

Version 1

Course Information

Course Number: POLS 207
Course Title: State & Local Government
Sections/Times/Locations:
501 (MWF 8:00-8:50am in ILCB 113)
502 (MWF 9:10-10:00am in ILCB 113)

Credit Hours: 3

Instructor Details

Instructor: Dr. Dwight Roblyer, Ph.D., Aggie Classes of '84 and '09
Office: *(ALL office hours and appointments will be via Zoom this semester)*
Phone: 979-845-7693 (always forwards to my cell phone)
E-Mail: dwright.roblyer@tamu.edu
Office Hours:

Outside of class, I will be available to students in several ways, as stated below. ***If you want to meet with me, I want to meet with you!***

1. Weekly, I schedule multiple opportunities for you to meet with me. These will vary week-by-week--there is no fixed "office hours" schedule for this course. Every Sunday night, I will post the meeting windows for that week on the Canvas course calendar and will send out an announcement. I vary the timing of these windows to accommodate differing class and work schedules for as many students as possible, as well as take into account my other university responsibilities and appointments. There will be ***two types of meeting opportunities*** and ***all will occur using Zoom***. There will be no office hours held at my faculty office this semester due to the increased risk that would pose to my family members with chronic, serious health challenges.
 - ***Group Office Hours via Zoom:*** These will be group Zoom sessions where we all can benefit from other's questions and inputs. Students may attend to ask questions, just to listen in on the discussion, or both! Don't be bashful--students are usually surprised by how helpful these can be! Instructions for joining these Zooms are contained in each associated event on the Canvas course calendar.
 - ***Private Appointments via Zoom:*** These 10 or 15-minute appointments are ideal for matters that are private in nature, such as reviewing grades or exams, but they also may be used for course material questions, etc. Whenever suitable, please use the Group Office Hours opportunities (see above) instead of a Private Appointment. Instructions for scheduling these

private time slots are contained inside each associated event on the Canvas calendar.

2. I encourage you to meet with me before or after lecture whenever time permits.
3. If you need to talk with me and none of the above methods work for your schedule that week, please email your request to see me, providing several times when you will be available to chat via Zoom. I will get back with you to figure out a meeting time.

Course Description

This is *not* a course about Texas politics. Instead, I want to open your eyes to how and why many political actors and most state and local governments do what they do—both the routine and the flabbergasting. Along the way, we will focus on governments in Texas as we also compare those of different states and locales. More importantly, this semester can be the turning point in how you view politics outside of Washington D.C. Since this is not a federal government course, many of you might consider it to be unimportant, uninteresting, and unworthy of your attention. My job is to give you great reasons to change those preconceptions. Why? Because, in the coming years, ***you and the local and state politics surrounding you will help make or break the future of the local community and the state in which your family lives.*** Some of you may run for local or state elected office, a few of you will even win, but all of you will be citizens or residents of your community and of your chosen state for the rest of your lives. How you *think* about politics and about fellow residents who see things differently than you do will make all the difference in our collective future. All of you (hopefully!) will also go on to become “Old Ags” with wisdom, experience, service, power, and money to invest toward improving our collective future. You will also become more likely as you age to participate in some small or big way in governmental politics. Therefore, ***I want to invest in you now*** because in another 20-40 years your generation will be the one actually influencing government at every level and my generation will only be able to hope that you do it well!

Course Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Special Course Designation

This course fulfills half of the the university's Core Curriculum requirement for the *Government/Political Science* category. According to the university catalogue: "Courses in this category focus on consideration of the Constitution of the United States and the constitutions of the states, with special emphasis on that of Texas. Courses involve the analysis of governmental institutions, political behavior, civic engagement, and their political and philosophical foundations. The following skills will be addressed in the courses that comprise this area: critical thinking, communication, social responsibility, and personal responsibility." (See <https://catalog.tamu.edu/undergraduate/general-information/university-core->

[curriculum/](#).) Furthermore, the university defines each objective area as encompassing specific target skills, as follows.

- Critical Thinking: *creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information*
- Communication: *effective development, interpretation, and expression of ideas through written, oral, and visual communication*
- Social Responsibility: *intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities*
- Personal Responsibility: *the ability to connect choices, actions, and consequences to ethical decision-making*

Course Learning Outcomes

1. Demonstrate social and cultural competence that leads to more responsible citizenship.
 - A. Define, understand, and use concepts and terms relevant to the study of state and local government in the United States.
 - B. Comprehend the origins and evolution of state and local political systems, including political institutions, constitutions, and federalism, with an emphasis on Texas.
 - C. Describe the various parts and processes of state and local governmental systems, as well as how they function both alone and together to produce political outcomes.
 - D. Understand the necessity of, opportunities for, and discouragements against citizens' participation in government at the state and local level by understanding the differences in mechanisms and patterns of participation.
2. Demonstrate critical thinking in political matters.
 - A. Explain how citizens, political actors, and political analysts do not share a common vocabulary, and frequently use the same terms while meaning different things.
 - B. Understand the differences between facts and beliefs and their differing roles. Identify biased or incomplete uses of empirical information, the motivations and processes that can produce them, and the threats they pose to democratic outcomes. Explain how different presentations of measurements control the messages the measurements support.
 - C. Recognize important aspects of issues that are *not* being discussed in political forums, and formulate incisive questions that would elevate these issues into the conversation.
 - D. Practice composing well-thought-out questions and responses to others' questions about state and local political issues.
3. Demonstrate preparation to engage in lifelong learning about issues of personal and corporate responsibility that should matter to citizens.
 - A. Assess the validity and reliability of political information.
 - B. Identify sources of political information that are likely to be more or less biased and be able to explain the rationale for this determination.

