

# POLS 207: State and Local Government

Texas A&M University

Spring 2020

Section 503 - MWF 11:30am - 12:20pm BLOC 102

Section 506 - MWF 1:50pm - 2:40pm BLOC 102

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Office Hours: TR 3:00pm-4:00pm

The best way to contact me is through e-mail. However, please note that I am unlikely to check my e-mail after 5:00 PM. Therefore, you should assume that I will not read my e-mail until the following morning if you contact me after this time. **It is also important that you have activated and consistently check your TAMU e-mail account.** This is the best way for me to contact the class concerning course materials. **However, I am terrible at returning e-mails.** Please allow forty-eight (48) hours for a response. E-mails to the instructor should include **your name, course and section number in the subject line** in order to receive a response. An alternative to email or office hours would be to discuss any concerns before or after class.

## Course Description

According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), this course *should* examine the origin and development of the Texas Constitution, structure and powers of state and local government, federalism and inter-governmental relations, political participation, the election process, public policy, and the political culture of Texas.

## Course Objectives

According to the THECB, upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- 1) Explain the origin and development of the Texas constitution
- 2) Demonstrate an understanding of state and local political systems and their relationship with the federal government
- 3) Describe separation of powers and checks and balances in both theory and practice in Texas
- 4) Demonstrate knowledge of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of Texas government
- 5) Evaluate the role of public opinion, interest groups, and political parties in Texas
- 6) Analyze the state and local election process
- 7) Describe the rights and responsibilities of citizens
- 8) Analyze issues, policies, and political culture of Texas
- 9) To define, understand, and use concepts and terms relevant to the study of state and local government in the United States

## Required Texts

There is NO textbook for this course available for purchase at the MSC bookstore. I recommend websites, like the Texas Tribune ([www.texastribune.org](http://www.texastribune.org)) and the Texas State Historical Association ([www.tshaonline.org](http://www.tshaonline.org)), for the information on the government and history of Texas. Attendance is not required but highly encouraged since the course is lecture based.

## Grades

Your grade in this course will be based on three (3) exams.

**Exams:** The exams will contain fifty (50) multiple choice questions about topics from the preceding lectures (meaning the exams are not cumulative). There will be a review sheet disseminated for each exam. These exams will be completed using the full sheet (8.5 X 11) Scantron. Ideal answers to questions on the examinations will express clear knowledge of both the assigned reading materials and the content of the lectures. Your highest exam will count for forty (40) percent of your final grade. Your second highest (median) exam will count for thirty (30) percent of your final grade. Your lowest exam will count for thirty (30) percent of your final grade.

## Grading Scale

The grade breakdown for the course is as follows:

Assignment	Grade %
Highest Exam	40%
Median Exam	30%
Lowest Exam	30%

A = 89.5-100 B = 79.5-89.4 C = 69.5-79.4 D = 59.5-69.4 F = Less Than 59.5

Please note that the grading scale already rounds up your final grade. After grades are calculated following the third exam, **your grades are final**. This grading scale is what you have earned not what you might think you "deserve" in the course. Every semester professors are inundated with e-mails asking them to "bump" or "curve" students' grades. I will not change a grade unless there is a miscalculation. I respectfully ask that you do not e-mail me asking for "special consideration" to raise your grade. **Your grades are final. Any request to change your grade, unless there is a miscalculation, is a violation of the Aggie Honor Code and will not be tolerated.**

## Extra Credit

It is possible faculty or graduate students may be conducting experiments as part of their research or dissertation. If such an opportunity arises and a faculty member or graduate student approaches me about conducting an experiment during class, half a point (0.5) will be added to the final grade in

the class for each experiment the student participates in during my class **ONLY**. If you participate in an experiment in a different class, **this does not count**. Possibilities for extra credit may occur, but are not guaranteed. **Although I have offered more “extra credit” in previous semesters, this *may be* the only extra credit I will offer this semester**. Please do not rely on extra credit to receive the grade that you want in the course.

## Students with Disabilities

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 <http://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.

