

POLS 3307.001
Fall 2025

Comparative State & Local Politics
Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30-1:50PM
Location: University Hall 02

Instructor: Dr. Brent Boyea

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:15AM-12:15PM

Microsoft Teams link:

https://teams.microsoft.com/l/team/19%3A_tpLxYIRYnSQGQ1X_IZeWQ1SZhtfTgyMJTr3IVL9f6k1%40thread.tacv2/conversations?groupId=f29caa2c-075a-41e4-9489-07ac379a2a97&tenantId=5cdc5b43-d7be-4caa-8173-729e3b0a62d9

I. Introduction:

The purpose of this course is to familiarize students with the functions and organizations of state and local governments. Throughout the course we will evaluate, comparatively, aspects of the American states, giving special attention to the role of institutions in shaping state political behavior. At the course's conclusion, students should be able to understand and discuss the operation of major political actors and institutions common in the American states. In the first section of the course, we will proceed toward an evaluation of state elections and political parties, focusing on the consequences of state electoral environments on election outcomes. From there, we will examine attributes of state legislatures as the engines of state democracy. Our attention there will be directed to the history of state legislative development to their contemporary status in the states. Thereafter, we will focus on the structure and functions of the executive and judicial branches of state government. We will conclude with a focus on state policies, which connect to how elected and appointed state leaders represent the citizens of their states. The material presented in this course will serve as a foundation for understanding state and local governments, including the relationship between state political structures and governing entities.

II. Course Modality

Per university policy, this is an in-person course. We will meet Tuesdays and Thursdays in University Hall 02 from 12:30-1:50PM unless noted otherwise in the schedule or announced in class.

Though the course is mostly in-person, several classes will be online and asynchronous. Presentation modules for those classes are stored in Canvas' Modules page. With each module, video and audio (generally found at the upper right corner of a slide) are embedded in the files. To view and listen to the media content, students must download the file from Canvas and open in Microsoft PowerPoint or Apple's Keynote. Where students attempt to review in Canvas, neither video nor audio will be accessible and important points will be missed.

III. Required Textbooks:

There is one required textbook. Additionally, there are other required readings that are noted in the weekly schedule. Those can be found either online or in Canvas. If purchasing your textbook online, use expedited shipping as readings will begin immediately.

1. Thad Kousser, Jamila Michener, and Caroline Tolbert. 2025 (12th Edition). *Politics in the American States: A Comparative Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press. (ISBN – 9781544391090)
2. Prepared readings in Canvas. To access Canvas, visit <https://www.uta.edu/provost/Canvas/uta-canvas-login.php> or contact the [Office of Information Technology Help Desk](#) at 817-272-2208.
3. Linked articles below. To access click hyperlink.

Let me emphasize that it is extremely important that students do not fall behind in their readings. With the substantial amount of weekly material, students will find themselves overwhelmed if they do not keep up.

IV. Course Requirements and Grading:

1. Class Participation – While there is not an attendance grade, students are expected to arrive on time and prepared to discuss the day's readings. While it is understood that events sometimes happen beyond our control, chronic lateness is inexcusable. Class begins at 12:30PM. Failure to attend class will have a direct negative result on your participation grade (10% of the course grade). I expect thoughtful participation in each class where participation reflects class engagement and careful thinking about that day's readings. Students will be called upon during class. One answer pass will be given per student during the semester; thereafter, deductions of twenty (20) percentage points will be made from the participation grade where students have not responded sufficiently or are not present.
2. Team Project and Presentation – Students are required to participate in a three-student team project with each presentation equal to ten minutes in length. Student assignments will be completed in class based on a random draw. Each team is expected to conduct independent research, using examples from state politics research to discuss during their presentation. Team project guidelines will be distributed on Thursday, August 28th. Each team's power point presentation must be submitted in Canvas prior to 8PM on Wednesday, October 1st and in-class presentations will begin on Thursday, October 2nd. All students are required to attend the presentations. Only scholarly citations (e.g., government sources and library books or articles downloaded from library databases, such as Lexis-Nexis, Academic Search Premier, or JSTOR) will be accepted as outside sources. All research must be cited on the last slide of the presentation. Failure to cite research is a violation of academic honesty and must be avoided. Failure to complete a presentation by a three-person team will result in a grade of zero and students may not re-use a presentation from another course. Use of AI software (like ChatGPT) is strictly forbidden. Confirmed or suspected use of AI software is considered academic dishonesty and violations will be submitted to UTA's Office of Community Standards. All forms of academic dishonesty (see section XI.3.) will lead to a grade of zero on the assignment. Students will receive a grade of zero where they do not assist their team partners. Team projects are worth 20% of the course grade.
3. Examinations – There will be two midterm examinations and one final examination. The first midterm exam is 22.5%, the second midterm exam is 22.5%, and the final exam is 25% of the course grade. Examinations will be essay and short answer format. Midterm examination #1 is on September 23rd, midterm examination #2 is on October 30th, and the final examination is on December 9th from 11:00-1:30PM. All students will take the examinations at the designated times with no make-up examinations allowed except for medical emergencies or the death of a family member. In relation to examination absences caused by medical emergencies, the student is expected to contact the instructor by the *day of the test* and will be required to present proof of a physician's examination. Otherwise, failure to take an examination will result in a grade of zero.