- C. Access and use resources to “fact check” political beliefs, assumptions, and assertions.
- D. Understand the consequences to democratic systems when political actors, governments, and citizens promote and operate from information and beliefs not based on facts.

Textbook and/or Resource Materials

The following are all *required* materials, unless otherwise noted:

Textbook - We will use a **free**, open-access textbook for this course. *Comparing States & Communities* by Harvey J. Tucker is available [here](#) (download begins immediately via the TAMU Library). *My sincere appreciation goes to Dr. Tucker for his generous gift to you.*

Packback Questions Account - The cost of access to this curiosity community will be \$29/student (or less) when purchased directly from Packback, or \$39 for an access code from the MSC Barnes & Noble Bookstore.*# You will use the *Packback Questions* platform (hereafter referred to as "Packback") to discuss course material by asking questions, thinking through answers, improving critical thinking, practicing concise writing, and scoring points.

- Registration instructions are included in Module 1 in Canvas, but the first set of posts will not be due until the end of the third week of class. ***DO NOT disregard these instructions and instead attempt to register yourself through the Packback website, even if you already have a previous account in another course.***
- Packback is fully integrated into Canvas in this course, so once you have properly completed all registration actions, Packback will automatically send your scores to the Canvas gradebook at the end of each posting period.

** If you are in a serious financial bind and don't have funds for this fee, or if your financial aid payment is delayed and you need more time, please email me as soon as possible after the start of the course.*

The cost may be lower for any of you who have used or are using Packback in other classes. See [Packback Product Pricing \(Links to an external site.\)](#).

Computer, Respondus LockDown Browser, and Webcam - All activities for course credit, including exams, will be accomplished online.

- **Computer Access:** You will need regular access to a computer throughout this course. If you do not own a computer or if yours become lost or nonfunctional, I encourage you to remember the university computers available at [Open Access Labs across campus](#). However, you will not be able to use a stationary computer at home or in a lab for exams, as explained below.
- **Portable Computing Device:**

- **For Exams** - You will need to bring a portable computing device with you to take course exams. Exams will take place in the classroom or in the Disability Resources Testing Center. but will be given on Canvas.
- **Permitted Types** - Your portable computing device can be a Windows or Apple laptop, a Chromebook, or an iPad because your device must be compatible with the exam security app we will use (see below). You may NOT use a mobile phone (Android or iOS) or an Android tablet to take exams.
- **Financial Assistance** - If you do not have a portable computing device, you may review [this information from the university](#) to learn more about potential eligibility for financial aid to obtain a satisfactory device.
- **Borrowing a Device** - If needed, you may borrow a suitable device from a friend or check out a laptop for temporary use [from the libraries](#). If this is not possible, contact me as as soon as possible.
- **Tech Issues** -
 - If you experience problems with your device before an exam, contact TAMU Help Desk Central (979-845-HELP) for troubleshooting assistance.
 - If you experience problems during an exam, let me know immediately. I may be able to help you resolve the issue. I also keep a limited number of paper copies of exams on hand in the event of issues.
- **Respondus LockDown Browser:** To enhance the security of the examination process, your portable computing device must have *Respondus LockDown Browser* installed. This software is free.
 - Use the Module 1 Canvas resource, *Respondus LockDown Browser Installation, Checkout, and Use* to properly download, install, and test this required tool.
 - This software, like the Aggie Honor Code, will assist students who want to take the exams honorably and fairly. The software will not prevent a student from cheating who is determined to do so. See the *Academic Integrity Statement & Policy* section near the end of this document for more important information about Honor Code violations and the critical role of personal responsibility.
- **Webcam:** A webcam will be required in only two situations: 1) When you are testing your portable computing device configuration after installing LockDown Browser; and 2) When you are taking a makeup exam.
 - An integrated (internal) webcam or a standalone (external) webcam may be required, depending on the situation. See the Module 1 Canvas resource, *Respondus LockDown Browser Installation, Checkout, and Use* for more information.
 - A webcam will NOT be required when taking an exam in the classroom or in the Disability Resources Testing Center.
- Students with issues meeting any of these technical requirements should contact me as soon as possible after the start of the semester.

Optional Small Groups

My sections are often REALLY big. You may have noticed! To help make the class experience more personal, **you ***MAY*** choose to join an optional small group** that I call a *POLS 207 Crew*. Each crew will have a maximum size of 5 students and can provide a set of peers you can easily ask questions of, study with, and obtain feedback from. For those who join, I encourage you to be creative and work together to make your POLS 207 Crew work well for all members. For instructions on joining a Crew, look in Canvas Module 1, *RESOURCE: POLS 207 Crews (Optional Small Groups)*. Participation is completely voluntary and you may opt in or out at any time.

Canvas & Course Activities

This course is built using Canvas modules. ***The easiest way to follow the course and accomplish all required activities is to use the modules.*** While you may have used the *Assignments* or *Quizzes* links in Canvas to access materials in other courses, those links are hidden in this course to encourage you to work through each module.

Following best practices, this course consists of many individual activities that will work together to support your efforts to master the course material. These activities appear within the modules in Canvas, accessible either via the *Modules* link on in-course menu (left side of the page in Canvas) or using the *Week#* shortcuts at the bottom of the Canvas course home page. Module 1 contains resources you may need throughout the course. Beginning with Module 1, each module contains the activities for one week of the course. Below are brief descriptions of the types of activities built into these modules.

