Texas Government

Course Description

The end of month, May of 2019, marks the end of the 86th Texas legislative session. There were numerous issues confronting Texas lawmakers. Among them were rising property tax rates, financing the Texas public school system, coping with border security and unlawful immigration, crafting the state’s 2020-21 budget, enacting new restrictions on abortions, and exploring new policy measures on marijuana legalization. Unlike two years ago there was not a hot political item that divided the Texas legislators into highly contentious factions. Perhaps the biggest winners of this session were the “Big Three”, the session’s leaders – Gov. Greg Abbot, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, and the new state House Speaker Dennis Bonnen. They were able to project an image of unity from the start to the end of the legislative session and were successful with many public policy proposals. They guided the legislative session through the passage of a two-year budget plan to spend approximately $250 billion that included priorities for funding public schools and increasing teacher salaries. However, the Big Three failed to convince the Texas legislators to approve a proposal for increasing the sales tax by one cent in order to buy down property taxes. All of the above issues are part of the landscape of Texas politics, encompassing both national and state dimensions, covered in the introductory political science courses on American and Texas governments.

This course is the second half of a two-sequence course program with Political Science 2305 being the first course which combined with Political Science 2306 will satisfy ASU’s Core Curriculum requirements in Political Science. Political Science 2306 is designed to introduce the student to the political system of the state of Texas. This introductory survey course covers the origin and development of the Texas constitution, structure and powers of state and local government, federalism and inter-governmental relations, political participation, linkage institutions, the election process, public policy, and the political culture of Texas. Overall, it provides an introduction to the Texas state system of government.

Course/Core Objectives:

1. Critical Thinking (CT): to gather, analyze, evaluate and synthesize information relevant to a question or issue.
2. Communication (CS): to develop, interpret and express ideas through effective written communication.
4. Personal Responsibility (PR): to demonstrate the ability to evaluate choices, actions and consequences as related to ethical decision-making.

Note: Don’t accept any assertion of fact on its face. Try to step back from ideology,
opinion & argument; listen carefully to different sides in a debate being prepared to see the logic in what people of different viewpoints have to say.

**Learning Outcomes:**

1. Student will demonstrate knowledge about Texas government and politics.
2. Student will explain the origin and development of the Texas Constitution.
3. Student will explain the origins and evolution of the Texas political system, with a focus on growth of political institutions, the key components of the Texas political system, and federalism.
4. Student will describe the ways in which different political systems divide and share power between the state, local governments, and national government.
5. Student will demonstrate knowledge of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of Texas government.
6. Students will evaluate the role of public opinion, interest groups, political parties, campaigns and elections in the Texas political system.
7. Students will describe the rights and responsibilities of citizens and be able to comment on the role of civic engagement in Texas politics.
8. Student will analyze political issues, demonstrate critical thinking skills, and develop a critical approach to the study of policies and political culture of Texas.

**Method of Assessing Learning Outcomes:**

- Learning outcomes will be assessed via examinations, a group presentation, and a written essay.

**Class Organization**

A combination format of lecture and discussion has been adopted for teaching this course. Students are strongly encouraged to be prepared for class and to actively participate in class through comments, questions, and responses to questions. For each lesson chapter I will post materials in the course website on Blackboard under the “Lessons” divider. They will consist of lecture Powerpoint presentations and review questions. You are expected to do the required readings and are urged to consult other sources of information for in-depth coverage of political events (newspapers, magazines, and/or major news network). It is strongly recommended that you consult on a regular basis a local newspaper or Internet source for political information on local, state, and national political events. Some reputable news sources are *The New York Times*, *Dallas Morning News*, *The Texas Tribune*, The PBS News Hour, and KUT News (www.kut.org).

**Office Hours**

- M-F 9:00-10:00 AM
- M-F 2:00-3:30 PM
- By appointment also

I am here to help. If you have questions, concerns, or need to chat please come during my office hours. If they are not convenient please email me to schedule an appointment. You can reach
me on weekdays, Monday through Friday. Please note that I check my emails periodically between 9 AM and 5 PM. Depending upon time of receipt of email I may take up to two days to response.

