

Texas Politics
POLS 2023
Spring 2022

In the event of a significant disruption of course activities because of an extraordinary environmental situation (e.g., COVID-19), this syllabus is subject to change. Any and all changes will be communicated with students in as timely a manner as the situation allows.

Professor: Dr. Clare Brock
cbrock1@twu.edu
940.898.2142
Office: CFO 612

Virtual Office Hours: Wednesdays 10am – 11am
Schedule using zoom provided on canvas

Catalog Course Description

This course is an introduction to Texas state and local government. We will examine the workings of the Texas political system through a variety of means, including readings, discussions, interactions with guest speakers, and written assignments. We will think critically about the structure of Texas government and politics, including its constitutional basis. We will carefully consider the political and cultural forces at work during the writing of the Texas Constitution and how they are still shaping the lives of Texans today. We will tackle fundamental questions, including asking how and why state and local governments operate as they do in Texas, the impact of politics and policy on Texans, and how Texas compares with other states in its structure, politics, and delivery of services to its citizens.

Measurable Student Learning Outcomes

- To acquire factual knowledge and understanding of the Texas political system;
- To understand and analyze patterns in the development of Texas' political system and political culture;
- To use history as a basis for understanding the behavior and constraints on actors and institutions within Texas politics; and
- To become engaged with state and local politics in Texas, with the understanding that state and local politics have enormous influence on the everyday lives of Texans.

Each of the above student learning outcomes must be performed at an appropriate level as stated in each course assignment requirements, grading scale or rubric.

Materials:

Textbook (Web-text):
Texas Politics, 9th Edition
ISBN: 978-1-949164-95-4

Readings and Media posted to Canvas

Assignments:

3 Written Assignments (50 points each, 150 points total)
Midterm and Final Essays (100 points each, 200 points total)
In-Text Reading Quizzes (14 Chapters in WebText, 140 points total)
Syllabus + Lecture Quizzes (Syllabus + 15 Modules, 160 points total)

Total: 650 points

A = more than 585 points

B = 520 – 584 points

C = 455 – 519 points

D = 390 – 454 points

F = 389 points or fewer

Course Schedule: This class is fully online. The Course Calendar below lists the dates during which assignments should be completed. **All quizzes assignments are due by 11:59pm on Wednesday nights** throughout the duration of this course.

Week 1: Introduction & Texas History

Wed. Jan. 18- Wed. Jan. 26

Topics: Introduction to the course, student and professor expectations, syllabus review; Texas history (overview), Texas political development, Texas political culture

Assignments: Syllabus Quiz; Lecture Quiz 1

Readings:

1. Textbook, "Political Culture"
2. Schwartz, Mimi. "How Texas Swaggered Into a Coronavirus Disaster." New York Times. June 28, 2020
3. Vara, Vauhini. "How California bested Texas." The New Yorker. January 8, 2015

Week 2: Texas Constitution(s)

Wed. Jan 26 – Wed. Feb. 2

Topics: Texas Constitution; historical context of Texas Constitution, contemporary ramifications.

Assignments: Lecture Quiz 2

Readings:

1. Textbook, "The Texas Constitution"
2. Burrough, Bryan and Jason Staford. "The myth of Alamo gets the history all wrong" The Washington Post. June 10, 2021.

Week 3: Federalism

Wed. Feb 2 – Wed. Feb 9

Topics: The relationship between Texas and the federal government; relationships between states; grants and mandates.

Assignments: Lecture Quiz 3

Readings:

1. Textbook, "Federalism"

Week 4: Texas Legislature

Wed. Feb 9 – Wed. Feb. 16

Topics: Legislative type; gerrymandering; redistricting; juxtaposition of formal powers granted to Texas Legislature and its legislative effectiveness

Assignments: Lecture Quiz 4 and Written Assignment #1

Readings:

1. Textbook, “The Legislature”
2. Listen: “TribCast: A new law banning most abortions in Texas takes effect”

Week 5: Legislative Organization and Process

Wed. Feb. 16 – Wed. Feb. 23

Topics: How the Texas Legislature is organized; party leaders; the committee system and its structure; how a bill becomes a law.

