

*State Government*  
*PS 2306-W01, Summer II 2019*

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**Office Hours:**  
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**Required Text:**

Texas Politics Today: 18<sup>th</sup> Edition by Mark P. Jones, Ernest Crain, Morhea Lynn Davis, Christopher Wlezien, and Elizabeth Flores. Cengage Publications, ISBN # 978-1-337-79984-3.

I do not use the Sul Ross Bookstore. The best and quickest way to get a copy of the text is to go to cengage.com, and the book is available for purchase as a hardcopy text, rental, or e-books.

**Course description**

This is an introductory course covering state politics and Texas public policy. This class will cover the historical foundation of Texas politics, the structure of the Texas government, and the most salient policy issues in Texas today. Additionally, the interaction between the state, local, and national government will be explored, as well as the diversity in state government approaches across the country.

**Course learning outcomes:**

By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

1. Explain how the history, geography, and political structure of Texas have affected and continue to affect policy implementation in the state
2. Discuss the key policy issues facing Texas today
3. Analyze how national, state, and local government interact to implement policy
4. Describe the distinctive features of Texas government compared to other states
5. Understand, analyze and discuss American and Texas government and politics as it pertains to contemporary American political life
6. Critically analyze information to discern its meaning and validity

**Program Learning Outcomes (Political Science):**

The graduating student will:

- Demonstrate knowledge of significant theoretical approaches of political science through written work and oral communication.
- Demonstrate the ability to analyze domestic and international political processes in written work.

- Demonstrate the ability to develop arguments about global equity and equality issues in politics through written work and oral communication.

**Texas Domain III Competency 19:**

The teacher understands and applies social science knowledge and skills to plan, organize, and implement instruction and assess learning.

**Texas Domain III Competency 23:**

The teacher understands and applies knowledge of concepts of government, democracy, and citizenship, including ways that individuals and groups achieve their goals through political systems.

**DIS TANCE EDUCATION STATEMENT**

Students enrolled in distance education courses have equal access to the university's academic support services, library resources, and instructional technology support. For more information about accessing these resources, visit the SRSU website. Students should submit online assignments through Blackboard or SRSU email, which require secure login information to verify students' identities and to protect students' information. The procedures for filing a student complaint are included in the student handbook. Students enrolled in distance education courses at Sul Ross are expected to adhere to all policies pertaining to academic honesty and appropriate student conduct, as described in the student handbook. Students in web-based courses must maintain appropriate equipment and software, according to the needs and requirements of the course, as outlined on the SRSU website.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS****ASSIGNMENTS:**

You will have twelve written assignments. There will be three possible essays to choose from on each daily assignment. For instance, on July 12, there will three essays listed. You will choose one and write your essay about that topic. Do not do all three, just pick one. This way, you can have some choice as to the topic that appeals to you—and I want a one or two sentence explanation as to why you chose the topical essay and why it appealed to you.

Each written assignment is due at the date specified below. Your written essays/assignments must be submitted through Blackboard. Each written assignment is to be double spaced. Each essay should be five pages in length. Each assignment will address the theme of the chapter assigned.

Each written assignment is worth 100 points. 90-100=A; 80-89=B; 70-79=C; 60-69=D; 0-59=F.

Therefore, the total number of points possible will be 1,200. At the end of the semester, I will add your points; 1080-1,200=A; 960-1079=B; 840-959=C; 720-839=D; 0-720=F

What should an essay consist of?

**First**—original work—any plagiarism uncovered will result in an F for that assignment. Two cases of plagiarism will result in an F in the course. What is plagiarism?

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** Doing and/or taking credit for someone else’s work, presenting the ideas and work of others as your own, and/or not citing your sources when you utilize the ideas of others are all violations of academic integrity. It is your responsibility to read and understand the university’s stance on academic dishonesty in the SRSU Student Handbook, as all violations will be taken seriously and handled through the university judicial process. In addition, please note that I will be using plagiarism software for all written assignments.

**Second**—correct punctuation and grammar, please proofread your essays—all considered part of a well-constructed essay.