**Expectations of Students**

Students are expected to read the course materials scheduled in the syllabus with care. It is important that there is no misunderstanding concerning the readings; consequently, if you have any questions regarding the assignments please do not hesitate to ask. All of the readings listed below are considered required. Class discussions and lectures will add to, rather than merely review, the reading materials. Analyses of current political events will be incorporated into class discussions and assigned reading materials; it is important that you come to class equipped with a prior reading of the assigned materials.

**Blackboard**

The teaching of this course is integrated with ASU’s online course management system, identified as Blackboard. You should familiarize yourself with the course components on Blackboard. You will find useful information on Blackboard such as a copy of the course syllabus, information about course policies, grading system, chapter Powerpoints, and grades for exams and assignments.

To access Blackboard you must have an ASU email account and be registered for this course. To login go to [https://blackboard.angelo.edu/](https://blackboard.angelo.edu/) and type in your ASU userid and password. Please try to access Blackboard as soon as possible to make sure that you are enrolled in the course and that you understand the various features of Blackboard.

**Course Requirements & Grading**

**Attendance**

Attendance is required for all classes. I will take attendance every day. It is important that you show up on time. If you come in late, it is your responsibility to approach me after class and make sure that I check your name on the class roll. Class attendance will be important for determining borderline grades. **Excellent class attendance will contribute five points to your sum total of points.** Excellent class attendance means no more than a specified number of class absences as determined by instructor. Student absence for observance of a religious holy day will be treated in accordance with OP 10.19 of ASU’s Operating Policies and Procedures. According to the University Calendar, the last day for a partial or total withdrawal from the University is **Monday, June 24, 2019**. Withdrawal grades will be indicated by the letter W.

**Exams (400 exam points)**

The evaluation of your class performance will be based on **four** examinations. The class exams will be objective and a combination of multiple-choice, identification, and/or short essay. A study guide will be provided before each exam through Blackboard. The final exam will not be cumulative. All electronic equipment (cell phones, computers, etc.) must be put away and hidden from view during exams. If you have a valid reason for missing an exam (verified
illness, accident, or unavoidable absence) you may make-up an exam. **If possible, you should notify me before the exam, if not, within 24 hours after the exam date.** The design of the make-up exam is left solely up to the instructor; the make-up exam may be comprehensive and entirely essay or a combination of multiple-choice and identification; it will be scheduled during the last week of the semester. Please note that you will be allowed to take only one make-up exam for the semester.

**Public Policy Group Project (140 points)**

This class project entails the research of a public policy topic pertaining to the Texas political landscape, and the delivery of a group presentation at the end of the semester. You will be randomly assigned to a group through Blackboard at the beginning of the semester. A public policy topic will be assigned or selected for each group. The public policy topics deal with a range of issues relevant to the current political landscape of the Texas political system which in general tend to center on the activities of the Texas legislature, courts, political parties, interest groups, and/or local governments. Each group will research one public policy topic from the list of approved topics. The goal is for each student to become immersed in the study of Texas politics by grappling with a contemporary public policy issue that has captured the attention of many Texans.

Each student will be required to work in a group in order to research the selected public policy topic and to prepare a group presentation. The group presentation will consist of the preparation of a Powerpoint presentation consisting of at least six slides, a short presentation to the entire class and the submission of a group essay. The presentation and essay should provide an analysis of the public policy topic that provides a balanced overview of the topic in terms of relevant issues that apply to the topic, for example, pro or con, for or against. The topic should be researched in order to provide information on its legislative history and impact on the Texas political landscape. Group discussion forums for each topic will be created in Blackboard to help promote the activities and exchange between group members. To help the group prepare for its presentations a series of class sessions, as listed in the course schedule, will be set aside throughout the semester and your attendance will be required for these class sessions. Unexcused absences from the group sessions will affect your group participation grade. At the conclusion of the group presentations each student will be required to submit a peer review on each individual member of the group.

Your grade for the public policy project is based on four component parts: group participation based on the discussion board postings and attendance for group sessions, group presentation based on the Powerpoint presentation and a group essay, peer reviews of group members, and an individual reflection paper.

- The group participation score is based on your active participation in group sessions and discussions, your discussion board postings which consist of at least one thread and reply to at least one posted thread in your group discussion forum, and an evaluation of your peers.
- The group presentation score is based on your group’s delivery of a presentation to the class on the selected topic, the preparation of a Powerpoint presentation, and a group paper.
- Your peer review score is based on the completion of a peer review for each member of
your group.