Assignments: Lecture Quiz 5

Readings:

1. Textbook, “The Legislative Process”
2. “How a bill becomes a law: Texas House of Representatives” Texas House of Representatives

Written Assignment #1

Due Wednesday, Feb 23 at 11:59pm: Bill Tracking Exercise

Week 6: The Executive Branch

Wed. Feb. 23 – Wed. Mar 2.

Topics: The makeup of the executive branch in Texas, including the six statewide, directly elected offices; the Texas Secretary of State and various agencies (TxDOT, State Health Services, the Railroad Commission, etc.)

Assignments: Lecture Quiz 6

Readings:

1. Textbook, “The Executive Branch”
2. Svitek, Patrick. “Attorney General Ken Paxton’s three Republican challengers criticize his legal problems — and pitch themselves as the best GOP nominee”

Week 7: Texas Governor

Wed. Mar. 2 – Wed. Mar. 9

Topics: Texas governorship serving as a springboard to national prominence, relatively few formal powers granted to governor by Texas Constitution

Assignments: Lecture Quiz 7 and Midterm

Readings:

1. Textbook, “The Governor”

Midterm Exam

Due Wednesday. Mar 9 at 11:59pm: Midterm Essay

Week 8: Texas Judicial System

Wed. Mar. 9 – Wed. Mar. 23

Topics: The structure of the Texas judiciary; the election of judges; the political development of the judicial system in Texas

Assignments: Lecture Quiz 8

Readings:

1. Textbook, “The Judicial Branch”

Mar. 14 – Mar. 18: Spring Break

Week 9: The Criminal Justice System & Midterm

Wed. Mar. 23 – Wed. Mar. 30

Topics: Criminal justice in Texas; the death penalty; prison population, etc.

Assignment: Lecture Quiz 9

Readings:

1. Textbook, “The Criminal Justice System”
2. Grann, David. “Trial by Fire: Did Texas Execute an Innocent Man?” *The New Yorker*. September 7, 2009
3. Listen: Death Penalty Information Center “Professor Frank Baumgartner on Death-Penalty Data, Public Opinion, and Capital Punishment as a “Failed Experiment””

Week 10: Campaigns and Elections

Wed. Mar. 30 – Wed. Apr. 6

Topics: Voting qualifications and registration; voting rights; getting on the ballot; electronic voting; primary versus general elections

Assignment: Lecture Quiz 10; Written Assignment #2

Readings:

1. Textbook, “Elections, Voting, and Campaigns”
2. Samuels, Alex. “Campaign finance for dummies: A guide to Texas election reporting rules” *Texas Tribune*. Feb 1, 2018.
3. Vann R. Newkirk II. “How Shelby County v. Holder Broke America.” *Atlantic*. July 10, 2018

Written Assignment #2

Due Wednesday, Apr 6 at 11:59pm: Voter Guide Assignment

Week 11: Political Parties

Wed. Apr. 6 – Wed. Apr. 13

Topics: The radical shift from Democratic to GOP domination in Texas and what it means for representation and policymaking

Assignment: Lecture Quiz 11

Readings:

1. Textbook, “Political Parties”
2. Walter, Amy. “Whose Party is It?” *The Cook Report*

Week 12: Interest Groups

Wed. Apr. 13 – Wed. Apr. 20

Topics: Interest group formation and activity, campaign contributions, and political influence of interest groups in Texas

Assignment: Lecture Quiz 12

Readings:

1. Textbook, "Interest Groups"
2. Watch WFAA Investigates: "How much money did lawmakers get from energy industry after power grid reform passed in legislative session? Millions."

Week 13: Local Government

Wed. Apr. 20 – Wed. Apr. 27

Topics: The relationship between the state and local governments; the role of counties and cities in providing services and law enforcement.