**Third**—you must base your essay on facts, not opinions. We all have opinions. Your essay must be based on facts and concepts drawn from the textbook or credible academic sources. What do I mean from a credible academic source? Books or articles from an academic press or an official newspaper or web-site. Avoid statements in your essay such as “I think Governor Abbot is a great governor” or “I think Governor Abbot is a terrible governor.” Another example might be “I think that the Texas Congress is corrupt.”

America has become a culturally and polarized society. Avoid excessive emotionally charged essays—keep them professional and scholarly and as objective as you can.

There is much good material online but there is much nonsense and conspiratorial theories out there—please do not include conspiratorial theories.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

**LATE WORK:** If you miss a due date, then each day your assignment is turned in late will result in a letter grade lowered. For instance, if an assignment is due July 17, and you submit the work on July 18<sup>th</sup>, the highest grade possible would be a B. If that same assignment is submitted on June 19<sup>th</sup>, then the highest grade possible would be a C. If that same assignment is submitted on June 20<sup>th</sup>, then the highest grade possible would be a D. After, that, a grade of zero is permanent.

That said, I also accept **Early Work**. If you complete an assignment on July 12 and that assignment is not due until July 14—do not hesitate to turn the assignment in.

**STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS:** It is Sul Ross State University policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. If you would like to request such accommodations because of a physical, mental, or learning disability, please contact the ADA coordinator for Program Accessibility located in FH 112 or call 837-8691.

## **Course Outline**

**July 9—read the syllabus and write me an email stating that you have read the syllabus and understand the requirements for the course and that you have obtained the textbook or are in the process of obtaining the textbook.**

**July 12-turn in prologue and chapter one assignment**

**July 15-chapter two assignment due**

**July 17-chapter three assignment due**

**July 19-chapter four assignment due**

**July 22-chapter five assignment due**

**July 24 and 26-no assignments due**

**July 29-chapter six assignment due**

**July 31-chapter seven assignment due**

**August 02-chapter eight assignment due**

**August 05-chapter nine assignment due**

**August 07-chapter ten assignment due**

**August 09-chapter eleven assignment due**

**August 12-chapter twelve assignment due**

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*Essay Choices and Requirements*

**Prologue and Chapter One—Politics and Cultural Diversity**

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

1. Describe each of the state's nine major cultural areas. Does the description fit your home area?
2. Discuss the policy differences between the Texas conservative and liberal ideologies.
3. How do the state's major cultural regions differ historically, economically, and ethnically/racially?

**Chapter Two: Texas in the Federal System**

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

- 1. What distinguishes a federal system of government from both a unitary system of government and a confederate system of government? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each type of system of government?**
- 2. Explain the differences between delegated and reserved powers and give examples of each. What is the importance of Article I, Section 8 and the Tenth Amendment in the U.S. Constitution? Define and give examples of exclusive and concurrent powers.**
- 3. Evaluate the arguments for state's rights and the argument that has become increasingly common during the current era of coercive federalism (define coercive federalism) that the national government's powers should be limited. What role has Texas played in recent efforts to limit national government power?**

### **Chapter Three-The Texas Constitution in Perspective**

**Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.**

- 1. What are the historical reasons for the restrictive nature of the Texas Constitution? What benefits did the state constitution's writers hope to achieve in limiting state government?**
- 2. Describe the constitutional organization of each of the three branches of Texas government?**
- 3. Discuss the major constitutional provisions that restrain each branch of state government. What are the consequences of these restraints?**

### **Chapter Four Voting and Elections**

**Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.**

- 1. What explains why some people are more likely to vote than others? Why does the number of elections in Texas lead to lower turnout? How does Republican dominance of statewide offices affect turnout in Texas?**
- 2. What is majority vote rule, and why is it used in Texas primaries? What is the plurality vote rule, where is it used, and what differences does it make in elections?**
- 3. Why is it hard for candidates to get on the ballot in Texas? Ballot design seems a technical issue but is seriously contested by parties and candidates. Why?**

### Chapter Five-Political Parties

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

1. Explain why there are two major parties in the United States and Texas. Why have parties in the United States and Texas traditionally been so pragmatic?
2. Define realignment and discuss to what extent it has occurred in Texas politics? Discuss the reasons for and describe the events that led to the rise of the Republican Party in Texas.

