

# **POLS 207: State and Local Government**

Texas A&M University

Spring 2025

Section 511 - MWF 10:20am-11:10am ILCB 111

Section 506 - MWF 1:50am-2:40pm ILCB 113

Professor: Jason M. Smith, Ph.D. (Aggie Class of '09)

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Office Hours: TBA

## **Getting Started**

**Syllabus:** Please make sure you read all parts of this syllabus. The information contained herein will answer most questions throughout the semester, so please read the syllabus before emailing me. Please do not email me about the information available here, as **you may not receive a response.**

**Log on to Canvas** (<https://canvas.tamu.edu>): **This course is a work in progress on Canvas.** I am constantly tweaking the course for better (and sometimes *worse*). As we go through the semester, we will encounter problems. Please use GroupMe (preferred) to message or email me if you encounter any issues. **Please be patient, as I am still working on the course on Canvas.** All information concerning the course will be on Canvas. It is important that you regularly check the announcements on Canvas and your TAMU email account. This is the easiest mode of communication with a large class.

**Attendance:** There is no course attendance policy. However, you are **NOT** allowed to attend any other course section. This will be considered a violation of the Aggie Honor Code. Please attend only the section for which you are registered.

**Materials:** The course materials are recommended for you to do well. However, I cannot force you to buy any course materials, so the term “required” is not one I like to use. Without completing all its components, you will not make an ‘A’ in this course. **Course materials include a textbook and a webcam for exam proctoring.** Each of these is described below.

**Communication and Email Protocol:** The best way to contact me is through the GroupMe link on Canvas. You are more likely to receive a quicker response through GroupMe than e-mail. You are welcome to e-mail me as well. However, please note that I will not check my e-mail after 5:00 PM. Therefore, you should assume that I will not read my e-mail until the following morning if you contact me after this time. **It is also essential that you activate and regularly check your TAMU e-mail account for class announcements.** I currently teach multiple sections. For this reason, **please state your name, course name, and section number in the subject line when you email me or in the body of the text when you text me.** To offer full disclosure, **I am horrible at returning emails.** Again, I ask for your patience.

Please allow forty-eight (48) hours for a response. I am constantly striving to get better with communication. **Please be patient.**

## Course Description

According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), this course *should* examine the origin and development of the Texas Constitution, the structure and powers of state and local government, federalism and intergovernmental relations, political participation, the election process, public policy, and the political culture of Texas.

## Course Objectives

According to the THECB, upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- To define, understand, and use concepts and terms relevant to the study of state and local government in the United States
- Explain the origin and development of the Texas constitution
- Demonstrate an understanding of 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 in Texas
- Demonstrate knowledge of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of Texas government
- Evaluate the role of public opinion, interest groups, and political parties in Texas
- Analyze the state and local election process
- Describe the rights and responsibilities of citizens
- Analyze issues, policies, and political culture of Texas

## Required Texts and Materials

**Textbook:** The following textbook is available at local bookstores (as well as through online sources). **This textbook is highly recommended, but I am recommending the electronic text version of the textbook to help alleviate costs.** You use any other (older) edition of the textbook at your own risk. The only textbook I guarantee has all of the material that you will need is listed below.

- Smith, Jason. *Foundations of Governance: Exploring State and Local Government*. 2024. ISBN - 9781533969262.

**Webcam:** Besides the textbook, you will need access to a webcam to take the third exam. Each exam is proctored using the Respondus Lockdown browser, with the first two exams being taken in class and the third exam being recorded using a webcam. You will not be able to take the third

exam without a webcam.

**Packback:** This course also uses Packback for discussions. This platform is available for purchase. The cost of access to this platform is approximately \$40-\$45 per student. Each student will receive instructions from Packback and/or from me concerning its use in the course. We will use this platform to discuss course material by asking questions, thinking through answers, improving thinking skills, and participating in class.

## Grading Policies

Your grade in this course will be based on three (3) exams, five (5) chapter quizzes (averaged into one grade), and ten (10) discussions (averaged into one grade)

**Exams:** The exams will contain fifty (50) multiple-choice questions about topics from the preceding lectures (meaning the exams are not cumulative). There will be a review sheet offered on eCampus for each exam. Ideal answers to questions on the examinations will express clear knowledge of both the assigned reading materials and the content of the online lectures. Your highest exam will count for thirty (30%) percent of your final grade. Your second highest (median) exam will count for twenty-five (25%) percent of your final grade. Your lowest exam will count for twenty (20%) percent of your final grade.