Assignments: Lecture Quiz 13 and Written Assignment #3

Readings:

1. Textbook, "Local Government"

<p style="text-align: center;">Written Assignment #3</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Due Wednesday, Apr. 27 at 11:59pm: Who Represents Me? + Letter to a Representative</p>

Week 14: Fiscal, Education, and Social Policy & Class Wrap Up

Wed. April 27 – Wed. May 4

Topics: Fiscal, Education, and Social Policy

Assignments: Lecture Quiz 14 and Final Exam

Readings:

1. Textbook, "Public Policy"

<p style="text-align: center;">Final Exam</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;">Due Wednesday, May 4 at 11:59pm: Final Essay</p>

I reserve the right to make any changes to this syllabus and/course as the semester progresses which I see fit in order to better its progression.

Assignment Breakdown

Course Readings and Lectures:

Each student is expected to read the assigned material as detailed in the course calendar. Students will be held accountable for assigned material via the course assignments, lecture quizzes, exams, and quizzes and discussions embedded in the WebText.

Each module will include corresponding video(s) for each chapter and other supplemental material, also posted online. These lectures and additional readings are required and will be included in quizzes and exams.

It is vital that you manage your time and maintain a high degree of self-discipline to ensure your success in any college course. If you fall behind it is difficult to adequately address the topics or complete assignments, often leading to a snowball effect and eventual failure. The pace of this course is about 1-2 chapters per week, plus additional readings, podcasts, and videos, during the full length of the term.

WebText Quizzes and Assignments

Each chapter of the TexasPolitics WebText will include a set of embedded questions and opportunities for interaction. There are 140 points available in total.

WebText embedded questions and responses have due dates keyed to the week in which we will be discussing them. The course calendar lists a week for each module. For example:

Wed. Jan. 18- Wed. Jan. 26

2. Textbook, "Political Culture"

This indicates that the "Political Culture" chapter of the Textbook should be read, and all questions should be completed before midnight on Wednesday Jan 26. However, in order to create flexibility for you, the questions will remain available for one week after the deadline. After that additional week, you may still answer the embedded questions, but you will not receive credit for them in canvas.

Lecture Quizzes

Lecture quizzes are **open book, open note** quizzes posted on Canvas covering lectures and additional readings that were not part of the Webtext. These quizzes will assess only the readings and lectures for that module and are not cumulative. You are allowed 2 attempts, per quiz, however, quiz questions may be shuffled to result in different questions on the second attempt. Quizzes are not timed. Answers and grades will be posted after the quiz deadline. If you are uncertain about a quiz question or how to answer a question, please contact the professor via email or during office hours. I will not give you quiz answers, but I am happy to help you better understand concepts or clarify issues that you find confusing. The window to complete these quizzes will be the start and end date for a given module. Each quiz must be complete within the module in which it is assigned.

Written Assignments

You will be assigned **3 written assignments**, worth 50 points each, to be submitted on canvas. These assignments are intended to give you practical skills and knowledge about the political system in Texas. These assignments will vary in length but are weighted equally. In these assignments word count requirements are not exact; however, they are a good guideline for about how much of a response the professor expects from you. A writing assignment that is considerably under or over the suggested amount will not receive full credit. For example, if the suggested word count is 250 words, a 100-word essay or a 500-word essay will not receive full credit. Each assignment will have its own suggested word count. Full assignment descriptions and instructions are available in canvas, under the appropriate assignment.

Please note that all written assignments are expected to be typed, double spaced with one-inch margins and in a 12-point font. The clarity of your writing will affect the strength of your argument and therefore you should proofread and spell-check your work carefully. You must cite any information and/or ideas that you take from someone else's work. Also, you should limit your use of direct quotations (someone else's words surrounded by "") to the rare occasion when the original author has stated your point perfectly and it cannot be improved. Otherwise, you are generally better off stylistically using your own words and citing the ideas and facts provided by other authors. For citations, I prefer that students use the American Psychological Association (APA). For additional information on APA style, visit:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/> or

<http://www.apastyle.org/learn/tutorials/basics-tutorial.aspx>

Midterm and Final

The class midterm and final will be **open-book, open-note**, and administered on canvas. The exam format, for both exams, is simply one essay question. Both the midterm and final are worth 100 points each.