How do parties help represent the public in government? Are parties always good agents of the public? Why or why not?

### Chapter Six—Interest Groups

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

1. What are interest groups? What do they do? What are the major types of interest groups? Identify an interest group in each sub-category.
2. How do interest groups use different approaches to influence each of the three branches of government? DO campaign contributions affect public policy making in Texas? How?
3. What is lobbying? What does a lobbyist do? What techniques do lobbyists use to influence state officials?

### Chapter Seven-The Legislature

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

1. What is legislative amateurism, and how does it affect the legislative process? Explain how low salaries, short biennial sessions, and limited staff designed to curtail the legislature's power. Explain how such limits increase the influence of interest groups.
2. Explain the powers of the Legislative Council, the Legislative Budget Board, the Legislative Audit Committee, and the Sunset Advisory Committee. List the powers of the speaker and lieutenant governor. Explain how each of their powers is used to control the legislative process.
3. What are the demographic and political factors that affect who becomes a member of the legislature? What is descriptive representation, and how does the make-up of Texas legislature compare with the state's population as a whole?

## Chapter Eight-The Executive

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

1. Describe the governor's legislative tools of persuasion. What are the weaknesses in the governor's executive powers? How can the governor adapt to these limits by asserting political influence?
2. Explain the function of the governors' staff? Why is a competent staff important for a successful administration?
3. Define and explain the characteristics of Texas bureaucracy. Describe the classical model of bureaucracy, and explain how the Texas executive branch differs from other bureaucratic organizations?

## Chapter Nine-The Judiciary

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

1. What are the characteristics that distinguish criminal and civil cases? What is the nature of the parties involved in both types of cases? What are the requisite standards of proof regarding evidence?
2. What types of jurisdiction do the different Texas courts have? What basic elements of a case determine where the case is heard?
3. Compare and contrast grand juries and petit juries. How are jurors selected to serve on parole? What is the function of each type of jury?

## Chapter Ten-Law and Due Process

Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.

1. Differentiate between civil and criminal law. Give at least six broad categories of civil law and examples of each. Explain why each example is classified as civil rather than criminal law.
2. Define the due process of law, and explain its origins in the state and national constitutions? Trace the criminal justice process step by step from search and arrest through fiscal conviction. At each stage, show how the legal system is designed to guarantee a sense of fair play between the government and the accused.

**3. List the four major purposes of jails and penitentiaries and evaluate how effectively they achieve each of them. How does the death penalty measure up against these standards? Discuss whether certainty or severity of punishment is more effective at preventing recidivism and deterring crime. Why?**

#### **Chapter Eleven-Local Government**

**Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.**

**1. Why do cities adopt home rule? What are some examples of limitations that are imposed on home rule cities? Explain the mayor's role and authority in the council-manager, weak mayor, and strong mayor forms of government. Compare and contrast at-large and single-member district election systems. Describe the cumulative voting alternatives.**

**2. In what ways are county governments restricted by state law? How are members of the commissioner's court elected? What are the responsibilities of the commissioner's court? Who are county law enforcement officers and county financial officers? What are their responsibilities?**

**3. What is the primary purpose of special district governments? What are some examples of special district governments? What are some reasons for creating a special district to provide a service as opposed to giving a city or a county the responsibility for the service?**

#### **Chapter Twelve-Public Policy in Texas**

**Choose one of the three essays and write about it with a one or two sentence explanation as to why that essay topic appealed to you.**

**1. Describe the major types of taxes imposed by state and local governments? How does Texas compare with other states? What are the advantages and disadvantages of regulatory taxes? Of taxes based on the benefits-received principle? Of taxes based on the ability-to-pay principle?**

**2. Define progressive and regressive tax rates. What are the arguments for an against each type? Which social groups benefit from each type?**

**3. Describe the functions of state and local institutions in governing Texas public elementary and secondary schools. What are the major issues that these institutions face? What are the major political issues that higher education faces in Texas?**