POLS 207: State and Local Government

Benjamin Tkach
UMTWR 01:15-02:50
QENG 114

Office: 328 TAMUQ Engineering Building
Office Phone: 4423-0468
Office Hours: TR 3:30-4:30 & by appointment
Email: benjamin.tkach@qatar.tamu.edu

Course Description

This course is a survey of state and local government with special reference to the government and politics of Texas. During the semester we will examine state constitutions, state and local government institutions, political behavior, and public policy. We will be integrating the historical development of institutions and political activities at the state level in order to better understand public policy outcomes. By the end of the course, students are expected to be able to critically analysis political actions at the state level and the connection between local politics and political power. In each of these areas we will specifically examine the politics of Texas.

Prerequisite: NONE

Learning outcomes

By the end of this course, students should be able:

1. To define, understand, and use concepts and terms relevant to the study of state and local government in the United States.
2. To comprehend origins and evolution of state political systems with a special emphasis on Texas including a study of political institutions, constitutions, and federalism.
3. To learn the opportunities for citizens to participate in government at the state and local level by understanding differences in mechanisms and patterns of participation thus making them more responsible citizens.
4. To be able to critically analyze and demonstrate competence in the construction and operation of local political institutions
5. To be able to identify key political actors in the local political landscape of the U.S. and particularly Texas

Required Text and Other Readings

There is one required textbook (citation below) for this course and is available at the Campus bookstore and internet outlets. You are responsible for the material presented in the 13th edition, the use of previous editions does not guarantee adequate coverage of current material. Additional course readings will be available through either email or the ELearning website associated with the course.


The reading that is assigned is not overly burdensome. However, some weeks are heavier than others. As a result, you should plan accordingly. I reserve the right to add readings from time to time during the semester. In most cases, such readings will represent current events in local government or additional readings to help clarify points arising from discussion.
Class Communication

I will be available during office hours or through appointment. I expect students to attempt these two options prior to unscheduled office interruptions. Contacting me via email is the best method to reach me and I strive to answer each email within 24 hours (excluding Fridays and Saturdays). All communications will be conducted in English.

Grading

Grading consists of 4 exams, 3 short pop quizzes, 1 short movie review writing assignment. The relative weights are as follows:

Exam 1: Sunday May 25–20%
Exam 2: Monday June 2–20%
Exam 3: Sunday June 8–20%
Exam 4: Thursday June 19–20%
Movie Review Paper Tentatively Due Sunday June 15th–11%
Pop Quizzes: 3 throughout the semester 3% each–9%

* A Handout outlining the movie review assignment will be distributed prior to the movie

All Make Up Exams: Sunday June 22nd

Grading Issues

You will be evaluated solely on your academic performance which includes participation. Academic performance includes clarity of thought and expression, general knowledge of the material, written composition, spelling and grammar.

- There is NO extra credit available in this course.
- Grades will be assigned based on the final averages as follows: A 89.5-100; B 89.4-79.5; C 79.4-69.5; D 69.5-59.5; F below 59.4.
- That said, if a student wishes to dispute a particular grade he or she may do so with the following process. Challenges must consist of a typed single page that clearly delineates the disputed element of the assignment. Students must wait 24 hours after the graded work is returned to file an appeal. All appeals must be filed within 3 days after the assignment has been returned. The 3 day period includes both business and non-business days. Students must return the original graded assignment and the written challenge to me or the Political Science Department offices. Challenges must be time stamped if not directly delivered to me.
- All assignments are due at the beginning of class.

I observe student rule 7 concerning university acceptable excuses for late work (see http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule7.htm). If you miss a test because you have a university acceptable excuse you must contact me or the department by the end of the next business day after the absence to ensure your full rights to take the makeup exam. It is in your best interest to contact me before the exam. If you do not have a university excused absence for a missed assignment, you will receive a 0 on that assignment. The late policy for this course is the loss of one letter-grade per-day without a university excuse. Weekends count when calculating late penalties.
Despite the lack of participation formally influencing grades, class participation is essential to successful completion of this course. Completion of the reading and active participation in class debate enhances students' ability to complete assignments and the exams. Students are responsible for material from both the readings and class discussions. It is in your best interest to collect notes for class days missed. I will not make lecture slides available without a university acceptable excuse. **NOTE:** if you are absent when a test/quiz is given, you will receive a ZERO on that test/quiz unless you have a university–excused absence. Tests will only be made up in cases of excused absences and all such tests will be held on Sunday June 22nd.