Lectures (*Live and To-Read*) - Almost all lecture activities will correspond to live lectures in the classroom and will contain a link to download the associated slides. On a few occasions, I will post lecture slides that you will need to cover on your own between scheduled lectures. I will clearly indicate in Canvas whenever posted slides will not be covered in class. All lecture materials are copyrighted and must be handled according to the Intellectual Property statement at the conclusion of this syllabus.
(*Core Curriculum Skills addressed: Critical Thinking, Social Responsibility, Personal Responsibility*)

Practice Problems - For each chapter, I will have a set of short-essay prompts available for students who want to check their understanding of the material we have covered. These will be optional and will not be submitted for scoring. The prompts will be derived from the learning objectives listed for each associated lecture. Working practice problems is a familiar way of mastering material and preparing for exams in math and the physical sciences. Practice problems can work just as well in this course, but they take the form of essay-style questions instead of calculation-based questions because of the nature of the material we are covering.

- I strongly encourage students to work these problems in order to learn the course material and to better prepare for exams. Module 1 contains more tips on how to optimize your use of these activities (see *RESOURCE: How to Use Practice Problems to Prepare for Exams*).

- You may work on these problems as a group activity because they are not for credit. However, the practice these problems can afford you will only help if YOU know the answers and can clearly and correctly explain them to another person.
- There is no answer key for these practice problems because the answers are contained in the course material. I encourage you to work with your *POLS 207 Crew* (optional small group, see above) or other friends to verify or improve your answers and understanding. You may also ask me questions about these problems.

Textbook Readings - There will be assigned readings from the free course textbook (see above) for each of the first nine chapters. These will be testable and will be the focus of up to 10% of the questions on the associated exams. (*Core Curriculum Skills addressed: Critical Thinking, Social Responsibility, Personal Responsibility*)

Reality Checks - These activities will be assigned approximately once each week and will require you to read several web pages, documents, and/or articles and then complete an open-book quiz based on those sources. These sources are designed to help you discover the connections between the concepts and theories we discuss in the course and the real-world activities, events, and decisions that shape our past, present, and future. They will educate you on the rules and processes of the Aggie Honor System--it is much more than the 13 words of the Honor Code. (*Core Curriculum Skills addressed: Critical Thinking, Social Responsibility, Personal Responsibility*)

- **You are to work alone** on these activities. They are graded activities and are labeled in the modules as *Scored Assignments*. Additionally, you will have up to **two attempts** on each. If you use both attempts, your assigned score will be the **most recent score** of the two attempts. Some of the assigned readings will be testable and will be clearly marked in each assignment. **Submitting any Reality Checks that are not solely your own, honest work will be an Honor Code violation.**
- **Up to 10% of the questions on each associated course exam** will come from these testable readings.
- **There will be 14 of these activities during the semester.**
- **"Dropping" Scores:**
 - I will *temporarily* exclude the (one) lowest Reality Check score for each student before I calculate midterm grades. However, the excluded score will not be removed from the gradebook and will be considered as one of the 14 total scores at the end of the semester.
 - I will exclude the two lowest scores among all 14 of these activities before calculating your final course grade. These scores will still appear in the gradebook.

Packback Posts - Packback is an AI-moderated platform to promote your curiosity and build critical thinking and writing skills. You will be expected to use this tool every week, starting with the third week of the semester, to post one original question clearly related to our course material, as well as two responses to questions asked by other

students. Registration instructions, as well as rules and criteria for successful posts are laid out in Canvas Module 1. (*Core Curriculum Skills addressed: Critical Thinking, Communication, Social Responsibility, Personal Responsibility*)

- **You should always accomplish your posts by selecting the "Packback" menu item along the left side of the screen within our Canvas course to access the Packback website.** This will ensure that points earned from your posts will be transferred to the Canvas gradebook at the end of each posting period.
- **You will accomplish these posts individually.** Allowing anyone else to post for you, making a post with the help of another person, or copying the ideas or words of other students or sources in your posts will be an **Honor Code violation**.
- **There will be 12 of these weekly activities.**
- **"Dropping" Scores:**
 - I will *temporarily* exclude the (one) lowest Packback score for each student before I calculate midterm grades. However, the excluded score will not be removed from the gradebook and will be considered as one of the 12 total scores at the end of the semester.
 - I will exclude the two lowest scores among all 12 of these activities before calculating your final course grade. These scores will still appear in the gradebook.

Exams - There will be 5 of these, each **covering the material assigned since the previous exam**. The fifth exam will occur during the final exam period, but will NOT be comprehensive. (*Core Curriculum Skills addressed: Critical Thinking, Social Responsibility, Personal Responsibility*)

There will be 5 of these, each **covering the material assigned since the previous exam**. The fifth exam will occur during the final exam period, but will NOT be comprehensive. (*Core Curriculum Skills addressed: Critical Thinking, Social Responsibility, Personal Responsibility*)

- **Online:** All exams will be taken online using **Respondus Lockdown Browser** (See Module 1: *RESOURCE: Respondus Lockdown Browser Installation, Checkout, and Use*). This browser is a tool that works with Canvas to help prevent students from accessing other, unauthorized applications on their desktop/laptop, including other browsers and communications channels, during the exam.
- **Location:** Most students will take exams in the classroom. Exceptions will be students taking a makeup exam or those with an exam-related accommodation from Disability Resources. Students with either of these exceptions will take the exam outside of the classroom. Students with disability accommodations associated with exams must schedule their exams directly with the Disability Resources Testing Center. Students taking a makeup exam will take their exam at a time and location of their choice, but will have additional webcam monitoring requirements with which they must comply. (See Module 1: *RESOURCE:*

Respondus Lockdown Browser Installation, Checkout, and Use for more information.)

