



**PS 2306-Wo1
State Government
Spring 2026**



Professor: Jessica Velasco, DPA
Office Hours: M (12-3), T (2-4), W (12-1) and by appointment
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Course description

This course will cover the state government of one of the most unique states in the country—Texas! You will learn about the historical foundation of Texas political culture, the structure of the Texas government, and the interaction between the state, local, and national governments. You will also learn about the way Texas approaches all sorts of governmental functions in a way that is distinctly...Texas.

Textbook & Course Materials:

We will be using a free, open educational resource (OER) textbook for this class. You can access it [here](#). There is also a pdf of the textbook on Blackboard.

If you prefer reading a print book, there is a print copy of the textbook available in the SRSU library in the Reserves section. You can check it out for up to 4 hours for use in the library.

There will also be additional materials for you to read and review each week. All of these items are provided on Blackboard.

Course learning outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Explain the origin and development of the Texas constitution.
2. Describe 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. Identify the rights and responsibilities of citizens.
8. Analyze issues, policies and political culture of Texas

9. Explain how the history, geography, and political culture of Texas have affected and continue to affect various aspects of the structure and function of the Texas government
10. Describe the distinctive features of each of the three branches of Texas government compared to other states and how each feature impacts outcomes for the state and its citizens
11. Illustrate and explain important state government concepts, vocabulary, and processes
12. Appropriately interpret information provided in various charts and graphs
13. List some of the many resources available to learn more about state and local government in Texas

CORE ASSESSMENT

In addition to other outcomes listed above, I will also be promoting the following in this class:

Personal Responsibility

Students will develop principles of personal responsibility for living in a diverse world; to include intercultural competency, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national and global communities.

Social Responsibility

Students will develop principles of social responsibility for living in a diverse world, to include the ability to connect choices, actions, and consequences to ethical decision-making.

GRADING

Grades in this class will be determined by the number of points you earn by the end of the course. The point distribution is listed below:

A	895-1000 points
B	795-894 POINTS
C	695-794 POINTS
D	595-694 POINTS
F	BELOW 595 POINTS

You can track your progress by clicking on the “My Grades” tab in Blackboard. You can also view grading rubrics for each assignment in the “My Grades” tab. If I leave you additional feedback outside of the rubric, you will see a message bubble in the grading center. PLEASE NOTE: As mentioned above, the grade for this class is based on POINTS, not the average that Blackboard gives you.

POINT DISTRIBUTION

Introduction Post	10 points
Syllabus Quiz	20 points
Discussion Board (11 x 20)	220 points
Weekly Applied Assignments (50 x 10)	500 points
Mid-term Exam	100 points
Final Exam	150 points
Total	1000 points
CITIZENSHIP POINTS	Up to 50 points

INTRODUCTION POST: By Friday at 11:59 p.m. of the first week of class, you need to post an introduction to the discussion board. More information is on Blackboard. The introduction post is worth 10 points. To receive full points, you must follow the instructions.

SYLLABUS QUIZ: By Friday at 11:59 p.m. of the first week, you need to complete the syllabus quiz on Blackboard in the Week 1 folder. You will have ONE attempt. The quiz is worth 20 points.

3-2-1 POST/WEEKLY DISCUSSION BOARD: Even though we are on online class, I would like to have some sort of class interaction. Each week, starting with Week 2, **post the following related to the readings and materials for the topics we are covering by Tuesday at 11:59 p.m.:**

- THREE (3) items you learned (three complete sentences)
- TWO (2) items you want to learn more about or don't understand (two complete sentences)
- ONE (1) discussion question for your classmates (see guidance below on discussion questions)

All of these should be in ONE post. **Please use the following format:**

3 things I learned:

1. Complete sentence
2. Complete sentence
3. Complete sentence

2 things I want to learn more about/need clarification on:

1. Complete sentence
2. Complete sentence

Discussion Question (must be related to the readings and materials for the week we are in):

