



PS 2306-001
State Government
Fall 2026
LH 309, 11 am-12:15 pm



Professor: Jessica Velasco, DPA
Office Hours: M (12-1, 2-3), T (2-5), 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:

Critical Thinking:

Students will develop critical thinking skills to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information.

Communication:

Students will develop communication skills to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral, and visual communication.

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
Attendance & Participation	150 points
3-2-1/ Weekly Assignments (12 x 30 pts)	360 points
Content Study Notebook	160 points
Mid-term Exam	150 points
Final Exam (comprehensive)	150 points
Total	1000 points
Citizenship Points (Bonus points)	Up to 50 pts

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.

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION/CLASS ENGAGEMENT: I expect you to attend and participate—and to do your part to stay healthy and alert so you can attend and participate. Attendance and participation are worth 150 points in this class. Please come prepared to participate. Being prepared to participate means:

- You have read the assigned materials
- You have paper and writing utensils to take notes
- You have removed all distractions—ALL electronics should be turned off and stowed away, earbuds removed, etc.
- **You are on time, and you stay for the entire class**
- You refrain from distracting other students during class
- You fully participate in discussions and other activities

Your participation grade will be based on the items above and a self-assessment at the mid-term mark and at the end of the semester. Remember that you play a role in the overall class community and atmosphere. It will be better if everyone participates.

CONTENT STUDY NOTEBOOK: This semester, you will be creating a content study notebook of important concepts, vocabulary, and processes you learn. I have provided instructions and a sample page in Blackboard, and I will give more guidance as the semester goes on. You will need loose leaf paper for this assignment. Please bring this and a writing utensil with you to class each day (as well as the information listed above). You will be working on the content study notebook in class and on your own time, and you will submit them at various points throughout the semester (Weeks 5, 10, and 15). For the submissions, you will take pictures or scan your pages, and submit them on Blackboard. The content study notebook is worth a total of 160 points.

3-2-1 WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT: Each week, starting with Week 2, **post the following. All items must be related to the readings AND materials posted in Blackboard for the topics we are covering that week (not the previous week) by Tuesday at 11 a.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)

Please use the following format and submit the appropriate place on Blackboard by the due date each week. These are each worth 30 points. **NOTE: The submission link for each week will close when class starts each Tuesday. Post on time, or you lose the points.**

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

EXAMS: There will be a mid-term exam and a final exam in this class. Both will take place in class on the days specified below. PLEASE PUT THESE IN YOUR CALENDAR NOW.

Week	Classes	Topic	Reading	Assignments and Important Dates*
1	Aug 25 Aug 27	Introduction to the course	Syllabus & Course Shell	Syllabus quiz & introduction post by Friday at 11:59 p.m.
2	Sept 1 Sept 3	Texas Beginnings	Chapter 1 & materials on Blackboard	3-2-1 due by the start of class on Tuesday
3	Sept 8 Sept 10	Texas Constitutions & Federalism	Chapter 2 & materials on Blackboard	3-2-1 due by the start of class on Tuesday
4	Sept 15 Sept 17	Texas Legislative Branch	Chapter 3 & materials on Blackboard	3-2-1 due by the start of class on Tuesday
5	Sept 22 Sept 24	Legislative Process in Texas	Materials on Blackboard	Bill lookup activity/assignment due by the start of class on Tuesday & Content Study Notebook due
6	Sept 29 Oct 1	Texas Governor	Chapter 4 & materials on Blackboard	3-2-1 due by the start of class on Tuesday
7	Oct 6 Oct 8	Plural Executive & Texas Bureaucracy	Materials on Blackboard	Government Jobs and Texas Register activity due by the start of class on Tuesday
8	Oct 13 Oct 15	MID-TERM REVIEW & EXAM WEEK		Review (10/13 in class) Exam (10/15 in class)
9	Oct 20 Oct 22	Texas Judicial Branch	Chapter 5 & materials on Blackboard	3-2-1 due by the start of class on Tuesday

10	Oct 27 Oct 29	Criminal Justice in Texas	Chapter 11 & materials on Blackboard	3-2-1 due by the start of class on Tuesday & Content Study Notebook due
11	Nov 3 Nov 5	Voting and Elections *11/3 Election Day*	Chapter 7	3-2-1 due by the start of class on Tuesday
12	Nov 10 Nov 12	Political Parties	Chapter 8	3-2-1 due by the start of class on Tuesday
13	Nov 17 Nov 19	Interest Groups	Chapter 9	3-2-1 due by the start of class on Tuesday
14	Nov 24	Local Government & Financing Government *Thanksgiving Week*	Chapters 6 & 12	3-2-1 due by the start of class on Tuesday
15	Dec 1	Final Exam Review		Content Study Notebook due (by start of class on December 1)
16	TBA	FINAL EXAM		The final exam will take place in person during the scheduled exam time using the final exam schedule (I will notify the class once it is posted. It is likely to be December 7 at 10:15 a.m.).

Other important dates:

- August 24, First Day of Classes
- August 27, Last day for registration and schedule changes
- September 7, Labor Day Holiday, No classes
- September 9, Last day to drop a 16-week class without creating an academic record
- October 5, Last day to register to vote in November elections
- October 19, First day of early voting
- October 30, Last day of early voting
- November 2, Registration for Spring 2027 begins
- November 3, Election Day
- November 6, Last day to drop a 16-week course with a "W"
- November 25-27, Thanksgiving Day Holiday (begins after last class meets on Tuesday)
- December 2, Last class day before finals
- December 3, Dead day
- December 4, 7-9, Final Exams

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 current with developments in the field to help you get the best possible experience in the course.

WHAT I EXPECT FROM YOU:

- You will check your Blackboard announcements and SRSU email daily.
- 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, appropriate, and respectful 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.
- 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 or use generative AI 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 (For your 3-2-1s)

--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 exams as well. I do NOT like using these tools, but they are an unfortunate necessity in a world with generative AI.

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/srsu). 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.

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.
- **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.**
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.**
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.
- **Listen carefully before speaking.**
Listen carefully 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.**
Make your point clearly and quickly.
- **Cite your sources.**
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.

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.

Program Learning Outcomes (Political Science): • 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.	Marketable skills for Political Science: • 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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