- **Time:** Exams will be available only during the scheduled class period, with exceptions made for the students as described in *Location*, above. Most students will be permitted 40 minutes to complete the exam, but must submit their exams before the end of the class period.
- **Disability Accommodations:** Students with disability accommodations will have their approved amounts of additional time to complete an exam loaded in Canvas. However, these students must use the Disability Resources Testing Center in order to receive all of their time, environment, and/or assistance accommodations. If students with accommodations test in the classroom, they will have no more time than is available between when the in-class exam window opens and closes. I cannot provide disability accommodations for any student without first receiving and acknowledging the formal notification email from Disability Resources.
- **"Closed Book:"** Exams will be ***taken without using any notes, course material, internet searches, or unauthorized assistance or information of any kind.***
- **Format:** All questions will be multiple-choice, multiple-answer, or true/false. They will also be more challenging than many exam questions you have faced in high school or in some other TAMU courses. My exams are designed to gauge your ***understanding*** of the material, ***not familiarity or ability to recall memorized facts.*** This may require an unexpected shift in how many of you learn course material. I will provide both resources and guidance to help you improve your approach to learning and to be able to continuously improve your scores on my exams.
- **Signing Out:** Every student testing in the classroom MUST present their picture ID and sign the exam roster near the podium after completing the exam but before leaving the classroom. Approved IDs include a TAMU ID, Drivers License, Green Card, passport, or other federal or state-issued ID that includes a picture. Digital photos of an acceptable ID may be presented in lieu of the actual card. Students who take the exam but do not sign the roster will NOT receive a score for the exam until they have met with me to establish whether this was an oversight or an Honor Code violation.
- **Excused Makeups:** Students with acceptable excuses who cannot take the exam on the scheduled day should contact me as soon as they are aware of the conflict. (See *UNIVERSITY POLICIES - Makeup Work Policy* later in this document, as well as the Module 1 resource in Canvas, *RESOURCE: Absences, Excuses, and Makeup Work*, for instructions on requesting excused absences.)
- **Unexcused Makeups:** I will permit each student ***ONE opportunity during the semester to take an exam that was missed without an acceptable excuse.*** Reasons may include sleeping through the exam, misremembering the date of the exam, etc., The request for an unexcused makeup must be submitted to me via email as soon as possible after the end of the scheduled exam period. If a request is not received within 24 hours of that exam window, I reserve the right to deny the request unless I agree there were justifiable extenuating circumstances. A student taking an ***unexcused makeup exam*** will forfeit 25 out of 100 possible

points on the exam. I will deduct this penalty from whatever score they earn on the exam, making the maximum possible score a "75." Seeking to take more than one unexcused makeup exam during the semester will be a violation of the Honor Code.

- **"Dropped" Scores:** I will ***exclude some of your lowest exam scores when*** calculating your midterm and final course grades. However, the fifth exam score cannot be excluded because I want every student fully engaged in the last portion of the course. That last exam and the highest two of the first four exams will altogether comprise the exam contribution to your ***final course grade***. The highest of your first two exams will comprise the exam component of your ***midterm grade***. In both cases, excluded scores will still appear in the gradebook.
- ***Cheating in any form, including helping others cheat, during exam preparation or execution will be an Honor Code violation.*** The use of Respondus Lockdown Browser is intended to remind you of your obligations under the Aggie Honor Code and to work toward "leveling the playing field" and requiring honest work of all students taking an exam. However, your integrity is always the first and best line of defense and the responsibility of avoiding academic dishonesty lies solely with each of you. See the *Academic Integrity Statement & Policy* section near the end of this document for more important information about Honor Code violations and the critical role of personal responsibility.

Core Assessments - ***The university requires that I submit work each semester from every student that reflects their learning in each of the assigned Core Objective Areas it has designated for that semester.*** To meet this requirement, I have designed mandatory student activities that will be relatively short and not difficult, but they should be done thoughtfully and completely. The quality of your submissions will be assessed by the university, so I will not score these activities. However, your work will reflect on both yourself and this course. These assessments will be assigned in the Canvas modules and will count toward your final course grade, with credit being earned upon submission of the assignments.

Course Communications

Largely because of my military background, I believe in the ***critical value of clear, timely communication within a team.*** Therefore, you will likely receive more messages from me than you have from many other faculty members. This is intentional. However, I also work very hard to send only important updates, notices, and recommendations.

Announcements - Announcements posted in Canvas will be my primary means of broadcast communication. These announcements will also automatically be forwarded to your TAMU email account. To ensure you do not miss any important changes or updates, ***you must check Canvas or your TAMU email for any new announcements at least once a day.*** Whenever I announce a change to the schedule, an assignment, or some other aspect of the course, I will assume that all of you will have received notification of any such change within 36 hours of the announcement.

Emails - I welcome your emails, but I will need your help. I spend hundreds of hours every semester responding to student emails. I use only my TAMU email and never send messages through Canvas.

- **Please ensure that every subject line in every email starts with your course and section ID (section number or start time), followed by the reason you are contacting me.** For example:
 - Subject: *POLS 207-502 - Request for excused absence*
 - Subject: *POLS 207 (9:10am) - Help with Activity 1.5*
 - Subject: *207 8am - Urgent request for meeting*
- **Please only use your TAMU email account instead of Canvas messages to contact me.** I strongly prefer that you email me via your TAMU email account instead of through Canvas for the following reasons.
 - When I'm working in my TAMU email, Canvas DOES NOT group together emails from a conversation between you and me, leaving me without any way to quickly remember the context of your latest message. Messages sent through Canvas really slow me down and I will sometimes need to delay responding to such a message until I have more time. Messages sent to me from your TAMU email DO create these conversation groupings and allow me to be much more responsive and efficient.
 - Canvas also DOES NOT permit me to reply to you with an attachment, unlike a TAMU email.

Phone Calls - I prefer that we use emails to schedule phone calls in advance, whenever possible. If there is an urgent matter or an emergency, you may call me directly. Please note that ***my office phone number is always transferred to my cell phone.*** I also leave my cell phone ringer on most of each day and night, even when sleeping, so please be aware of the time of day before you press "CALL."