DQ: Your question

After you have made this post, you will need to respond to the discussion question of one other student by Thursday at 11:59 p.m. Each discussion board is worth 20 points. Please see the information at the end of the syllabus for more information about discussion board questions, responses, and expected behavior. **NOTE: All discussion boards are “post-first” boards, meaning you will not see the posts of your classmates until you post. In addition, since I can only attach one due date to each graded item in Blackboard, the due date you see is the date for the initial post, the 3-2-1 post. However, you need to post your 3-2-1 post by Tuesday.**

WEEKLY APPLIED ASSIGNMENTS: For most weeks, after you have completed reading and reviewing the materials on the folder for each chapter, you will complete an applied assignment. The instructions for each weekly assignment are in Blackboard in each week's folder. **The weekly assignments are due by 11:59 p.m. on Thursday of each week and are each worth 50 points.**

CLASS MEETINGS/LECTURE: I will be having an optional, virtual class Q&A meeting during the first week of class to answer any questions you have about the course. I have also tried to have weekly virtual meeting times for asynchronous web courses before, and they are very poorly attended—usually, no students attend (it is hard to find a time that works for all/most students since y'all didn't sign up for it at a specific time). For this reason, I will NOT be doing an optional weekly virtual meeting time. Instead, lecture recordings are posted in your weekly folders for you to view at your convenience. I am also available during office hours and for scheduled virtual meetings. Just sent me an email to set those up! In addition, if you are in Alpine, you are always welcome to attend my FTF section on Tuesdays/Thursdays, 11 a.m.-12:15 p.m. (LH 309).

EXAMS: There will be a mid-term exam and a final exam in this class. Both will be available on Blackboard on the days and times specified below. PLEASE PUT THESE IN YOUR CALENDAR NOW. For each, you will have two hours from the time you start to finish the exam.

CITIZENSHIP POINTS: Throughout the semester, I will provide opportunities to earn extra points by engaging with the various communities you are a part of (class, campus, city, etc.). You may earn up to 50 citizenship points that will be added to your point total for the class. NOTE: Citizenship points are not available after the last class day.

W	Week of	Topic	Reading	Assignments and Important Dates*
1	Jan. 12	Introduction to the course	Syllabus	Syllabus quiz & introduction post due by Friday at 11:59 p.m.
2	Jan. 19	Texas Beginnings	Chapter 1 & materials on Blackboard	3-2-1 post due by Tuesday at 11:59 p.m. and response post due by Thursday at 11:59 p.m.
3	Jan. 26	Texas Constitutions & Federalism	Chapter 2 & materials on Blackboard	3-2-1 post due by Tuesday at 11:59 p.m., response post and weekly applied assignment due by Thursday at 11:59 p.m.
4	Feb. 2	Texas Legislative Branch	Chapter 3 & materials on Blackboard	3-2-1 post due by Tuesday at 11:59 p.m., response post and weekly applied assignment due by Thursday at 11:59 p.m.
5	Feb. 9	Legislative Process in Texas	Materials on Blackboard	Bill look-up discussion board post due by Tuesday at 11:59 p.m., response post and weekly applied assignment due by Thursday at 11:59 p.m.
6	Feb. 16	Texas Governor	Chapter 4 & materials on Blackboard	3-2-1 post due by Tuesday at 11:59 p.m., response post and weekly applied assignment due by Thursday at 11:59 p.m.
7	Feb. 23	Plural Executive & Texas Bureaucracy	Materials on Blackboard	Weekly applied assignment due by Thursday at 11:59 p.m.
8	March 2	MID-TERM REVIEW & EXAM WEEK		MID-TERM (available from 12:15 pm on 3/3 to 11:59 pm on 3/5)
9	March 9	Spring Break Week		Enjoy your break!
10	March 16	Texas Judicial Branch	Chapter 5 & materials on Blackboard	3-2-1 post due by Tuesday at 11:59 p.m., response post and weekly applied