Each of these exams will be offered through Canvas. **Students are responsible for a reliable internet connection. Exams will not be reset except for extraordinary circumstances.** You will have fifty-five (55) minutes to complete each exam. Exams must be completed in one session and cannot be paused once started. **Each exam will be proctored through Respondus Lockdown Browser. The first two exams are in class during your class period. The third exam will be taken out of class, and a webcam is required to take the exam. The third exam will be open for at least twenty-four (24) hours for you to complete.**

**Chapter Quizzes:** This course has nine (9) chapter quizzes. Your highest five (5) quizzes will be averaged and count fifteen (15%) percent of your final grade. These quizzes are to be completed outside of class without the assistance of your classmates. Failure to complete the quizzes independently will result in an 'F' for the course and possible expulsion from Texas A&M University. **The student must submit these quizzes. These quizzes are NOT automatically submitted as they are not timed. Failure to submit the quiz, even if it is completed, will result in a zero (0) for that particular quiz. The professor will NOT submit the quiz for you for any reason.** The take-home quizzes for each section are due on the dates listed in the schedule below. **These will be available on Canvas for you to complete. Late quizzes will only be accepted in rare circumstances. Please do not wait until the last minute to complete these quizzes.**

**Discussions:** Each student will participate in at least ten (10) discussions throughout the semester using Packback. There will be a discussion each week starting in the second week of the course (at least 14 total). Your highest ten (10) will be averaged to one grade. Participation over the week is vitally important in grading these discussions. During each discussion (over a week), you will need to post one (1) question concerning the material for that particular discussion and two (2) answers to questions from your classmates. These posts must meet very reasonable minimum

requirements for quality as outlined on Canvas to count. These discussions will constitute ten (10%) percent of your final course grade.

## Grading Scale

The grade breakdown for the course is as follows:

| Assignment                | Grade % |
|---------------------------|---------|
| Highest Exam              | 30%     |
| Median Exam               | 25%     |
| Lowest Exam               | 20%     |
| Chapter Quizzes (Average) | 15%     |
| Discussion (Average)      | 10%     |

A = 89.5-100 B = 79.5-89.4 C = 69.5-79.4 D = 59.5-69.4 F = Less Than 59.5

Please note that the grading scale already rounds up your final grade. After grades are calculated following the third exam, **your grades are final**. This grading scale is what you have earned not what you might think you "deserve" in the course. Every semester professors are inundated with e-mails asking them to "bump" or "curve" students' grades. I will not change a grade unless there is a miscalculation. I respectfully ask that you do not e-mail me asking for "special consideration" to raise your grade. **Your grades are final. Any request to change your grade, unless there is a miscalculation, is a violation of the Aggie Honor Code.**

## Make-Up Exams

Note that you are eligible to take a makeup exam only if the following conditions are met:

- 1) you must have a documented University recognized excused absence and
- 2) you must make arrangements for the makeup before the exam or by the next class period.

In case of a university excused absence, students should arrange a makeup through an electronic e-mail request to me. **It must be a university-excused absence with supporting documentation. This includes the University Explanatory Statement for Absence from Class form available at <http://attendance.tamu.edu>.** I WILL NOT accept copies of medical excuses; you must provide original documentation. You will receive a zero for the exam if you do not have an excused absence. **No Exceptions.** You have **48 hours to contact the professor concerning the make-up**. Failure to do so will result in a zero for the exam. **This is NOT a retake of an exam.** Students can take a maximum of two make-ups only and must be taken on the same day. You will be given the same time for class (55 minutes). **All make-up exams will be administered online through Canvas**

## Extra Credit

Several graduate students each semester conduct experiments as part of their dissertation research or other research projects. If such an opportunity arises and a graduate student approaches me

about experimenting with class, half a point (0.5) will be added to the final grade for each experiment the student participates in during my class **ONLY**. If you participate in an experiment in a different class, **this does not count. Possibilities for extra credit may occur but are not guaranteed.** Please do not rely on extra credit to receive the grade you want in the course.

## **Students with Disabilities**

Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please get in touch with Disability Resources in the Student Services Building or at (979) 845-1637 or visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>. Disabilities may include, but are not limited to, attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability-related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible. **Please be patient, as these will take time to be set properly.**

## **Mental Health**

Texas A&M University recognizes that mental health and wellness are critical factors that influence a student's academic success and overall well-being. Students are encouraged to engage in proper self-care by utilizing the resources and services available from Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). Students who need someone to talk to can call the TAMU Helpline (979-845-2700) from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. on weekdays and 24 hours on weekends. Emergency 24-hour help is also available through the National Suicide Prevention Hotline (800-273-8255) or at [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

## **Title IX and Limits to Confidentiality**

Texas A&M University and the College of Liberal Arts are committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws guide achieving such an environment. Although class materials are generally considered confidential according to student record policies and laws, University employees — including instructors — cannot maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues that jeopardize the health and safety of our community. As the instructor, I must report (per Texas A&M System Regulation 08.01.01) the following information to other University offices if you share it with me, even if you do not want the disclosed information to be shared:

Allegations of sexual assault, sexual discrimination, or sexual harassment when they involve TAMU students, faculty, or staff, or third parties visiting campus.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who wants to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In many cases, it will be your decision whether or not to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting, you are encouraged to make an appointment with the Student Counseling Service (<https://scs.tamu.edu/>).

