Texas Government

Course Description

The 86th Texas legislative session came to a close at the end of May, year 2019. 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. The “Big Three”, the session’s leaders – Gov. Greg Abbot, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, 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. The year 2020 marks an election year in which Texas voters will elect a new Texas legislature. In addition, a new Speaker of the House will be selected, given the decision of House Speaker Dennis Bonner to step down at the end of his term. 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 and a written essay plus an extra credit group presentation.

Expectations of Students and Instructor

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. You are asked to attend classes and to participate actively by reading the course materials, interacting with classmates, and to have an inquisitive mind.

Finally, it is expected that you get in the habit of checking your ASU E-Mail account for class announcements, notices, and timely information, as it becomes available concerning the course. Your ASU E-Mail address will be the primary mode of communication. Please consult also the home page for Blackboard on a regular basis.

As the instructor, I will provide the course syllabus, the details for assessing student performance and computing grades, a description of special projects or assignments, the course outline and
class calendar, and notice of specific policies for running the course. More importantly, I will facilitate an effective learning environment through learner-centered instructional techniques. I will provide lecture Powerpoints, study guides, and supplemental instructional resources. I will endeavor to provide a rich learning environment build on the premise that it is important to know about how governments function and to understand that the decisions of government impact everyday lives and one needs to avoid being passive about politics.

Class Organization

A combination format of professor-led lectures and discussion forums have been adopted as the primary method of instruction. Students are expected to participate in a dialogue fashion. 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,W,F 10:00-11:00 AM
T,R 9:00-9:30 AM
M,T,R 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.

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/ 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 **Thursday, March 26, 2020.** Withdrawal grades will be indicated by the letter W.

Exams (400 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 Paper (100 points)

Each student is required to submit a public policy paper by the end of the semester. Randomly created groups, consisting of several students, will be created in Blackboard at the beginning of the semester. A public policy topic will be assigned or selected for each group from a diverse set of topics posted on Blackboard. The public policy topics deal with a range of issues relevant to the current political landscape of the Texas political system; these tend to center on the activities of the Texas legislature, courts, political parties, interest groups, and/or local governments. 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. To help the students prepare for this assignment 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. As members of a team, you will be able to collaborate with other peers and share ideas plus resources. The public policy paper consists of several sections: Issue Description & Bibliography, Historical Context, Contemporary Issue Analysis (Critical thinking positions), and Policy Evaluation and Recommendation. You are permitted to collaborate with your colleagues for the sharing of ideas, avenues of research, and resources, but the actual written paper will be
entirely your own work. The paper will be submitted in APS style, which includes a cover page, reference page, and individual works cited. More information about the specifics of the policy paper assignment and submission will be posted in Blackboard.

**Extra Credit (40 points)**

Individuals that wish to submit extra credit may do so by delivering a public policy group presentation at the end of the semester. Using the materials assembled for the preparation of the individual policy papers, group members can work together to deliver a group presentation at the end of the semester. The group members must assemble a Powerpoint presentation and deliver a presentation to the rest of the class during the last week of the semester. To receive extra credit you must work with other group members in the preparation of the Powerpoint slides, you must deliver a short individual oral presentation to the class, and submit a copy of the written script for the individual presentation. More information about the specifics of the group presentation will be posted in Blackboard.

All written assignments must be submitted in hard copy. Your papers must be typed, paginated, and double-spaced with one-inch margins (unjustified) and Times New Roman font with a 12 pt. size. Please be advised that papers may not be submitted electronically unless you have made advanced arrangements. Be careful to avoid the offence of plagiarism, which is the intellectual appropriation of someone else’s ideas or writings. Some suggested newspaper sources that you may consult are *New York Times, Washington Post, Dallas Morning News, The Texas Tribune,* or other well-known newspaper. *The Texas Tribune* is extremely useful as an online source because there is no requirement for the viewer to become a subscriber before gaining access to the various news articles pertaining to Texas politics.

