

POLS 2312-007
Fall 2025

State and Local Government
T/Th 9:30-10:50AM
Location: University Hall 108

Instructor: Dr. Brent Boyea

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Office Hours: 11:15AM-12:15PM

Microsoft Teams link: [https://teams.microsoft.com/l/team/19%3ApeEc-2-](https://teams.microsoft.com/l/team/19%3ApeEc-2-G4dsOgsWA0FXvRPotsx8Sni2qBe9p57dySvEI1%40thread.tacv2/conversations?groupId=2167c1be-445c-4b38-9734-10292ac9aaa0&tenantId=5cdc5b43-d7be-4caa-8173-729e3b0a62d9)

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Graduate Teaching Assistant: Coleton Boles and Alonzo Savage

I. Introduction:

This course is designed to provide students with a basic understanding of how decisions occur at the state and local levels of government. While the course will focus on Texas politics at times (including the textbook), it is designed to provide a comparative evaluation of state governments by looking at all fifty states. As its main objective, the course will help students understand the activities and responsibilities of state and local government. At the completion of this course, you should be able to understand and discuss the major political actors and state institutions common among the American states. Beyond an understanding of the basic elements, structures, policies, and processes of state and local government, you should emerge with a greater appreciation of the role of subnational government including an understanding of the different complexities involved in state governance.

II. Course Modality

Per university policy, this is an in-person course. We will meet each Tuesday and Thursday in University Hall 108 from 9:30-10:50AM 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. Course Goals

Students will (1) demonstrate a well-rounded knowledge of state and local politics; (2) demonstrate an understanding of how political scientists analyze and interpret the foundations, institutions, processes, and actors that constitute state and local politics; and (3) demonstrate critical thought about state and local politics.

IV. Learning Outcome Objectives:

To identify (1) certain environmental, citizen participation, and institutional factors that affect state politics and policy choices; (2) and to identify certain analytical concepts that are useful for understanding politics and policy making; and (3) and to identify certain generalizations about the behavior of sub national governments generally, and Texas specifically, that are useful for understanding politics and policy making.

Among the (1) political processes, (2) analytical concepts and (3) generalizations that students might understand to accomplish, these learning outcomes are the following:

- (1) Political Processes: To identify some of the following processes about politics among the states and in Texas: (a) the effects of state contextual features on state politics and policies; b) the manner in which electoral processes, political parties, and interest groups influence state politics and policies; (c) the instruments and processes of policy making institutions such as state legislatures, executives, and judiciaries); (d) the similarities and differences among political institutions and state policy choices; (e) and the ways in which Texas governments are typical or atypical in comparison to other states;
- (2) Analytical Concepts: To identify some of the following concepts useful for analyzing state and local politics: demographics, political culture; federalism; state constitutional design; direct democracy; public opinion; direct referenda, political party systems; interest groups systems; legislative professionalism, representation, and policy making; executive powers including the role of the governor in policy making; the characteristics and roles of state agencies; the selection and structure of state judiciaries, judicial policy making and the key elements of the judicial process; and relationships among state branches of government;
- (3) Generalizations: To identify some of the descriptive generalizations about trends in state and local politics or comparisons of Texas politics with other states, or current issues or problems of state and local governments, or research findings about the importance of certain explanatory variables on the policy choices of states or the politics of states.

V. Required Text:

There is one required textbook, which is available for purchase at the university bookstore or through an on-line bookseller. If purchasing on-line, be sure that it is shipped promptly as readings will begin immediately.

- 1. Brandon Rottinghaus. 2023. (4th Edition). *Inside Texas Politics: Power, Policy, and Personality of the Lone Star State*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. (ISBN – paper back 9780197672419)
 - a. E-book version is also available through Oxford University Press.

VI. Course Requirements

Student grades for this course are a function of three in-class examinations (two mid-term examinations and a final examination) and a research letter. Further, six online quizzes will occur throughout the semester with points earned reflecting extra credit opportunities. The extra credit quizzes – each with four multiple-choice questions – will be announced in Canvas the week of the quiz. Each quiz will last ten minutes and will be administered through Canvas with students given access for 24 hours. Questions on the quizzes will be formed from the lecture material, textbook, assigned videos, and current events discussed in class or assigned to follow. Failure to take a quiz will result in a non-grade (0). With the online format of the quizzes, it is important that students use a wired or strong wireless connection to avoid having their quiz stopped prematurely. There will be *no* make-up opportunities for missed quizzes regardless of the reason, including where access to a quiz stopped due to a poor wireless connection.

The three examinations will be multiple-choice format and administered in our classroom. The exam times for midterm examinations #1 and #2 will be 9:30-10:50AM on the days designated in the class schedule. The final examination will be on Tuesday, December 9th from 9:15-10:30AM. Examinations will cover class presentations, assigned readings and videos, and current events discussed in class. The midterm examinations

are non-cumulative and will cover topics only from the beginning of the course or the most recent examination. The final examination, however, will be partly cumulative. All students will take the examinations at the designated times with no make-up exams allowed, except for situations relating to a medical emergency or death in one's family. In relation to examination absences caused by medical emergencies, students are required to contact me no later than the day of the exam and will be required to present proof of a physician's examination. Failure to do so will result in a grade of zero for that examination.