Students and faculty can report non-emergency behavior that causes them to be concerned at <http://tellsomebody.tamu.edu>.

## **Diversity**

The Department of Political Science supports Texas A&M University's commitment to diversity and welcomes individuals of any racial, ethnic, religious, age, gender, sexual orientation, class, disability, and nationality. (See <http://diversity.tamu.edu/>). In the spirit of this vital commitment, in this course, each voice in the classroom has something of value that contributes to all discussions. Everyone is expected to respect the different experiences, beliefs, and values expressed by fellow students and the instructor and will engage in reasoned discussion that refrains from derogatory comments about other people, cultures, groups, or viewpoints.

## **Course Materials/Copyright Statement**

The handouts used in this course are copyrighted. By "handouts," I mean all materials generated for this class, which include but are not limited to syllabi, quizzes, exams, lab problems, in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets. Because these are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy the handouts, unless I expressly grant permission.

## **Academic Dishonesty/Plagiarism Statement**

As commonly defined, plagiarism consists of passing off as one's own ideas, words, writings, etc., which belong to another. In accordance with the definition, you are committing plagiarism if you copy another person's work and turn it in as your own, even if you should have the person's permission. Plagiarism is one of the worst academic sins, for the plagiarist destroys the trust among colleagues, without which research cannot be safely communicated. If you have any questions regarding plagiarism, please consult the Aggie Honor System Office website (<http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor>) or the latest version of the Texas A&M University Student Rules, under the section "Scholastic Dishonesty." (<http://rules.tamu.edu>). Always remember:

**"An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do."**

## **Additional Course Policies**

**You will not be allowed to interrupt the learning environment for other students in this class.** To this end, cell phones and other electronic devices should be silenced and not be used in class. You can use your laptops to take notes for the course; however, internet use is prohibited during class. Further, you will not be allowed to use headphones or earbuds or watch movies or television, etc., during class time.

**Group Messaging Apps:** Participating in or joining a Group Messaging App (GroupMe, Slack, WhatsApp, etc.) and File Sharing (Dropbox, Google Docs, etc.) is not an academic misconduct violation; however, the exchange of answers to graded work and the exchange of copyrighted materials (instructors' exams are considered copyrighted material) are examples of academic misconduct.

Examples of appropriate group messaging activities are questions related to due dates, specific instructions about assignments, or where to find materials on Canvas. Again, distributing answers to quizzes/exams to everyone in a group chat is academic misconduct. Similarly, uploading answers to quizzes/exams to a file-sharing service and then allowing people to access those notes is academic misconduct.

## **Course Schedule**

Below is a tentative schedule of readings, topics, and assignments that will be covered in the course. If it appears that we are falling behind or new material needs to be added, I reserve the right to alter the syllabus to ensure that we spend adequate time on each topic with thoughtful consideration of your time as students. **NOTE: All exams are proctored online**

### **Section 1: Introduction, Constitution, Federalism, Local Government**

- Chapters 1-4
- Test Discussion (**not graded**) – **January 19<sup>th</sup>**
- **NO CLASS** – **January 20<sup>th</sup>**
- Discussion 1 – **January 26<sup>th</sup>**
- Discussion 2 – **February 2<sup>nd</sup>**
- Discussion 3 – **February 9<sup>th</sup>**
- Discussion 4 – **February 16<sup>th</sup>**
- Chapter Quizzes – Chapters 1-4 – **February 19<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday)**
- **EXAM 1** – **February 21<sup>st</sup> – in class**
- **Discussion 5** – **February 23<sup>rd</sup>**

### **Section 2: Participation, Political Parties, Institutions**

- Chapters 5-7
- Discussion 6 – **March 2<sup>nd</sup>**
- Discussion 7 – **March 9<sup>th</sup>**
- Discussion 8 – **March 16<sup>th</sup>**
- Discussion 9 – **March 23<sup>rd</sup>**
- Discussion 10 – **March 30<sup>th</sup>**
- Chapter Quizzes – Chapters 5-7 – **April 2<sup>nd</sup> (Wednesday)**
- **Exam 2** – **April 2<sup>nd</sup> – in class**

- Discussion 11 – **April 6<sup>th</sup>**

**Monday, April 14<sup>th</sup>, 5pm - \*Last Day to Q-drop\***

### **Section 3: Institutions, Budget and Policy**

- Chapters 8-9
- Discussion 12 – **April 13<sup>th</sup>**
- Discussion 13 – **April 20<sup>th</sup>**
- Discussion 14 – **April 27<sup>th</sup>**
- Chapter Quizzes – Chapters 8-9 – **April 30<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday)**
- Discussion 15 – **May 4<sup>th</sup>**
- **Exam 3 - Monday, May 5<sup>th</sup> – Online/Not in Class**