**Grading**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exams (4)</th>
<th>400 points</th>
<th><strong>Grading Scale</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Policy Paper</td>
<td>100 points</td>
<td>450-540 A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extra Credit Presentation</td>
<td>40 points</td>
<td>400-449 B</td>
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<td><strong>Total Points</strong></td>
<td><strong>540 points</strong></td>
<td>350-399 C</td>
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<td>290-349 D</td>
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<td>Below 289 F</td>
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**Exam Schedule**

- **First Exam** February 5 100 points
- **Second Exam** March 2 100 points
Third Exam  April 6  100 points
Final Exam  May 6  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 (URL address: http://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. The University prohibits discrimination based on sex, which includes pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other types of Sexual Misconduct. Sexual Misconduct is a broad term encompassing all forms of gender-based harassment or discrimination including: sexual assault, sex-based discrimination, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, public indecency, interpersonal violence (domestic violence and/or dating violence), and stalking. University faculty and staff members are required to report any instances of sexual misconduct, including the above, to the ASU Office of Title IX Compliance so that the victim may be provided with appropriate resources and support options.
As a student, you are encouraged to report any incidents of sexual misconduct directly to ASU’s Office of Title IX Compliance and the Director of Title IX Compliance/Title IX Coordinator in the Mayer Administration Building, Room 210 at 325-942-2022.

You may also file a report online 24/7 at www.angelo.edu/incident-form. If you are wishing to speak to someone about an incident in confidence you may contact the University Health Clinic and Counseling Center at 325-942-2173 or the ASU Crisis Helpline at 325-486-6345.

For more information about Title IX in general you may visit www.angelo.edu/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


Please be sure to note the fourth edition. Older editions contain outdated materials and the fourth edition is the most up-to-date version.

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.]

January 13: 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.

January 15 – January 22: 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


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

January 31 – February 3: Federalism

Imagine being faced with the task of laying the constitutional foundations for a brand-new federal system of government. How would you resolve differences regarding structures and powers between the national government and individual state governments? What is the American federal system? How does federalism function today?

A. Federalism today – contemporary issues
B. Three types of governmental systems
C. The scope of powers in American federalism
D. Different types of federalism in the U.S.

**February 7: Group Session #1**

February 10 – February 14: 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

February 17 – February 21: 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

February 24 – February 28: The Court System and Criminal Justice 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 – Civil vs Criminal
B. Texas court organization – court levels and jurisdiction
C. Categories of Crimes and Punishments
D. Judges and the administration of justice
E. Readings: Mora, Chapters 5 and 6

**March 4: Group Session #2**

March 6 – March 20: Local Governments in Texas

One reason for the federalist system was the framers' 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

March 23 – March 27: 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

March 30 – April 3: 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. Strategies of interest groups
D. Readings: Mora, Chapters 12

**April 8: Group Session #3**

April 13 – April 17: 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

April 20 – April 24: 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

**April 24: Individual Policy Paper due**

April 27 – May 1: Group public policy presentations

A. Group Powerpoint due
B. Individual Presentation Script due
C. Additional information will be forthcoming.

May 6: Final Exam:
8:00-10:00 a.m. (Section-020)
10:30-12:30 p.m. (Section-050)
You may consider an additional source for gaining access to the textbook at the following site: https://www.mheducation.com/highered/product/state-texas-government-politics-policy-mora/M9781259912412.html

Suggested topics are posted in the Policy Topics of Blackboard. You may select another topic with approval of the instructor. The topic thus needs to be appropriate and relevant to the scope of the Texas political landscape.

. can involve the actions of the Texas legislature, the courts, and or local government.
, and pertaining student participation in groups, the delivery of a group presentation at the end of the semester, and the submission of an individual public policy paper through Turnitin. The paper and group presentation assignment is the submission of a written essay that meets the Core Curriculum assessment requirements with regards to demonstrating a basic knowledge of the Texas political system, engaging in critical thinking based on synthesis & evaluation, and exhibiting the skills necessary to understand and evaluate political outcomes.

The requirements for the public policy assignment will entail a group presentation before the class during the last week of the semester, the submission of the public policy paper through Turnitin in Blackboard, and participation in the class presentations during the last week of the semester. To organize the group presentations, you will be required to submit a 200 word paragraph in the Discussion Forum of Blackboard that briefly describes the policy topic that you will analyze and develop as your public policy paper.

The sum total of 100 points will be earned on the basis of the requirements found below. Please note the due dates in the course syllabus for the individual component items of this project. The due dates are important for the smooth and timely preparation of the group presentations, scheduled for the last week of the semester. Extensions of the deadlines will generally not be granted; thus please employ due diligence to meet the deadlines posted in the syllabus.