				assignment due by Thursday at 11:59 p.m.
11	March 23	Criminal Justice in Texas	Chapter 11 & materials on Blackboard	3-2-1 due by Tuesday at 11:59 pm
12	March 30	Voting and Elections	Chapter 7	3-2-1 post due by Tuesday at 11:59 p.m., response post and weekly applied assignment due by Thursday at 11:59 p.m.
13	April 6	Political Parties	Chapter 8	3-2-1 post due by Tuesday at 11:59 p.m., response post and weekly applied assignment due by Thursday at 11:59 p.m.
14	April 13	Interest Groups	Chapter 9	3-2-1 post due by Tuesday at 11:59 p.m., response post and weekly applied assignment due by Thursday at 11:59 p.m.
15	April 20	Local Government & Financing Government	Chapters 6 & 12	3-2-1 post due by Tuesday at 11:59 p.m., response post and weekly applied assignment due by Thursday at 11:59 p.m.
16 & 17	April 27 & May 4	Final Exam Review & FINAL EXAM		Final Exam will be available online from 8 a.m. on Sunday, May 3, to 11:59 p.m. on Monday, May 4

Other important dates:

- 1/14, First day of SRSU classes
- 1/19, MLK, Jr. Holiday, no SRSU classes
- 1/20, Last day for registration and schedule changes
- 1/30, Last day to drop a 16-week class without a record
- 2/2, Last day to register to vote in primary election
- 3/9-3/13, Spring Break (No Classes)
- 3/30, Registration for Summer & Fall 2026 opens
- 4/2, Last day to register to vote in May elections
- 4/3, Last day to withdraw with a “W” (16-week classes)
- 4/29, Last SRSU class day before finals
- 4/30, Dead day

- May 1, 4-6, Final Exams
- 5/2, Uniform Election Day
- 5/7, Residence Halls Close at 12 p.m. noon (non-graduating students)
- 5/8, Spring Commencement, 5:30 p.m., Gallego Center

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM ME:

- I will provide email responses within 24 hours of receipt during the hours of 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday-Friday.
- I will provide grades and feedback for assignments **within one week of the submission due date.**
- I will provide clear and concise instructions on how to complete the course requirements.
- I will provide a range of opportunities to engage in the course content in a meaningful way.
- I will stay abreast of the current research in the field to help you get the best possible experience in the course.

WHAT I EXPECT FROM YOU:

- You will familiarize yourself with the course syllabus, policies, assessments, evaluation, grading criteria, and course design.
- You will acquire the tools necessary to be successful in this class. This includes paper, writing utensils, reliable Internet access, and a device other than your phone for completing assignments.
- You will complete all assigned readings and coursework by assigned due dates.
- You will take the time to review feedback I provide to avoid repeating mistakes.
- You will engage in the course, with your peers, and with me, using open and appropriate communication
- You will be diligent about using communication in a way that shows respect to me and your classmates.
- You will submit college-level work that has been checked carefully for errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation (using a free extension like Grammarly is recommended).
- You will respond to communication from me and your classmates in a timely manner (within 24 hours).
- You will not plagiarize the work of others or yourself, and you will also not collaborate with others on class assignments, quizzes, or exams.
- You will reach out to me immediately if you are having trouble in the class or with access to course materials. For general access issues or technical help, please call the Help Desk--888.837.6055.

GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

--A good discussion question meets the following criteria:

- Is clear and easy to understand
- Has appropriate grammar, spelling, and punctuation
- Allows your classmates the opportunity to apply or critically think about a concept from the readings or to discuss an issue that is **relevant to the topics for the week**
- Is open-ended, allowing for a 2-3 sentence response. Adding a “why or why not” follow up question is appropriate
- Encourages deeper exploration of course topics

- Helps bring in new knowledge to the learning environment

--A good discussion question DOES NOT

- Ask for specific answers that can be easily found in the book or online (you're not testing your classmates)
- Promote a certain opinion (e.g., Do you agree that meeting yearly is a bad idea?)
- Duplicate questions from other sources or assignments—create questions in your words
- Reword a quiz question
- Present inaccuracies (e.g., Why do we limit the number of terms the governor can serve?)

OTHER COURSE POLICIES & RESOURCES

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: Students in this class are expected to demonstrate scholarly behavior and academic honesty in the use of intellectual property. Students should submit work that is their own and avoid engaging in behaviors that violate academic integrity, such as turning in work as original that was used in whole or part for another course and/or professor; turning in another person's work as one's own; copying from professional works or internet sites without citation; collaborating on a course assignment, examination, or quiz when collaboration is forbidden. ***In this course, every element of class assignments must be fully prepared by the student. The use of generative AI tools for any part of your work will be treated as plagiarism.*** Violations of academic integrity can result in failing assignments, failing a class, and/or more serious university consequences. These behaviors also erode the value of college degrees and higher education overall.