Grading Policy

Scores & Total Grade in Canvas

All activity scores will be posted on Canvas. The **Total Grade** calculated by Canvas and appearing in the Canvas gradebook will be calculated differently before and after midterm. Below, I explain how Canvas will do this.

- **BEFORE Midterm:** The *Total Grade* in Canvas will reflect the midterm grading weights shown below. In addition, I will configure Canvas to exclude some of your lowest scores before calculating midterm grades, as explained in each of the activity descriptions above and noted below. Any earned exam extra credit will not affect Canvas's calculated *Total Grade* because of Canvas's limitations. No course extra credit will yet be available before midterm. (*NOTE: An explanation of the two types of extra credit in this course follows below.*)
- **AFTER Midterm:** The *Total Grade* calculations in Canvas will be changed to reflect the final course grading weights, also shown below. I will also configure Canvas to automatically drop the lowest scores as described above in the activity

descriptions and noted below. Any earned exam extra credit or course extra credit will not be included in Canvas's calculated *Total Grade* because of limitations in Canvas.

It is important to recognize that the Total Grade in the Canvas is only an approximation and is not your official grade. I will manually calculate your official midterm and final course grades based on the scores posted in Canvas and the rules laid out below. ***You must be careful when using the Total Grade in Canvas*** to judge your situation in this course.

Tracking and Projecting Your Course Grade

The **Canvas Module 1 resource**, *How to Track and Project Your Course Grade*, provides a complete description of the drawbacks of estimating your course grades using Canvas. There are also ***links in that resource to the Course Grade Projection Tools I have built for you to use this semester***. These tools are much easier to use and much more powerful in helping you track and project your course grades.

Letter Grades & Grade Calculations

Letter Grades - I will assign letter grades to Canvas at midterm and at semester's end using the following procedure. I will first calculate numerical grades, ***rounding only to two decimal places*** (00.00). I will then assign letter grades by ***strictly*** following the cutoffs below. ***These letter grade cut-offs are non-negotiable!***

A = 89.50 – 100
B = ≥ 79.50 and < 89.50
C = ≥ 69.50 and < 79.50
D = ≥ 59.50 and < 69.50
F = Any grade below 59.50

Calculation for Midterm Course Grades - I will record all scores using two decimal places. I will calculate your **midterm grade** as follows:

ACTIVITY	WEIGHT
Packback Posts	33% <i>(after excluding the lowest 1)</i>
Reality Checks	33% <i>(after excluding the lowest 1)</i>
<u>Exam + banked Exam Extra Credit</u>	<u>34%</u> <i>(after excluding the lowest 1)</i>
TOTAL	100%

Calculations for Final Course Grades - I will record all scores using two decimal places. I will calculate your **final course grade** as shown below.

ACTIVITY	WEIGHT
Packback Posts	19% <i>(after excluding the lowest 2)</i>
Reality Checks	19% <i>(after excluding the lowest 2)</i>

Core Assessments	6%	(full credit upon completion of all 3 activities)
3-Exam Average	56%	(after excluding the lowest TWO scores from Exams 1-4, then adding all banked Exam
		Extra Credit to Exam 5's score)
TOTAL	100% + earned Course Extra Credit	

Attendance & Participation

I do not grade attendance or participation separately due to class size. However, I expect and value both attendance and participation by every student. In college, you don't just get what you pay for. Instead, value out depends on work put in!

Extra Credit

I offer two types of extra credit. Neither type will be incorporated by Canvas when it displays your *Total Grade*. However, they are accounted for in the *Course Grade Projection Tools* in Module 1 and I will include them in my manual calculations of your midterm and final course grades, as shown above.

1. **Exam extra credit** opportunities may be offered at multiple points. Any points so earned will be displayed in the Canvas grade book as "*Banked Exam Extra Credit*" and will serve to increase your exam component score when I calculate midterm and final course grades.
 - Any *exam extra credit* earned before midterm will be temporarily added to your highest exam score when I calculate your midterm course grade.
 - For calculation of your final course grade, all banked *exam extra credit* (from both before and after midterm) will be added to the Exam 5 score. Since Exam 5's score cannot be dropped, that is the most beneficial place to post any *exam extra credit*.
2. **Course extra credit** opportunities will be offered after midterm. I will add any points earned as *course extra credit* to your final course grade. This type of extra credit has the greater potential to improve your course grade. I strongly recommend that you take advantage of these opportunities when offered.

Grade Change Requests

My policy on grade change requests is captured by the following maxim: "*Earn the grade you want—receive the grade you earned.*"

I will *only change a midterm or final course grade* if I made a mathematical error in computing the grade according to the guidelines defined above. To be fair to all my students, I will base your midterm and final course grade *solely* on the scores you earned in this course, including any extra credit *offered to the entire section* and satisfactorily completed by you. ***I do not "bump" grades and I do not offer individual extra credit assignments.*** I will uphold this policy even if you are short of the next higher letter grade by 0.01 points.

Since you will not be able to lobby for a higher grade at the end of this course, the best strategy is for you to learn well and earn more points than you will need for your needed or desired course grade. **Be sure to see me early and often this semester if this is difficult for you!**

Late Work Policy

I will consider all assignments **submitted at or after the posted deadlines** to be late and they will be assigned a score of zero. The only clocks that count for assignment deadlines are the internal clocks within Canvas or Packback. Furthermore, "submitted" means that the assignment has been processed and accepted by Canvas or Packback--the time shown by the associated platform for the submission is the official submission time.

In addition, **submissions made on the actual due dates of assignments will be done so at your own risk in the event that technical issues arise.** This means that any late-breaking technical problems on your end (e.g., computer), the distant end (e.g., Canvas, Packback), or in between (e.g., WiFi, internet provider) that occur on the due date and prevent your successful submission of an assignment will NOT be acceptable reasons for you to request additional attempts or deadline extensions from me.