- The reflection essay is a short paper of approximately three (3) pages (≈ 850 words) in which you integrate your group experience with class materials. You should briefly comment on your experience of working within your group, but more importantly you should provide feedback on your understanding of the Texas political system. You should elaborate on what you found most pertinent and relevant for your understanding of Texas politics and your responsibility as a citizen. In other words highlight some of your achievements with regards to meeting the learning outcomes, specified previously.

Grading

Your semester grade is based on the number of points earned for each component element of the course requirements – the four examinations and public policy group project. The total sum of points earned will be used to determine your overall course grade. The table below outlines the grading scale for the course based on the number of points earned for each component part of the course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Grading Scale</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exams</td>
<td>400</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Policy Project</td>
<td>486-540</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Participation</td>
<td>432-485</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Presentation</td>
<td>378-431</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection Essay</td>
<td>313-377</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Reviews</td>
<td>Below 313</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Points</td>
<td>540</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Exam Schedule

- First Exam: June 10, 100 points
- Second Exam: June 18, 100 points
- Third Exam: June 25, 100 points
- Final Exam: July 3, 100 points

Nota Bene: All electronic devices, including portable music players, are not allowed during exam taking.

Academic Honesty

Angelo State University expects its students to maintain complete honesty and integrity in their academic pursuits. Students are responsible for understanding and complying with the university Academic Honor Code, which is contained in both print and web versions of the ASU Student Handbook. See the Current Student page on the ASU homepage: www.angelo.edu/cstudent, and click on Academic Honor Code. Acts of academic dishonesty and misconduct as referenced in Angelo State University's Student Handbook will be referred to the Dean of Students.
Accommodations for Disability

ASU is committed to the principle that no qualified individual with a disability shall, on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs or activities of the university, or be subjected to discrimination by the university, as provided by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments of 2008 (ADAAA), and subsequent legislation.

The Student Affairs Office is the designated campus department charged with the responsibility of reviewing and authorizing requests for reasonable accommodations based on a disability. It is the student’s responsibility to initiate such a request by contacting the Student Affairs Office, Suite 112 of the Houston Harte University Center, at 325-942-2047 (phone) or 325-942-2211 (fax) or by e-mail at studentservices@angelo.edu to begin the process. The Student Affairs Office will establish the particular documentation requirements necessary for the various types of disabilities.

Title IX at Angelo State University

Angelo State University is committed to providing and strengthening an educational, working, and living environment where students, faculty, staff, and visitors are free from sex discrimination of any kind. Sex discrimination, sexual misconduct, public indecency, interpersonal violence, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, and stalking are not tolerated at ASU. University faculty and staff members are required to report any instances of sexual misconduct, including the above, to the University’s Title IX office so that the victim may be provided appropriate resources and support options. You are encouraged to report any incidents to ASU’s Office of Title IX Compliance and the Director of Title IX Compliance/Title IX Coordinator in the Mayer Administration Building, Room 200 at 325-942-2022. For more information about Title IX in general you may visit www.angelo.edu/services/title-ix/.

Unprofessional Behavior

A certain classroom decorum based upon mutual respect toward others contributes towards a productive environment. Please note that arriving late without a good reason or making distracting noise in the classroom, i.e., whispering or eating, is unprofessional and a sign of disrespect. Please be sure to turn off cell phones, pagers or other electronic devices with audible signals, and also refrain from bringing food and beverages. Laptops are permitted only for note taking.

Reading Materials


You may consider an additional source for gaining access to the textbook at the following site: https://www.mheducation.com/highered/product/M9781259912412.html. Be sure to note the fourth edition.
Course Schedule

[Note: The course syllabus is a general plan for the semester. The schedule is a tentative and may be updated or changed throughout the semester as necessary.]

June 3: Introduction

What are the rules of the game for this course? What will be the basis for evaluating student performance? Questions pertaining to management of the course will be answered by discussing the course syllabus.