Essays will be graded on thoughtfulness, use of class materials and resources, and based on the provided rubric.

Important Course Policies

Late work:

I tend to think about late work as having two types: the type that really isn't going to matter to anybody that it's a little bit late (soft deadlines) and the type that it actually does matter (hard deadlines).

Embedded WebText questions are keyed to a particular moment in the course progression. Some flexibility is built in, but after the dedicated flex time has passed, the course has moved on. I cannot allow you to complete WebText questions after the allotted flexibility window has

passed because the publisher controls the grading and sends grades to canvas. I do not have control over WebText settings once the course has begun.

Exams are also a hard deadline. If you are very ill and unable to complete the exam on time, please send me an email (even if it is just 1 line saying "I'm sick") within the allotted exam time and we will work together on coming up with a fair solution.

Lecture Quizzes and Writing assignments, in general, have a little more flexibility. I'm perfectly happy to let you have a two- or three-day grace period on the lecture quiz or assignment if you ask for it in a timely manner or ask in advance. That being said, after more than a few days have passed, the homework assignment is no longer useful to you because the class has moved on. It would not be in my best interest, or yours, to allow you to pile up assignments and complete them at the end of the semester. **I cannot let you go back at the end of the semester and complete work you have missed over the entire course.** I wish I could, but unfortunately grades are due very quickly at the end of the semester and I need sufficient time to meet the deadline that the university imposes on me.

If you need significantly more time on an assignment, please email me or schedule a virtual meeting and tell me what is going on. We may be able to figure things out. My concern will always be for your progress and your ability to participate in the course. I cannot do for any one student what I wouldn't do for the others, because that violates the basic fairness of a course. But fairness doesn't have to mean that everybody does everything at exactly the same time, extensions may therefore be granted occasionally if possible and if it will hurt no one else.

Learning during a pandemic

Life is not normal right now and things are not okay. You most likely know people who have lost their jobs, have tested positive for Covid-19, been hospitalized, or perhaps even died. You may have experienced changes to your work responsibilities or family care responsibilities.

I am fully committed to making sure that you learn everything you were hoping to learn from this class! I will do my best to help you finish assignments, do well, and learn from and understand the class materials. If you are having trouble, I will not judge you or think less of you. I hope you will extend me the same grace. I will be flexible and lenient to the extent that I am able (see the above late policy).

You do not owe me personal information about your health (mental or physical). You are always able to talk to me about things that you are going through, though. If I can't help, I may know someone who can.

If you are struggling, need help, feel that you aren't understanding everything, do not suffer in silence. Talk to me! I will do my best to work with you and help you. Please drop-in to virtual office hours, schedule a specific appointment with me outside of regular office hours, or just send an email. I want you to learn things from this class, but I also want you to stay healthy, balanced, and grounded during this class.

How to get help

In almost all cases, the best way to get help is to ask as soon as you know you need it. Contact me (Prof. Brock) or stop by my virtual office hours (link posted on canvas). Asking for help is GOOD. It shows that you are aware of what you need and that you are able to take some control of your life and education, even if it is just to say, "I have no control over my life and education! Help!"

If you don't understand course material, tell someone as soon as possible. Talk to a classmate or talk to me. Everybody struggles with the material for this course at some point or another. That is expected. Don't let things snowball. It is easier to deal with difficulties earlier rather than later.

If you need help with accessibility or if you are having problems with basic needs, please see the resources linked for you on the canvas page. You cannot learn well if you are lacking accessibility accommodations or if you do not have basic food or shelter. Please let someone know and get the help you need!