There is also a research assignment worth 10 percent of the course grade. Each student is required to write a one-page letter about a current state policy controversy. The letter will be addressed to any member of the Texas Congress, including either the Texas House of Representatives or the Texas Senate. The letter must be based on facts and ideas presented in class presentations, the textbook, and valid external sources; however, the purpose is for each student to express an idea that is both personal and well researched. An assignment handout will be distributed on Thursday, August 28th and letters will be due in Canvas before 8PM on Monday, October 13th. This assignment is for original work only. Students may not re-use a paper 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, examination, or quiz.

Make-up Examination Policy

Where make-up exams are permitted, those examinations will be scheduled prior to the final examination on Tuesday, December 9th from 8:00-9:00AM in our classroom (University Hall 108). Make-up exams are more difficult due to the time that has passed since the discussion of the graded material. Make-up exams will be essay and short answer format, may be comprehensive, and will require specific, detailed answers. An additional disadvantage relates to the extra points sometimes added to the regular exam, which are never applied to make-up exams.

Exam Tardiness Policy

Students entering late disturb other students and will not be allowed to take the exam. Further, tardiness permits students to ask exiting students about the content of an exam, which is not fair to other students. Unless a prior arrangement has been made, students will receive a grade of zero when tardy.

VII. Grading

Grades will be posted on Canvas. To access the extra-credit quizzes and your grades on 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. Midterm Examination #1 – 30%
2. Midterm Examination #2 – 30%
3. Final Examination – 30%
4. Research Letter Assignment – 10%
5. Extra Credit Quizzes – Up to 10 extra points added to the semester grade
 - a. For example, if a student earns an 88 as a semester grade based on their midterm and final examinations performance, they may earn up to a 98 semester grade with their extra credit points added.
 - b. The value for the extra credit sum reflects the average quiz performance. For example, if five quizzes are given and 12 of 15 questions (80%) are answered correctly, then 8 extra credit points (the product of 80% multiplied by 10) will be earned.

The grading scale is as follows:

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

VIII. Current Events

With state and local politics providing a steady stream of events, including developments in Texas and the other forty-nine states, I will discuss events as they unfold. Where current events are relevant and discussed in class, they may be included in the extra credit quizzes and examinations. I will integrate political and policy debates into the course, as they provide a method for understanding topics relating to state constitutions, legislatures, governors, political participation, elections, and other topics.

IX. Class Schedule:

Topic 1: Introduction to State and Local Politics

August 19-21

- Rottinghaus, chapter 1 (Cultural, Demographic and Political Trends)

Topic 2: State Constitutions

August 26-28

- Rottinghaus, chapter 2 (The Texas Constitution)

Research Letter Assignment Handout: Thursday, August 28th

Topic 3: American Federalism

September 2-4

- Rottinghaus, chapter 3 (Federalism)
- Both classes for this topic are asynchronous and found in Canvas' modules page

Topic 4: Political Attitudes, Voting, and Elections

September 9-18

- Rottinghaus, chapter 4 (Voting and Elections)
- Class on Thursday, September 11 is asynchronous and found in Canvas' modules page

Midterm Examination #1: Tuesday, September 23rd

Topic 5: Political Parties

September 25-30

- Rottinghaus, chapter 5 (Political Parties: Texas in Blue and Red)

Topic 6: State Legislatures

October 2-9

- Rottinghaus, chapter 7 (The Legislature)

Research Letter Assignment Due: Monday, October 13th, due in Canvas by 8PM

Topic 7: Governors

October 14-21

- Rottinghaus, chapter 8 (Governors of Texas) and chapter 9 (The Plural Executive and the Bureaucracy, pp. 278-300)

Midterm Examination #2: Thursday, October 23rd

No class on Tuesday, October 28th

Topic 8: State Courts

October 30 – November 6

- Rottinghaus, chapter 10 (The Texas Judiciary) and chapter 11 (Criminal Justice, pp. 352-373)

Topic 9: Local Governments

November 11-13

- Rottinghaus, chapter 12 (Local Government)

Topic 10: Public Policy

November 18 – December 2

- Rottinghaus, chapter 13 (Budget, Finances, and Policy) and chapter 14 (Public Policy in Texas)

Final Examination: Tuesday, December 9th from 9:15-10:30AM

(8:00-9:15AM will be used for make-up exams only)

X. Core Expectations and Citizenship

Expectations of Students

While an introductory course, I have strong yet reasonable expectations for students. To perform well, students are expected to work - meaning a combination of (1) recurrent attendance, (2) frequent class participation, and (3) 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 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. Meetings during office hours will take place in my office (University Hall 446).

Communication

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

Citizenship

While students pay a significant cost to attend this course, sometimes an individual is less interested in learning, and disturbs others in class by talking, listening to music, receiving or making phone calls, or texting. 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 is a 4-point penalty, etc.). The instructor reserves 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 for non-related material rather than paying attention to the lecture. Where I see laptops, I assume they are being used for something other than class.

XI. 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 with cell phones, textbooks, and computers prohibited during examinations. All materials must be removed from one's desk and headwear (e.g., hats), sunglasses, and earphones are not permitted during an examination.
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. 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/>.
6. 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.
7. 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>.
8. 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.
9. 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.

10. 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.
11. Syllabus Changes – The instructor reserves the right to change the syllabus at any time during the semester.