Make-up Examination Policy

Where make-ups are permitted for a midterm examination, they must be completed within one week of the scheduled exam. Otherwise, the student will earn a grade of zero for that exam. Make-ups for

the final exam, which are strongly discouraged, generally occur during the following semester. Make-up exams are more difficult due to the time that has passed since the graded material was covered.

Exam Tardiness Policy

Students entering an exam late disturb other students. Further, tardiness permits students to ask other exiting students about the content of an exam – that is obviously not fair for students that have arrived on time. Unless a prior arrangement has been made, students will receive a grade of zero when tardy for an examination.

V. Grading:

Grades will be posted in Canvas. To access the quizzes and your grades in Canvas, log in with your UTA email address and password at uta.instructure.com. If you have difficulty with Canvas, visit <https://www.uta.edu/provost//Canvas/uta-canvas-login.php> or contact the [Office of Information Technology Help Desk](#) at 817-272-2208. The grade components of the course are:

1. Participation – 10%
2. Team Project and Presentation – 20%
3. Midterm Examination #1 – 22.5%
4. Midterm Examination #2 – 22.5%
5. Final Examination – 25%

The grading scale is as follows:

90-100	A
80-89	B
70-79	C
60-69	D
0-59	F

VI. Class Schedule

Date/Topic	Assignments (KMT = Thad Kousser, Jamila Michener, and Caroline Tolbert's <i>Politics in the American States: A Comparative Analysis</i>)
<i>August</i>	
Tuesday, 8/19 Introduction	1. Course syllabus
Thursday, 8/21 Why Study States?	1. KMT Chapter 1, "Racial, Economic, and Gender Inequity in the States" 2. "The Sanctuary State Migrant Boom" – <i>Wall Street Journal</i>
Tuesday, 8/26 Federalism & Policy Diffusion	1. Federalist 45 & 46 2. Benitez and Friedman, "Texas just gutted free speech on college campuses. Is your state next?" – <i>Washington Post</i>
Thursday, 8/28 Federalism & Policy Diffusion	1. KMT Chapter 2, "Policy Diffusion and Innovation" 2. Petrilli, "Democrat's School Choice Dilemma" – <i>Wall Street Journal</i>
Thursday, 8/28	Team project guidelines distributed
<i>September</i>	
Tuesday, 9/2	1. KMT Chapter 3, "Parties and Elections in the American States" pp. 47-60 2. "Democrats could do a lot better with the power they hold" – <i>The Economist</i>