Civility:

A government class will necessarily touch on topics that are sensitive, controversial, and difficult. **Accordingly, I ask that above all students remain *respectful of one another and of the professor and GA*.** Personal attacks and comments that discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, age, ability, sexual orientation, religion, political party affiliation or national background will not be permitted. In this class I ask you to make a personal commitment to learning about, understanding, and supporting your peers. Value the diversity of the class, participate actively in discussion, and ask clarifying questions when necessary. Do not minimize or devalue statements by your peers, and do not assume that others are attempting to minimize or devalue you. Do not try to embarrass or demean your peers. You may disagree with ideas and constructively challenge each other, but you may not make personal attacks. Be open and ready to be challenged and come to class ready to learn and grow. Similarly, I cannot promise that you will never perceive my political beliefs and positions; but I do promise that I will not push or force them upon you, I ask that you behave similarly. If you struggle to abide by these etiquette rules, you will be dropped from the class, and you may be removed from the university (see academic freedom statement).

Email:

Please approach all of your emails as if they were professional academic correspondence, and not text messages. You should include your name and section number in your subject line, as this makes it easier to identify students and get you the fastest and best response possible. Next, you should use the proper greeting, which includes the person's title and last name. First name basis is not appropriate when addressing your professor or the graduate assistant. The body of your text should be checked for basic spelling errors, tone, and clarity. ***Please realize that I may not be able to respond to emails right away.*** I will try to get to your emails within 24 to 48 hours or, at the latest, or on the next business day, should you email on the weekend. **If you email me with a question that is answered in the syllabus, I will simply refer you back to this document.** I may

also answer through Canvas or a general email to the class, rather than writing you back personally, if your question reflects a general concern.

Technology:

If you need immediate technological assistance, try contacting the help desk. I will always try my best to get to your emails as quickly as possible, but I am human, and my responses may not be as fast as you would need them to be, especially if you email me at night. Further, I am not a technology expert.

Similarly, if you experience difficulties with the WebText, I recommend contacting Soomo through their online chat or student help email (see details on canvas).

Online Course Attendance Policy

Students are expected to log-in and use Canvas for a total of about 3 hours a week, in a regular semester. You will also need to dedicate around 6 hours a week to studying and working on assignments. Please bear in mind that this is an average, some weeks may involve less work, other weeks will involve more. As a general rule, you should login to the course and check your email at least two to three times per week.

Modules for the course will be open for 2 weeks, and no longer, unless you have discussed an extension with me. This is to ensure that students are keeping similar pace throughout the semester and to prevent you from falling behind. Each module deadline will serve as a benchmark for your overall progress in the course. Remember that the online education environment requires a high degree of self-discipline and intrinsic motivation. I suggest that you keep a steady pace throughout the semester. Mark deadlines clearly on your calendar.

Course Email / Announcements

There will be frequent updates posted in the course announcements area and via email. This is the primary avenue of communication for this course. Each student is expected to read the information and keep current with the course. Many frequently asked questions are addressed via announcements and some may contain vital course information. These are official course communications, and you will be held accountable for the information provided via electronic communications.

Course Honor Code

Scholastic dishonesty is a violation of the TWU Student Code of Student Conduct. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating on a test, plagiarism, and collusion. Students are expected to complete all course work by their own efforts and in their own words.

When you cite or paraphrase another author, you are required to properly acknowledge all sources with a parenthetical citation in the body text and provide a bibliographic listing on a works cited page, using MLA, APA, or another recognized format. If you have any questions about citations, contact me immediately. Any attempt to submit work that is not a product of your own efforts will result in an automatic "F" for the assignment and the course. In addition,

you may face disciplinary action by the college administration leading up to expulsion from the college.

The college uses a premier plagiarism detection program known as “Turn It In.” Since all papers will be electronically submitted for review, I implore you to avoid procrastinating and begin your work as soon as possible. Time seems to be the largest factor in a student’s decision to plagiarize.

Intellectual Property

All course materials and course content are the intellectual property of the instructor, your classmates, and/or their respective authors. As a result, recording audio or video of the class, as well as the duplication of or forwarding of e-mail, video, and Canvas postings is prohibited without written permission. This means, for example, that you may not post or share materials from the class, video or audio of lectures/discussions, or video of the class to personal web pages, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube or any other electronic medium without the written consent of the instructor, and, if appropriate, all relevant class members. Students may, however, request permission from the instructor to record course lectures/discussions for personal academic use.