Therefore, **here is a highly recommended strategy:**

- **Submit assignments early** whenever possible.
- If you must be working on an assignment on its due date, then plan to **submit the assignment as early as feasible that day** so you will have additional time to implement technical workarounds, if needed and possible.
- If it appears that you may be late turning in your work, then I recommend you **consider submitting an incomplete assignment** before the deadline in order to earn *some* points rather than be late and lose *all* of them.

Excused Absences - Work submitted by a student as makeup work for an excused absence is not considered late work and is exempted from the late work policy. (See *UNIVERSITY POLICIES - Makeup Work Policy* later in this document). More information about excused absences is included below in *Attendance Policy*.

Course Schedule

This is a **projected** schedule for the course. I will announce any major changes to this schedule, especially exam dates. However, all changes will be reflected on Canvas and not in this syllabus. **Canvas will always be the default source for due dates, exam dates, and other major events and deadlines.**

Canvas Module	Day	Date	Chpt		Topic	Event

Week 1	W	18-Jan	0A	1	Course Intro	
	F	20-Jan	0B	2	Winning the Academic Battle	
Week 2	M	23-Jan	1A	3	What's Important in Politics?	**Add/Drop Deadline**
	W	25-Jan	1B	4	Science, Variations, Comparisons, Measures	
	F	27-Jan	2A	5	Scatterplots & Correlation	
Week 3	M	30-Jan	2B	6	Causation & Spuriousness	
	W	1-Feb	3A	7	Political Cultures	**Official Census Date**
	F	3-Feb	3B	8	Public Continuums & Political Culture	Packback 1 due
Week 4	M	6-Feb	4A	9	Origins of Concern with Government	Reality Checks 1-3 due before midnight preceding exam
	W	8-Feb		10	EXAM 1 (Chpts 1-3)	
	F	10-Feb	4B	11	State Constitutions	Packback 2 due
Week 5	M	13-Feb	5A	12	Revenue Sources	
	W	15-Feb	5B	13	Budgeting	
	F	17-Feb	5C	14	Taxation, Part 1	Packback 3 due
Week 6	M	20-Feb	5D	15	Taxation, Part 2	
	W	22-	5E	16	Expenditures &	

		Feb			Debt	
	F	24-Feb	6A	17	Voting & Participation	Packback 4 due
Week 7	M	27-Feb	6B	18	EXAM 2 (Chpts 4-5)	Reality Checks 4-5 due before midnight preceding exam.
	W	1-Mar	6C	19	Voting Rights	
	F	3-Mar		20	Voting Security & Accessibility	Packback 5 due
Week 8	M	6-Mar	7A	21	Political Parties & Competition, Part 1	**Midterm Grades Due**
	W	8-Mar	7B	22	Political Parties & Competition, Part 2	
	F	10-Mar	7C	23	Interest Groups & Competition	Packback 6 due
*****Spring Break (13-17 Mar)*****						(No Packback posts due on 17 Mar)
Week 9	M	20-Mar	8A	24	Local Governments, Part 1	Course extra credit opens
	W	22-Mar	8B	25	EXAM 3 (Chpts 6-7)	Reality Checks 6-7 due before midnight preceding exam
	F	24-Mar	8C	26	Local Governments, Part 2	Packback 7 due
Week 10	M	27-Mar	9A	27	Local Governments, Part 3	

	W	29-Mar	9B	28	Redistricting & Gerrymandering	
	F	31-Mar	9C	29	Legislative Ops 1	Packback 8 due
Week 11	M	3-Apr	10A	30	Legislative Ops 2	
	W	5-Apr		31	Executing the Law, Part 1	
	F	7-Apr			READING DAY (No classes meet)	Packback 9 due
Week 12	M	10-Apr	10B	32	Executing the Law, Part 2	
	W	12-Apr	11A	33	Adjudicating the Law, Part 1	
	F	14-Apr	11B	34	EXAM 4 (Chpts 8-10)	Packback 10 due Reality Checks 8-10 due before midnight preceding exam
Week 13	M	17-Apr	11C	35	Adjudicating the Law, Part 2	
	Tu	18-Apr			**Q-DROP DEADLINE**	
	W	19-Apr	12A1	36	Adjudicating the Law, Part 3	
	F	21-Apr		37	Policy & Privilege	Packback 11 due **MUSTER @ 7pm, Reed Arena**
Week 14	M	24-Apr	12A2	38	Poverty, Part 1	
	W	26-Apr	12A3	39	Poverty, Part 2	
	F	28-	12B1	40	Healthcare, Part	Packback 12

		Apr			1	due
Week 15	M	1-May	12B2	41	Healthcare, Part 2	
	Tues	2-May	12C	42	Education (Registrar's redefined "Friday")	All Makeup Work Due
	W	3-May			READING DAY (No classes meet)	Core Assessments 1&2 Due Course Extra Credit Due Sect 501 RC 11-12 due before 11:59pm
	Th	4-May			EXAM 5 (Chpts 11-12) for Section 501 (8am lecture) @10:00-11:00am in ILCB 113	Sect 502 RC 11-12 due before 11:59pm
	F	5-May			EXAM 5 (Chpts 11-12) for Section 502 (9:10am lecture) @8:00-9:00am in ILCB 113	**Core Assessment 3 Due**
	Tu	9-May				All Exam 5 & final course grades posted to Canvas by 10pm
	W	10-May				All degree candidate grades due to Registrar
	M	15-May				All remaining grades due to Registrar

University Policies

COVID-19 Precautions

To help protect Aggieland and stop the spread of COVID-19, **Texas A&M University urges students to be vaccinated and to wear masks in classrooms and all other academic facilities on campus**, including labs. Doing so exemplifies the Aggie Core Values of **respect, leadership, integrity, and selfless service** by putting community concerns above individual preferences. COVID-19 vaccines and masking — regardless of vaccination status — have been shown to be **safe and effective at reducing spread to others, infection, hospitalization, and death**. The university's latest policies and guidance about COVID-19 positive tests and exposures is always available at <https://covid.tamu.edu/index.html>.