Parties, Elections & Voting *Asynchronous Canvas*	
Thursday, 9/4 Parties, Elections & Voting *Asynchronous Canvas*	1. KMT Chapter 3, "Parties and Elections in the American States" pp. 60-72 2. Meagher, "The 2026 Midterms: Virginia's off-year election will show where the parties stand ahead of the midterms" – USAPP London School of Economics
Tuesday, 9/9 Parties, Elections & Voting	1. Jankowski, "Redistricting Effort Could Backfire on Texas GOP" – <i>Governing</i> 2. "Why stricter voting laws no longer help Republicans" - <i>The Economist</i>
Thursday, 9/11 Public Opinion and Representation *Asynchronous Canvas*	1. KMT Chapter 5, "Public Opinion, Representation, and America's Culture Wars pp. 105-127
Tuesday, 9/16 Public Opinion and Representation	1. KMT Chapter 5, "Public Opinion, Representation, and America's Culture Wars pp. 127-138
Thursday, 9/18	Midterm #1 Review
Tuesday, 9/23	Midterm #1
Thursday, 9/25 Legislatures	1. KMT Chapter 7, "Legislative Politics in the States" pp. 163-186 2. "Dropping DEI in Texas Schools" – <i>Wall Street Journal</i>
Tuesday, 9/30 Legislatures	1. KMT Chapter 7, "Legislative Politics in the States" pp. 186-200
<i>October</i>	
Wednesday, 10/1	Team projects due in Canvas before 8PM (Canvas will close at 8PM; considered late thereafter)
Thursday, 10/2 Legislatures	1. Barton, "Outspent 4-to-1, Republicans still made gains in state legislative elections" – <i>National Public Radio</i> 2. Myers, "Improving press coverage of state legislatures is key for better representation and accountability for constituents" – USAPP London School of Economics
Thursday, 10/2	Team projects begin
Tuesday, 10/7 Governors	1. KMT Chapter 8, "Governors and the Executive Branch" pp. 201-239
Thursday, 10/9 Governors	1. KMT Chapter 8, "Governors and the Executive Branch" pp. 239-247 2. Gunderson, "Who Punishes More? Partisanship, Punitive Policies, and the Puzzle of Democratic Governors", use link or access directly through university library
Tuesday, 10/14 State Courts	1. KMT Chapter 9, "Politics and Judicial Process" pp. 247-258 2. Mallinson, "Most Pennsylvania voters ignore judicial elections – a political scientist explains why they matter, especially in a battleground state" – <i>The Conversation</i>
Thursday, 10/16 State Courts	1. KMT Chapter 9, "Politics and Judicial Process" pp. 258-276 2. Redman, "Wisconsin Supreme Court Overturns 19th Century Abortion Ban" - <i>Governing</i>
Tuesday, 10/21 State Courts	1. Boyea and Brace, "Revisiting the Business of State Supreme Courts in the 21st Century" , use link or access directly through university library
Thursday, 10/23	Midterm #2 Review
Tuesday, 10/28	No class – prepare for Midterm #2

Thursday, 10/30	Midterm #2
<i>November</i>	
Tuesday, 11/4 Fiscal Policy	1. KMT Chapter 11, "Fiscal Policies: Taxes and Spending in the States" pp. 305-318
Thursday, 11/6 Fiscal Policy	1. KMT Chapter 11, "Fiscal Policies: Taxes and Spending in the States" pp. 318-332
Tuesday, 11/11 Fiscal Policy	1. Theal and Fall, "State tax revenues are dropping below long-term trends" - <i>Governing</i>
Thursday, 11/13 Health/Welfare Policy	1. KMT Chapter 12, "State Health and Welfare Programs" pp. 333-350
Tuesday, 11/18 Health/Welfare Policy	1. KMT Chapter 12, "State Health and Welfare Programs" pp. 350-363 2. Theal and Judd, "Ahead of Federal Cuts, State Medicaid Costs Already Soaring" - <i>Governing</i>
Thursday, 11/20 Health Policy and the COVID-19 Pandemic	1. Murray and Murray, "Science was not a high priority in US governors' decisions to issue COVID-19-related Stay-at-Home Orders," – USAPP London School of Economics
Tuesday, 11/25	Remaining Team Presentations
Thursday, 11/27	No class - Thanksgiving recess
<i>December</i>	
Tuesday, 12/2	Final Exam Review
Tuesday, 12/9 11:00AM-1:30PM	Final Exam in UH 02

VII. Core Expectations and Citizenship

Expectations of Students

I have strong yet reasonable expectations for students. To perform well, students are expected to work - meaning a combination of recurrent attendance, frequent class participation, and careful attention to the readings is required. Students that do not attend class regularly, do not take careful class notes, and do not carefully read the assigned material will have a more difficult time with the exams. Additionally, I encourage students to see me during my office hours. Where questions arise about the content of the course or a student's grade, office hours represent important opportunities for interaction between students and their instructor.