As an SRSU student, it is your responsibility to read and understand the university's expectations about academic integrity. All violations will be taken seriously and handled through the appropriate university process. The policy can be found at: <https://www.sulross.edu/about/administration/university-policies/>

In addition, please note that plagiarism detection software will be used in this class for written assignments. Respondus Lockdown Browser & Monitor will be used for the two exams as well.

If you have any questions about this, please ask!

LATE WORK:

I have been very intentional about how I have designed this course and distributed the content to optimize your learning and comprehension. Trying to cram weeks of work into a few days or waiting until the end of the semester to do everything isn't conducive to learning. For this reason, you must have an extenuating circumstance and approval from me to submit late work. If you submit late work without an approved extension from me, I reserve the right not to grade it. **IMPORTANT NOTE:** Since university-related travel (e.g., travel for athletics competition) is planned in advance (with a few exceptions), make sure to plan ahead. Please consult with me if you have concerns about how your university-related travel will impact a submission deadline. This needs to be done **BEFORE** you leave and before the deadline.

COURSE BLACKBOARD RESOURCES:

There are several resources on the course Blackboard page. You are expected to review and familiarize yourself with the items in Blackboard in the first week of class. **NOTE:** Please post general, course-related questions to the discussion board forum I have set up for this. Typically, if one student in the class has the question, others do as well. Please allow 24 hours for a response, and then feel free to email me or call me directly with your question.

ADA STATEMENT

SRSU Accessibility Services. Sul Ross State University (SRSU) is committed to equal access in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1973. It is SRSU policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. It is the student's responsibility to initiate a request each semester for each class. Students seeking accessibility/accommodations services must contact Ronnie Harris, LPC, Counselor, at 432-837-8203 or ronnie.harris@sulross.edu. RGC students can also contact Alejandra Valdez, at 830-758-5006 or email alejandra.valdez@sulross.edu. Our office is located on the first floor of Ferguson Hall, room 112, and our mailing address is P.O. Box C122, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas, 79832.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES STATEMENT

All full-time and part-time students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the Student Handbook and the Undergraduate & Graduate Catalog and for abiding by the University rules and regulations. Additionally, students are responsible for checking their Sul Ross email as an official form of communication from the university. Every student is expected to obey all federal, state and local laws and is expected to familiarize themselves with the requirements of such laws.

COUNSELING SERVICES

Sul Ross has partnered with TimelyCare where all SR students will have access to nine free counseling sessions. You can learn more about this 24/7/365 support by visiting [Timelycare/SRSU](https://www.timelycare.com/sulross). The SR Counseling and Accessibility Services office will continue to offer in-person counseling in Ferguson Hall room 112 (Alpine campus), and telehealth Zoom sessions for remote students and RGC students.

ALPINE LIBRARY INFORMATION

The Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library in Alpine offers FREE resources and services to the entire SRSU community. Access and borrow books, articles, and more by visiting the library's website, library.sulross.edu/. Off-campus access requires logging in with your LoboID and password. Librarians are a tremendous resource for your coursework and can be reached in person, by email (srsulibrary@sulross.edu), or by phone (432-837-8123).

No matter where you are based, public libraries and many academic and special libraries welcome the general public into their spaces for study. SRSU TexShare Cardholders can access additional services and resources at various libraries across Texas. Learn more about the TexShare program by visiting library.sulross.edu/find-and-borrow/texshare/ or ask a librarian by emailing srsulibrary@sulross.edu.

SRSU DISTANCE EDUCATION STATEMENT

Students enrolled in distance education courses have equal access to the university's academic support services, such as library resources, online databases, and instructional technology support. For more information about accessing these resources, visit the SRSU website.

Students should correspond using Sul Ross email accounts and submit online assignments through Blackboard, which requires a secure login. 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. Directions for filing a student complaint are located in the student handbook.