Dr. Roblyer's Addendum:

- I will be wearing a mask **every day** when inside a building. My family has members with serious, long-term medical conditions and COVID-19 has already caused threatening complications for them.
- I believe that masks greatly reduce infections and transmission, that the vaccine reduces the seriousness of infection and saves lives, and that both masks and vaccinations are very necessary to protect our health and the health of others. I will be glad to explain why I hold these strong beliefs.

Attendance Policy

The university views class attendance and participation as an individual student responsibility. Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about excused absences, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Dr. Roblyer's Addendum:

- **A request for an excused absence is only necessary in this course if your absence will prevent you from completing an assignment for credit or from taking an exam.**
- **Instructions** for requesting an excused absence in this course are posted in **Canvas Module 1, "Absences, Excuses, and Makeup Work."** That resource contains a link to the **Excused Absence Request Form** that I use.
 - **If you are infected or exposed to COVID-19, you must first comply with the University's mandatory reporting requirements.** After that is complete, submit the Excused Absence Request form to me.

- *If you are a student athlete, I will receive automated notices of your absences, **but still need for you to submit the Excused Absence Request Form to me.***
- *I will sometimes excuse absences that go beyond the reasons that [Rule 7](#) specifies when I believe the reason for the absence is morally equivalent to those listed in the rule. (For example, I consider loss of a dear family friend to be justification for an excused absence to be with your family.) I am the sole determiner of whether to excuse any absence that exceeds the University requirements.*

Makeup Work Policy

Students will be excused from attending class on the day of a graded activity or when attendance contributes to a student's grade, for the reasons stated in Student Rule 7, or other reason deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](#) in its entirety for information about makeup work, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Absences related to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 may necessitate a period of more than 30 days for make-up work, and the time frame for make-up work should be agreed upon by the student and instructor" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.1](#)).

"The instructor is under no obligation to provide an opportunity for the student to make up work missed because of an unexcused absence" ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.2](#)).

Students who request an excused absence are expected to uphold the Aggie Honor Code and Student Conduct Code. ([See Student Rules 20 & 24](#).)

Dr. Roblyer's Addendum:

- *If you are not certain if your absence could be excused or not, I welcome you contacting me to discuss the reason for your absence and the possibility of receiving an excuse.*
- *I do not offer makeup opportunities for unexcused absences except for the once-per-semester Unexcused Makeup Exam option. See the "Exams" section above for additional information about unexcused makeup exams.*
- ***All work missed due to excused absences must be made up before 11:59pm on the last lecture day of the semester unless you have requested and received permission for a later submission. Such extensions are not common and usually reserved for those students who had a very recent or complex excused absence.***
- *Complete makeup work instructions are posted in Canvas Module 1, "RESOURCE: Absences, Excuses, and Makeup Work."*

Academic Integrity Statement and Policy

“An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do.” (Dr. Roblyer's Note: Why? Because TRUST is the foundation of honor AND education. Without TRUST, this university and our world would become a miserable, horrid place.)

“Texas A&M University students are responsible for authenticating all work submitted to an instructor. If asked, students must be able to produce proof that the item submitted is indeed the work of that student. Students must keep appropriate records at all times. The inability to authenticate one's work, should the instructor request it, may be sufficient grounds to initiate an academic misconduct case” ([Section 20.1.2.3, Student Rule 20](#)).

You can learn more about the Aggie Honor System Office Rules and Procedures, academic integrity, and your rights and responsibilities at aggiehonor.tamu.edu.

Dr. Roblyer's Addendum: *As a Former Student, faculty member, retired military officer, father, husband, brother, and son, I take the Aggie Honor Code very seriously. I want all of you to do the same, going beyond the memorization of the 13 words it contains to actually knowing why it exists and how it is enforced. I believe this is so important that I am willing to take course time to teach you about the Aggie Honor System, as well as hold myself and my students responsible for upholding it. Through assignments in this course, **all of my students will learn about multiple aspects of the Honor Code** and the university rules against academic misconduct that put teeth in the Code. Violations of those rules in my past courses have included:*

- *Copying, passing, or otherwise misusing, exam, assignment, and extra credit materials (Fall 2016)*
- *Preparing for exams with “exam-like” materials that I did not provide and have not approved (Fall 2016)*
- *Obtaining, receiving, or providing unauthorized assistance or assistance that provides an unfair advantage*
- *Forging, or altering excuse documentation (Fall 2014)*
- *Copying answers during exams (Spring 2019 and previously)*
- *Obtaining help from others on individual assignments (Fall 2019 and previously)*
- *Submitting Understanding Checks for completion credit that are blank (Spring 2021)*
- *Submitting Packback posts that are re-worded versions of classmates' posts (Spring 2021) or copied directly from the internet (Fall 2022)*

Because you are an Aggie, I am extending to you the TRUST conferred to those who fully understand and faithfully adhere to our Honor Code. Abuse of this trust will damage your honor, your academic standing, the reputation of this institution, and the foundation of the superb educational process offered here. Additionally, the university's recommended sanction for a first-time honor violation is an F in the course. Know that **I will report and sanction ALL Honor Code violations.***

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy

Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact Disability Resources in the Student Services Building or at (979) 845-1637 or visit disability.tamu.edu. Disabilities may include, but are not limited to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible.