Citizenship

While each student pays a significant cost to attend this course, sometimes an individual is less interested in learning, and disturbs others during class (i.e., talking, receiving or making phone calls, or text messaging). As a result of student complaints, use of cell phones during class will result in a two-point deduction from a student's final semester grade for each offense (one offense is a 2-point penalty, two offenses are a 4-point penalty, etc.). I reserve the right to ask the students to leave class when cell phone use is observed. Otherwise, do not walk in late, leave early, or push around others to find a seat once class has begun - it disturbs others! Be careful with laptop computers. Unfortunately, most students use their laptops to access the web for non-related material, play games or read email rather than paying attention to the lecture. Where I see a laptop being used, I assume that it is being used for something other than class purposes.

Communication

The University has provided students with an official email address. All communication will be directed to you through that address, as well as announcements through Canvas. Students are responsible for checking their e-mail and Canvas regularly. Per university policy, I will not respond to non-university email addresses. Also, remember to formalize your emails by addressing the e-mail, providing a subject, and always signing your email. Note that one-line comments or questions are not enough for me to know what you are trying to say - be sure to provide enough detail about the context to allow a sufficient answer on my part.

VIII. Special Notes:

1. Cell Phones and Electronic Devices – Students are instructed to turn off their cell phones prior to class. See the comments about cell phone usage in the Citizenship section. Usage of a cell phone or other non-permitted electronic device during an examination or quiz will result in a grade of zero on that examination or quiz.
2. Test Conduct – Examinations are closed book. Cell phones, textbooks, and open internet sites that are not Canvas are prohibited during examinations.
3. Academic Integrity - All students are expected to obey the civil and penal statutes of the State of Texas and the United States, the Regents' Rules and Regulations of The University of Texas System, the rules and regulations of the University, and the orders or instructions issued by an administrative official of the University or U.T. System in the course of his/her duties, and to observe standards of conduct that are compatible with the University's function as an educational institution. Any student found to engage in cheating, plagiarism, or collusion will be sanctioned.
4. Inclement Weather – If a class is canceled due to inclement weather, its subject will be delayed until the following class. Similarly, all tests canceled due to university closure will be delivered during the following class. For information related to weather related class cancellations please call (972) 601-2049.
5. Emergency Exit Procedures - Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator, but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist individuals with disabilities.
6. Campus Carry - Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes as prohibited. Under the new law, openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/news/info/campus-carry/>.
7. Students with Disabilities - Any student with a documented disability needing academic accommodations is requested to speak with me via Microsoft Teams during the first two weeks of the course. All discussions will remain confidential.
8. Discrimination Policy – The University of Texas at Arlington does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, genetic information, and/or veteran status in its educational programs or activities it operates. For more information, visit <https://www.uta.edu/eos-title-ix/equal-opportunity-services>.
9. Title IX Policy - The University of Texas at Arlington is committed to maintaining a learning and working environment that is free from discrimination based on sex in accordance with Title IX of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs or activities; Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), which prohibits sex discrimination in employment; and the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (SaVE Act). Sexual misconduct is a form of sex discrimination and will not be tolerated. For information regarding Title IX, visit <https://www.uta.edu/eos-title-ix/title-ix> or contact the Title IX Coordinator at (817) 272-7091.
10. Student Support Services - The University of Texas at Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. These resources include tutoring, major-

based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. Among the support services on campus, the IDEAS Center (2nd Floor of Central Library) offers free tutoring to all students with a focus on transfer students, sophomores, veterans and others undergoing a transition to UT Arlington. To schedule an appointment with a peer tutor or mentor email IDEAS@uta.edu or call (817) 272-6593. For more information, students may contact the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107 or visit www.uta.edu/resources.

11. Emergency Phone Numbers - In case of an on-campus emergency, call the UT Arlington Police Department at 817-272-3003 (non-campus phone), 2-3003 (campus phone). You may also dial 911. The non-emergency number is 817-272-3381.
12. Syllabus Changes – The instructor reserves the right to change the syllabus at any time during the semester.