June 3 – June 4: Introduction to Texas History and Politics

What makes for a political community at the state level? What is the history of Texas politics and what shapes it? What is meant by political culture? What are the current challenges in Texas politics?
   A. The Texas political community
   B. Historical periods in Texas politics
   C. Texas political culture
   D. Readings: Mora, Chapter 1

June 5 – June 6: The Texas State Constitution and the American Federal System

How did Texans deal with the tasks of creating a viable government? What are the component parts of the Texas constitution? What are the patterns of constitutional change? Do Texans need a new constitution?
   A. The case of education policy in Texas
   B. Evolution of Texas Constitutions
   C. Constitutional government
   D. The Constitution of Texas
   E. The need for a new constitution in Texas
   F. Readings: Mora, Chapter 2

**June 6: Group Session #1**

June 6 – June 7: The U.S. Constitution and Federalism

Imagine being faced with the task of laying the constitutional foundations for a brand-new nation. Where would you turn for philosophical guidance? How would you resolve differences in viewpoints regarding structures and powers of government? What are some important events in the formation of the new U.S. government? What is the American federal system? How does federalism function today?
   A. Historical Roots
      1. Articles of Confederation
      2. Declaration of Independence
   B. Drafting and ratifying the U.S. Constitution
   C. Three types of governmental systems
   D. The scope of American federalism
E. Different types of federalism in the U.S.

**June 11 – June 12: The Texas Legislature**

What are the characteristics of the Texas legislature as an institution of government? What is meant by congressional reapportionment? What is the impact of congressional reapportionment upon the Texas legislature? What constitutes the legislative process in the Texas legislature?

A. Characteristics of the Texas legislature
B. Structure of the legislature
C. Legislative redistricting
D. The legislative process
E. Readings: Mora, Chapter 3

**June 13 – June 14: The Executive Department and the Office of the Governor**

What constitutes the executive branch at the state level of government? How does the governor influence the activities of state government and the policymaking process? What are the powers of the Texas governor in a comparative context?

A. Structure of the Texas executive branch
B. Powers of the governor
C. The Texas bureaucracy
D. Readings: Mora, Chapter 4

**June 14: Group Session #2**

**June 14 – June 17: The Court System in Texas**

What is the structure of the Texas judicial system? What are some of the problems of the Texas judicial system? Is the Texas system of justice in a state of crisis?

A. State law in Texas
B. Texas court organization
C. Judges and the administration of justice
D. Readings: Mora, Chapter 5

**June 19 – June 20: Local Governments in Texas**

One reason for the federalist system was the framer's desire to provide the states with a large dose of political autonomy and sovereignty. States are granted exclusive sovereignty with regards to establishing local governments. Local governments are the most pervasive forms of government in Texas. What are the most common forms of local government in Texas?

A. Municipal/city government
B. County government
C. Special district governments
D. Readings: Mora, Chapter 7
June 21: Political Parties in Texas

Political parties exist not only at the national level but also at the state level. They provide a vital link between personal values & aspirations and policy makers. Political parties offer alternative avenues for political participation.

A. Political parties in Texas
B. Texas party machinery – temporary and permanent organizations
C. Readings: Mora, Chapter 11

**June 21: Group Session #3**

June 24: Interest Groups and Lobbying in Texas

Interest groups also exist at the state level. They provide a vital link between personal values & aspirations and policy makers. Interest groups offer alternative avenues for political participation?

A. Interest groups in Texas
B. Most powerful interest groups in Texas
C. Readings: Mora, Chapters 12

June 26 – June 27: Voting and Political Participation in Texas

Democracies depend upon political participation. Public policy ultimately responds to participation. How is political participation achieved at the state level? What are other forms of political participation?

A. Political participation in Texas
B. Other forms of political participation
C. Readings: Mora, Chapter 9

June 28 – July 1: Elections and Campaigns in Texas

At the heart of the democratic political system is the election of freely chosen representatives by the majority of the people in competitive elections. For democracy to work there must be meaningful campaigns among candidates and meaningful participation among the voters. How are campaigns and elections distinguished at the state level? What is the difference between a primary election and general election in Texas? What concerns are raised today by changes in funding political campaigns?

A. Campaigns and elections in Texas
B. Primary election versus general election
C. Different types of elections
D. Readings: Mora, Chapter 10

**July 1: Reflection Essay due**
July 2:  *Group public policy presentations*

- Group Powerpoint due
- Group Paper due
- Additional information will be provided as the semester progresses.

July 3:  *Final Exam: 10:15-12:15 pm*