why, and how you believe that can be best achieved.

Amendment Simulation:

Since 1876, Texas has been able to amend its constitution 507 times. This simulation will be a multistep, multi-assignment project with the goal of providing a deeper understanding of the structure of the legislature, constitution, and lawmaking process. Finalizing the semester with each group being able to bring forward an amendment, and perhaps with the will of the class passing it into law. Students should be able to identify actors, the significance of their actions, and the importance of those choices.

Extra Credit

Extra credit opportunities will be spread out sporadically through the semester. They will be provided to students via email or canvas, with them to be turned in similar to assignments. Extra credit assignments will not be able to be turned in late, unless approved by the professor.

Grading¹

Reflections & Quizzes	Weekly	100 points
Active Discussion	In-Class	25 points
Exam I	September 22 nd	100 points
Exam II	October 13 th	100 points
Letter to a Legislator	November 10 th	50 points
Constitution Amendment Simulation	November 13-17 th	25 Points
Final Exam	TBA	100 points
TOTAL		500 points

Class Schedule

Week 1 August 21-25	Thinking About Texas Course Intro & TX Population <i>Readings:</i> Sterken et. al. Ch.1
Week 2 August 28-September 1	Texas Constitution & Frames all state and local actions <i>Readings:</i> Lopez et. al. Ch. 2 Smith, Jr., Griffin. " <u>We the People.</u> " Texas Monthly, January 1974. Menon, Sangita. " <u>Bill Seeks to Amend Texas Constitution to Ban Slavery.</u> " KUT, May 8, 2021.
Week 3 September 4 September 6-8	Voting and Elections in Texas LABOR DAY/NO CLASS <i>Readings:</i> Lopez et. al. Ch.3
Week 4 September 11-15	Battle for the Heart of Texas <i>Readings:</i> Owens et. al. Ch.1-5
Week 5 September 18-22	Battel for the Heart of Texas <i>Readings:</i> Owens et. al. Ch. 6-9 Exam I: Friday, September 22 nd
Week 6 September 25-29	Parties & Interest Groups <i>Readings:</i> Lopez et.al. Ch. 4 & 5
Week 7 October 2-6	Texas' Legislature <i>Readings:</i> Lopez et. al. Ch. 6 Jones, Mark. 2021. " <u>The 2021 Texas House from Right to Left.</u> " Texas Tribune.

¹ Should the class schedule need to be amended, I will advise the class in advance by email and via the course page.

Week 8 October 9-13	Texas' Legislature Lopez et. al. Ch. 6 Exam II: Friday, October 13 th
Week 9 October 16-20	Texas' Governor <i>Readings:</i> Lopez et. al. Ch 7
Week 10 October 23-27	Profiles of Leaders in Texas <i>Readings:</i> Sterken, All Chapters
Week 11 October 30-Novemeber 3	Courts in Texas Lopez et. al. Ch. 8
Week 12 November 6-10	Courts In Texas Lopez et. al. Ch.8 <i>Due Friday:</i> Letter to the Legislature
Week 13 November 13-17	Constitutional Amendment Simulation
Week 14 November 20-24	Thanksgiving Break NO CLASSES
Week 15 November 27-29	Recap of Texas Government Final Review
Finals Week December 4-8	FINAL EXAM WEEK TBA

Academic Honesty

It is your responsibility to avoid plagiarism, cheating, and dishonesty. The University of Texas at Tyler Policies and Procedures for Student Affairs will be strictly followed and can be found here at:

<http://www.uttyler.edu/mopp/documents/8Student%20Conduct%20and%20Discipline.pdf>. Tests and assignments are designed to assess your understanding of the material—do not reference another student's answers.

Violations of academic integrity are serious and will have a negative consequence on your classroom performance. In each instance a violation occurs, a failing grade will be assigned for the assignment or the course, require work to be redone, and have you identify what the cause of

the violation was. The matter will be referred to the Dean of Students if institutional action is necessary. Reference the rights and responsibilities of students:
<http://www.uttyler.edu/wellness/rightsresponsibilities.php>.

Student Standards of Academic Conduct:

Disciplinary proceedings may be initiated against any student who engages in scholastic dishonesty, including, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts.

i. "Cheating" includes, but is not limited to:

- Copying from another student's test paper;
- using, during a test, materials not authorized by the person giving the test;
- failure to comply with instructions given by the person administering the test;
- discussing the contents of an examination with another student who will take the examination;
- divulging the contents of an examination, for the purpose of preserving questions for use by another, when the instructors have designated that the examination is not to be removed from the examination room or not to be returned or to be kept by the student;
- substituting for another person, or permitting another person to substitute for oneself to take a course, a test, or any course-related assignment;
- paying or offering money or other valuable thing to, or coercing another person to obtain an unadministered test, test key, homework solution, or computer program or information about an unadministered test, test key, home solution or computer program;
- falsifying research data, laboratory reports, and/or other academic work offered for credit;
- taking, keeping, misplacing, or damaging the property of The University of Texas at Tyler, or of another, if the student knows or reasonably should know that an unfair academic advantage would be gained by such conduct; and

- misrepresenting facts, including providing false grades or resumes, for the purpose of obtaining an academic or financial benefit or injuring another student academically or financially.
- ii. “Plagiarism” includes, but is not limited to, the appropriation, buying, receiving as a gift, or obtaining.
by any means another’s work and the submission of it as one’s own academic work offered for credit.
- iii. “Collusion” includes, but is not limited to, the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing academic assignments offered for credit or collaboration with another person to commit a violation of any section of the rules on scholastic dishonesty.
- iv. All written work that is submitted will be subject to review by plagiarism software.