## Title IX and Limits to Confidentiality

Texas A&M University and the College of Liberal Arts are committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws provide guidance for achieving such an environment. Although class materials are generally considered confidential pursuant to student record policies and laws, University employees including instructors cannot maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues that jeopardize the health and safety of our community. As the instructor, I must report (per Texas A&M System Regulation 08.01.01) the following information to other University offices if you share it with me, even if you do not want the disclosed information to be shared:

Allegations of sexual assault, sexual discrimination, or sexual harassment when they involve TAMU students, faculty, or staff, or third parties visiting campus.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In many cases, it will be your decision whether or not you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting, you are encouraged to make an appointment with the Student Counseling Service (<https://scs.tamu.edu/>).

Students and faculty can report non-emergency behavior that causes them to be concerned at <http://tellsomebody.tamu.edu>.

## Diversity

The Department of Political Science supports the Texas A&M University commitment to diversity, and welcomes individuals from any racial, ethnic, religious, age, gender, sexual orientation, class, disability, and nationality. (See <http://diversity.tamu.edu/>). In the spirit of this vital commitment, in this course each voice in the classroom has something of value to contribute to all discussions.

Everyone is expected to respect the different experiences, beliefs and values expressed by fellow students and the instructor, and will engage in reasoned discussion that refrains from derogatory comments about other people, cultures, groups, or viewpoints.

### **Course Materials/Copyright Statement**

The handouts used in this course are copyrighted. By “handouts,” I mean all materials generated for this class, which include but are not limited to syllabi, quizzes, exams, lab problems, in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets. Because these are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy the handouts, unless I expressly grant permission.

### **Academic Dishonesty/Plagiarism Statement**

As commonly defined, plagiarism consists of passing off as one’s own the ideas, words, writings, etc., which belong to another. In accordance with the definition, you are committing plagiarism if you copy the work of another person and turn it in as your own, even if you should have the permission of the person. Plagiarism is one of the worst academic sins, for the plagiarist destroys the trust among colleagues without which research cannot be safely communicated. If you have any questions regarding plagiarism, please consult the Aggie Honor System Office website (<http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor>) or the latest version of the Texas A&M University Student Rules, under the section “Scholastic Dishonesty.” (<http://rules.tamu.edu>). Always remember:

**“An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do.”**

### **Additional Course Policies**

**You will not be allowed to interrupt the learning environment for other students in this class. To this end, cell phones and other electronic devices should be silenced and not be used in class. You can use your laptops to take notes for the course; however, use of the internet is prohibited during class time. Further, you will not be allowed to use headphones, earbuds, or watch movies or television, etc. during class time.**

### **Make-Up Exams**

**NOTE: The make-up exams are only available to those who miss the in-class exams with a legitimate, excused absence. The dates of the make-up exams will be announced on eCampus**

You are eligible to take a makeup exam only if the following conditions are met:

- 1) you must have a documented University recognized excused absence, and
- 2) you must make arrangements for the makeup prior to the exam or by the next class period.

In case of a university excused absence, students should arrange a makeup through an electronic, e-mailed request to me. **It must be a university excused absence with supporting documentation. This includes the University Explanatory Statement for Absence from Class form available at <http://attendance.tamu.edu>.** I WILL NOT accept copies of medical excuses; you must provide original documentation. If you do not have an excused absence you will receive a zero for the exam. **No Exceptions.** You have **48 hours to contact the professor concerning the make-up.** Failure to do so will result in a zero for the exam. **This is NOT a retake of a previously completed exam.** Students can take a maximum of two make-ups only. You will be given the same time allocated for the class.

## Course Schedule

Below is a tentative schedule of readings, topics, and assignments that will be covered in the course. If it appears that we are falling behind or new material needs to be added, I reserve the right to alter the syllabus to ensure that we spend adequate time on each topic with thoughtful consideration of your time as students.

### Section 1: Course Overview, Introduction, Constitution, Federalism, Local Government

- Exam 1 - Friday, February 14th

### Section 2: Participation, Political Parties, Media, Interest Groups

- Exam 2 - Wednesday, March 25th

Tuesday, April 14th, 5pm - **\*Last Day to Q-drop\***

### Section 3: Institutions, Budget, Policy

- Exam 3 - Friday, April 24th

### Optional Replacement Exam

NOTE: This exam can be used to replace your lowest exam score. It cannot be used as a make-up exam. **This exam is cumulative.**

- Replacement Exam - Tuesday, April 28th - This is a redefined Friday