Disability Resources is located in the Student Services Building or at (979) 845-1637 or visit disability.tamu.edu.

Dr. Roblyer's Addendum:

- *I will gladly and actively work with and for students with disabilities to optimize their educational experience in my courses. I have multiple family members with different types of disabilities, so I have had much practice in adjusting and accommodating. Do not hesitate to contact me if you are facing these kinds of challenges and there is something I can do to help.*
- *If you know or suspect that you may have a disability, **you must advocate for yourself to receive assistance at the university level.** The first step in doing this is to make an appointment with Disability Resources (contact info above). I will also be happy to meet with you to discuss and encourage you to take this initial step, as well as for follow-up after that meeting.*
- **Statement on Accessibility:** *I strive to make this course, including all course materials, **accessible to all** my students. If you take note of any part or aspect of my course that is not fully accessible to you, please inform me as soon as possible so I can work to remedy the problem.*

Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality

Texas A&M University is committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws prohibit gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

With the exception of some medical and mental health providers, all university employees (including full and part-time faculty, staff, paid graduate assistants, student workers, etc.) are Mandatory Reporters and must report to the Title IX Office if the employee experiences, observes, or becomes aware of an incident that meets the following conditions (see [University Rule 08.01.01.M1](#)):

- The incident is reasonably believed to be discrimination or harassment.
- The incident is alleged to have been committed by or against a person who, at the time of the incident, was (1) a student enrolled at the University or (2) an employee of the University.

Mandatory Reporters must file a report regardless of how the information comes to their attention – including but not limited to face-to-face conversations, a written class assignment or paper, class discussion, email, text, or social media post. Although Mandatory Reporters must file a report, in most instances, you will be able to control how the report is handled, including whether or not to pursue a formal investigation. The University's goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and to ensure access to the resources you need.

Students wishing to discuss concerns in a confidential setting are encouraged to make an appointment with [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS).

Students can learn more about filing a report, accessing supportive resources, and navigating the Title IX investigation and resolution process on the University's [Title IX webpage](#).

Statement on Mental Health and Wellness

Texas A&M University recognizes that mental health and wellness are critical factors that influence a student's academic success and overall wellbeing. Students are encouraged to engage in proper self-care by utilizing the resources and services available from Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS).

Students who need someone to talk to can call the TAMU Helpline (979-845-2700) from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. weekdays and 24 hours on weekends. 24-hour emergency help is also available through the National Suicide Prevention Hotline (800-273-8255) or at suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

Dr. Roblyer's Addendum:

- *All of my family members, including me, are familiar with personal mental health challenges. Life happens. Sometimes we are hurt or get broken and we cannot fix it ourselves. Visit [Counseling and Psychological Services](#). Call the Student Helpline (979-845-2700). Use the [free "MY SSP" app](#) to access free counseling and resources. Talk with me. Don't remain silent or alone.*
- **Food/Housing Insecurity:** *These situations can cause substantial anxiety and stress. I urge any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing to contact me. As your instructor, I will connect you to TAMU resources that will help address these serious problems and bring you needed relief. (Note: Adapted from "Aggie Collegiates Ready to Explore the World (ACREW) Course Syllabus," Palomin, L., 2019.)*

College and Department Policies

Code of Conduct

The Department of Political Science at Texas A&M University is committed to fostering an environment of learning and scholarship that is open, respectful, and welcoming to

all, regardless of race, religion, gender (identity), ability, age, socio-economic background, or sexual orientation.

As outlined in the department's Code of Conduct, we strive to create a positive climate for all students, faculty, and staff. We are dedicated to providing a harassment-free experience for all members and guests of the department.

Whereas we expect members of the political science department to adhere to the departmental Code of Conduct in general, respectful behavior by all participants is especially important in the classroom and other course-related interactions (virtual and in-person). An environment conducive to learning and scholarship requires free speech and an open mind, but must be free of harassment, hostile, or threatening behaviors. Faculty, staff, and students ought to be proactive in helping others and speak up to avoid harm in the case that any of these unwelcome behaviors are observed.

Dr. Roblyer's Addendum: *I believe in treating all people with dignity and respect. My physical and virtual classrooms and offices are open to all students, and each of you are welcome as you are. By its nature, this course will most certainly expose you to opinions and information that are contrary to your own ideas and understandings. We will see a significant amount of evidence that challenges our long-held convictions that the Great State of Texas is the "hands-down best state" in the Union. No matter the reason or topic, we will see information and be presented positions that disagree with what we believe is true and best. When this happens, **respectfully engage** and seek to understand the new information and contrary position. Both you and your classmates will be the poorer if you choose agitation or anger instead. I am always willing to converse via email or to meet with you outside of class to privately discuss any issue that may be troubling to you.*

No matter the strength of any person's convictions or the facts they wield, respectful speaking and listening will be the rule in my course. *One of the pillars of the greatness of America and the Great State of Texas is respectful and mutual consideration of our differing perspectives and opinions. We will lean and build upon that pillar in this course.*

Course Updates, Copyright, and Intellectual Property

The dates, times, and assignments listed or described in this document are subject to change at any point during the semester. Any such changes will be made as soon as known and will be posted on *Canvas* and announced via email.

This syllabus and other non-exam-related, non-assignment-related materials I produce or use for this class may be reproduced in part or in whole, but only for your personal, educational use. Any other attempt to distribute, provide, or sell my intellectual property without my express permission is against copyright law and the Aggie Honor Code.

■ Important Note about Course Summary (below)

The **Course Summary** listed below is appended automatically by Canvas based on calendar events as they are currently listed. ***If you are viewing this Syllabus as a PDF via Howdy or any location other than in Canvas, these events and dates (if present) are likely to have changed since the PDF was created.***