
SAM HOUSTON STATE UNIVERSITY

POLS 2306 - TEXAS GOVERNMENT SYLLABUS



Course Description

State and local governments influence everything from our economy to the environment to education, public safety and health care. The decisions made or not made by public officials shape how we live. The governor, state legislators, and administrators, for example, set policies that determine your tuition rates. Do you have a student loan? Do you pay your tuition and fees by working? Those policies affect you, but have you ever wondered how they are made? What institutions and decision makers play a part in that process? Who influences their decisions? Those are the types of questions that we will explore in this course.

Professor Info

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Office Hours: By

Appointment

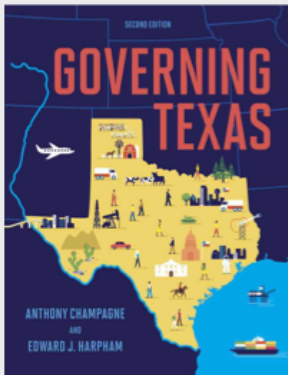
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Required Text

Anthony Champagne &
Edward Harpham
Governing Texas, 2015, 2nd
Edition

W.W. Norton & Company
ISBN: 978-0-393-93684-1



Recommended Readings

- The Texas Tribune: : <https://www.texastribune.org/>
- Texas Politics: <http://www.soomolearning.com/catalog/texas-politics/overview>

By the end of the semester, you will be able to identify and describe the structure of state and local government in Texas and how policies are made. You will also be able to identify key political process and opportunities to participate as an active citizen.

From high school or political science classes, you might remember that the U.S. Constitution divides our federal government into three different branches; the executive, legislative, and judicial. Texas state government is also divided into these three branches. You might remember that power is shared between the federal government and the states in a system we call federalism. Local governments play a role as well. We will explore how Texas operates in this context, and how state and local officials make policies and how citizens and interest groups participate.

Politics and public policymaking does not always happen as explained in a textbook, however. Ultimately, it is hoped that you will make use of your new knowledge and skills to participate in the policymaking process and make a positive impact in your communities.

Course Objectives

By the end of the semester students will be able to

- Examine the origin and development of the Texas constitution.
- Illustrate state and local political systems and their relationship with the federal government.
- Describe separation of powers and checks and balances in both theory and practice.
- Analyze the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of Texas government.
- Evaluate the role of public opinion, interest groups, and political parties in Texas policymaking.

- Analyze the state and local election process.
- Identify the rights and responsibilities of citizens.
- Analyze public policy problems, policies, and the political culture of Texas.
- Critically assess potential solutions to public policy problems.
- Develop as a citizen through critical thinking about your social responsibility to participate in state governance and politics.



Course Requirements

Quizzes (60%):

Fifteen (15) Quizzes will be given throughout the term via Blackboard. They will include a combination of short answer, multiple choice, and true/false questions. Material will come from your readings, lectures, and other activities. You may use open books and open notes; however, you are expected to work independently. Instructions will be posted on Blackboard. You will have one week to complete each quiz. The quizzes will open on every Monday after midnight and will close on the following Sunday at 11:59 p.m. (midnight) throughout the semester.

Critical Thinking Exercises (25%):

Throughout the term, you will be asked to think critically about key issues in Texas politics. You will complete several short writing assignments in response to specific readings or documentary films. Some of these assignments will be completed via discussion board forums where you will interact with your classmates. Instructions will be posted on Blackboard. Critical thinking exercises will will open on every Monday after midnight and will close on the following Sunday at 11:59 p.m. (midnight) throughout the semester.

Current Event Assignments (15%):

Course Requirements & Grade	
Quizzes	60%
Critical Thinking Exercises	25%
Current Event Assignments	25%
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100-90 points	A
80 - 89	B
70 - 79	C
60 - 69	D
< 60	F

< 60	E
60 - 69	D 3
70 - 79	C

Throughout the term, you will stay up-to-date on relevant events. During some weeks, you will be asked to watch short news videos and complete comprehension quizzes. During other weeks, you will be asked to read newspaper articles and complete short writing assignments. One objective of this assignment is to apply key concepts from the textbook and our lectures to the real world. Another objective is to encourage you to follow current Texas events. Instructions will be posted on Blackboard. Current event assignments will open on every Monday after midnight and will close on the following Sunday at 11:59 p.m. (midnight) throughout the semester.

Course Policies

Communication with the professor:

Email is the preferred mean of communication. I will reply your emails within 24-48 hours. You can send a reminder after 48 hours of no reply.

You can call the office number when necessary, however reaching me via email would be faster than the phone.

Absences on Religious Holy Days:

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911 (a) (2) defines a religious holy day as: “a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20....” A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the



missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed.

Disability Services

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Counseling Center. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

<http://www.shsu.edu/dept/academic-affairs/documents/aps/students/811006.pdf>

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:



Dean of Student's Office

Important Resources

Websites

- The City of Huntsville, <http://www.huntsvilletx.gov/>
- The State of Texas, <http://www.texas.gov/en/Discover/Pages/agency-finder.aspx>
- Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/>
- Texas State Legislature, <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/>
- Texas State University System, <http://www.tsus.edu/>
- Walker County, <http://www.co.walker.tx.us/>

Newspapers and Magazines

- Austin American-Statesman, <http://www.statesman.com/>
- Houston Chronicle, <http://www.chron.com/>
- Huntsville Item, <http://itemonline.com/>
- The Texas Tribune, <https://www.texastribune.org/>

Videos

- CBS 60 Minutes, http://www.cbs.com/primetime/60_minutes/video/?vs=Clips
- CSPAN, <http://www.c-span.org/>
- PBS Frontline, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/view/>
- TED: Ideas Worth Spreading, <http://www.ted.com/>

Course Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Read
1	Jan 18 - Jan 22	Introduction	
2	Jan 23 - Jan 29	Ideology and Political Socialization	
3	Jan 30 - Feb - 6	Texas Political Culture, The People, & Geography	Chapter 1 Documentary Film: Ken Burn's <i>The West</i>
4	Feb 7 - Feb 12	The Texas Constitution	Chapter 2
5	Feb 13 - Feb 19	Texas in the Federal System	Chapter 3
6	Feb 20 - Feb 26	Local Governments	Chapter 10
7	Feb 27- Mar 5	Political Parties	Chapter 4
8	Mar 6 - Mar 12	Campaigns and Elections	Chapter 5
9	Mar 13 - Mar 19	Spring Break - No Class	
10	Mar 20 - Mar 26	The Texas Legislature	Chapter 7 (pp. 219 - 227)
11	Mar 27 - Apr 2	The Legislative Process	Chapter 7 (pp. 210 - 219)
12	Apr 3 - Apr 9	Interest Groups and Lobbying	Chapter 6
13	Apr 10 - Apr 16	The Texas Governor	Chapter 8 (pp. 235 - 253)
14	Apr 17 - Apr 23	The Plural Executive	Chapter 8 (pp. 254 - 269)
15	Apr 24 - Apr 30	The Justice System	Chapter 9 Chapter 13 Documentary Film: Death by Fire
16	May 1 - May 7	Public Finance in Texas	Chapter 11