All written assignments are subject to the following rules unless otherwise specified. They must be typed, doubled spaced, and numbered, with no larger than 12 point font size and 1 inch margin all around. All written work should be stapled at the upper left corner, without any colorful or plastic covers. The research paper should use headings and subheadings for structure. Failure to follow the format requirements will result in grade deductions.

**Statement about Students with Disabilities**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Department of Student Life, Services for Students with Disabilities in Room B118 of Cain Hall, or call 845-1637. For additional information visit http://disability.tamu.edu.

**Statement about Course Materials/Copyright and Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty**

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

**Definition of plagiarism:** As commonly defined, plagiarism consists of passing off as one’s own the ideas, words, writing, 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 offenses, 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.”

**Campus Resources: OASIS** The OASIS facilitates activities related to the learning of core course concepts and applications within the common body of knowledge expected of engineering graduates. Focus areas within this definition are writing, math, sciences, and engineering classes. Additionally, ancillary skills, such as applied technology, college success strategies, multi-media applications, presentations skills development, career–building activities, and peer mentoring are also part of the mission of OASIS as they are appropriate to the total professional development of engineering graduates. In designated classes, Supplemental Instruction Leaders (SI Leaders) attend each class meeting, take notes, and develop special help sessions designated to keep students current with each week’s learning objectives. The department’s onsite tutors work with students in the office located in suite 310, near the library. Tutoring hours of operation are weekdays 9:00AM to 7:00PM and Saturdays 3:00-6:00PM. Come in and have a cup of coffee or tea and relax knowing an entire department is dedicated to your success at Texas A&M University at Qatar. Please stop by the front desk or make your appointments online from OASIS.
Academic Dishonesty: Students should be aware that academic dishonesty involves acts other than plagiarism. Please consult the Honor Council Rules and Procedures at http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor for more information.

The materials used in this course are copyrighted. By “materials,” I mean all products generated for this class, which include but are not limited to syllabi, web pages, podcasts, multimedia files, presentations, 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.

This syllabus is subject to change.

Course Schedule

Week 1
Sunday May 18
   Assignment: Course Syllabus and U.S. Constitution
Monday May 19
   Assignment: Chapter 1–Overview of States in America
Tuesday May 20
   Assignment: Chapter 1 continued, handouts of U.S. States
Wednesday May 21
   Assignment: Chapter 2–Democracy and Constitutionalism in the States
Thursday May 22
   Assignment: Chapter 3–States and Federalism

Week 2
Sunday May 25
   Assignment: Exam 1
Monday May 26
   Assignment: History of Texas
Tuesday May 27
   Assignment: Chapter 4–Participation in State Politics
Wednesday May 28
   Assignment: Chapter 5–Parties and Campaigns in the States
Thursday May 29
   ***CLASS CANCELLED

Week 3
Sunday June 1
   Assignment: Chapter 11–Participation in Community Polities
Monday June 2
Assignment: **Exam 2**

Tuesday June 3
Assignment: Chapter 6–Legislators in State Politics

Wednesday June 4
Assignment: Chapter 7–Governors in State Politics

Thursday June 5
Assignment: Chapter 8–Bureaucratic Politics

**Saturday June 7**
Chapter 8–Continued

**Week 4**

Sunday June 8
Assignment: **Exam 3**

Monday June 9
Assignment: Chapter 13–Civil Rights (& Civil Liberties)

Tuesday June 10
Assignment: Movie viewing will occur today.

Wednesday June 11
Assignment: Chapter 10–Governing America’s Communities

Thursday June 12
Assignment: Chapter 9–Courts, Crime, and Correctional Policy

**Week 5**

Sunday June 15
Assignment: Movie Assignment Due
Assignment: Chapter 12–The Politics of Taxation and Finance

Monday June 16
Assignment: Chapter 14–Politics of Poverty, Welfare, and Health

Tuesday June 17
Assignment: Mass Polarization


Wednesday June 18
Assignment: The Poltics of Education, reading handout on ecampus

Thursday June 19
Assignment: **Exam 4**

**Week 6**

Sunday June 22 Assignment: Exam Makeup day