CLASSROOM DEMEANOR

Political issues can be emotionally charged. It is highly unlikely in a class this size that everyone will share your personal values, beliefs, and opinions. Believe it or not, this is a good thing! The presentation of varying perspectives will help all of us to learn. This can be accomplished if ideas, beliefs, and opinions are presented in a respectful way. I will be expecting all students to follow these basic ground rules for our interactions, whether they are face-to-face or virtual.

GROUND RULES FOR DISCUSSION (VIRTUAL/IN-PERSON)

SOURCE: Center for Teaching and Learning. (2020). Sample discussion board ground rules. Retrieved from <https://ctl.wiley.com/sample-discussion-board-ground-rules/>

- **Ask questions.**
If you find something confusing or want to know more, do not hesitate to ask questions. Make sure to post your questions in the appropriate thread.
- **Participate.**
Do not hide in the background; it is not fair to lurk and let others do all the work. Contribute to discussions to get as much as possible from the course and to maintain your participation grade.
- **Do not dominate a discussion.**
Share your knowledge, but not to the point of excluding others. If you have something to offer, please share it, but allow everyone to contribute equally to a discussion.
- **Be intellectually rigorous.**
Do not excuse sloppy or illogical thinking. Challenge yourself and one another.
- **Be tactful.**
Be critical of ideas but remember there are other people involved. Be tactful and kind. You can hurt the feelings of a person reading your post.
- **Forgive other students' mistakes.**
Do not correct others, even if you follow the rules of netiquette and use good manners. Just because you do not agree with a student's post does not mean that he or she is wrong. Instead, offer a different perspective to encourage further discussion.
- **Read the whole thread before posting.**
Read all the posts in a thread before responding so you don't repeat what others have already said. Try to contribute clarifying information or a new idea to a discussion.
- **Be concise.**
Do not waste people's time by posting basic, repetitive information. Make your point clearly and quickly.
- **Reread and check your posts.**
Practice professionalism. Be mindful of how you look online; others will likely judge the tone and quality of your writing. Reread your posts and edit for clarity and mechanics.
- **Cite your sources.**
If you use a source, cite it properly. Give credit where credit is due. Include links where appropriate.
- **Maintain confidentiality.**
Respect your classmates' privacy. Do not repeat the personal information that others share.
- **Report technical problems.** If the platform is not working properly, please let me know as soon as possible

BLACKBOARD TECHNICAL SUPPORT: SRSU 24/7 Blackboard Technical Support Online Support Desk Contact Info: Toll Free: 888.837.6055. Email: blackboardsupport@sulross.edu

UNDECIDED or UNSURE about YOUR MAJOR?

Political Science may be for you! Hopefully this class and the assignments will help open you up to the various career possibilities in political science, and I would be happy to discuss this with any interested students.

<p>Program Learning Outcomes (Political Science):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• SLO 1: Domestic Processes and Concepts: Students will understand key political processes, institutions, and concepts within the United States.• SLO 2: International and Global Processes: Students will develop an awareness of international relations, global issues, and the influence of global organizations on national politics.• SLO 3: Applied Government Experience: Students will gain practical experience working in government settings, applying political science knowledge to real-world policy and decision-making processes.	<p>Marketable skills for Political Science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students can effectively communicate ideas and information verbally, visually, and in writing• Students can distinguish between credible/relevant information and information lacking credibility/relevance• Students can identify critical and common institutions of political decision-making and policymaking across different nation-state settings• Students can engage with social and political problems and use critical thinking to develop logical solutions
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FOR THOSE SEEKING A TEACHING CERTIFICATION:

Texas Domain III Competency 003 (Geography & Culture):

The teacher understands and applies knowledge of geographic relationships involving people, place, and environments in Texas, the United States, and the world: the teacher also understands and applies knowledge of cultural development, adaptation, diversity, and interactions among science, technology, and society.

Texas Domain III Competency 004 (Economics):

The teacher understands and applies knowledge of economic systems and how people organize economic systems to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services.

Texas Domain III Competency 005 (Government & Citizenship):

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.