



Course Syllabus for *Texas State & Local Government* Spring 2012 Dr. Yale

T & Th 12:00-1:20, section 45607-023
T & Th 1:30-2:40, section 45656-087

Course description & Format

Course Description: This course is an introduction to Texas state & local government. It includes an introduction to a **framework** for analyzing Texas government and politics, the **constitutional basis** for Texas government and politics, the **processes** of Texas government and politics, the **institutions** of Texas government and politics, and the **policies** of Texas government and politics. We'll discuss how Texas's political history, political culture, and institutional structures influence the policy decisions made by those who govern the state and localities. By the end of the semester you will have a better understanding of state and local governments in general, how they operate in Texas, the impact of politics and policy on Texas, and how Texas compares with other states in its structure, politics, and delivery of services to its citizens.

Course Objectives: This course has several basic objectives:

- To help you develop an understanding of Texas governments;*
- To help you become a better consumer of political information;*
- To encourage you to think about, and participate in, state and local government; and,*
- To help you develop better reading, writing, analytical, and technological skills*
- To help you develop good college habits.*

Course Format: This class will involve both lecture and discussion. To facilitate class discussion it's important that you read the assigned chapter prior to coming to class on the day it's assigned.

Contact Information

<i>Office Hours</i>	MW 9:30-10:30; TTh 9:30-12:00 and by appointment.
<i>Office</i>	Northridge campus, room 2132
<i>Office & Fax Phone</i>	223-4054, 223-4310
<i>Email</i>	mmyale@austincc.edu
<i>Website</i>	www.austincc.edu/mmyale

The best way to contact me is via email. In your emails to me please use proper grammar, spelling and mechanics – do not use text-message-style writing. It is not appropriate here. I read class-related email between 9:00-5:00 Monday through Friday. I don't typically read email in the evenings or weekends. I'll typically reply within 2 business days.

Course Requirements

1. *Text:* *Texas Politics* 11th edition by Newell, Prindle, and Riddlesperber. ACC's bookstore site is at <http://austincc.bkstore.com/bkstore/content>. You can also buy the book at Bevo's or at the publisher's website at http://www.cengage.com/search/showresults.do?Ns=P_CopyRight_Year|1&N=+16+4294922390&Ntt=Newell&Ntk=all (pick the 11th edition, not the 12th edition). You should also be able to purchase an e-book at the publisher's site or at www.coursesmart.com or perhaps rent the ebook at www.chegg.com/search/am+gov/.
2. *Tests:* Three exams will be required this semester. Each exam will contain roughly 60 multiple choice and true-false questions. Roughly two-thirds of the exam questions will come from lectures while one-third will come from the textbook so do buy and read the textbook and do make use of the study aids available on the Blackboard website. The chapters being covered in each exam are listed in the course calendar below.

Retests and Missed Tests: A retest will be available for exams 1 and 2 and will be available on Blackboard for two weeks following the original test date. While the original exam is worth up to 115 points, the retest is worth only up to 100 points. The retest is open book and open notes but is, like the quizzes, timed. You will have 60 minutes to answer 50 true/false, multiple choice questions. The questions will cover the same material as the in-class test but will be different questions.

3. *Quizzes:* There will be a chapter quiz for each chapter in the textbook. These are open-book and are taken online via Blackboard. Each quiz can be taken up to two times and the higher score is kept (even if it is the second attempt is lower). The quizzes are timed, however, and if you exceed the time limit your score will be zero.
4. *Assignments :* Three assignments will be due this semester, each worth 60 points. The assignment instructions will be posted for you on Blackboard, and you will send me your completed assignments electronically through Blackboard as well.
5. *Attendance and participation:* You are expected to arrive on time and stay for the entire class, unless you've notified me in advance.

Course Policies

Grading Policy: Your grade will be based on your total points using the grading scale below. There are no "grade negotiations" so please note that if you decide not to complete an assignment that is due in week 3 for example, you cannot change your mind in week 16 when you realize you need those points to pass. Make your decisions wisely. I will not allow you to "unmake" them. Also note that while Blackboard lists your percentage scores, the percentages do not count, only the grading scale below counts.

<u>Requirement</u>	<u>Points Possible</u>	<u>Course Grade</u>
3 Exams (115 each)	345	A: 590 and above
14 Quizzes	140	B: 530-589
3 Assignments	180	C: 460-529
	Total 665	D: 370-459
		F: <370

Behavior in class:

You must not text or play with your ipod, etc.

You must not use your laptop during class, even to take notes for this class.

You must not complete work for another class, or read during this class.

You must conduct yourself in a mature manner and not disrupt class by chatting during class.

You must arrive to class on time and stay until class is over.

Late Policy: Regarding the exams, as noted above, if you miss an exam, you will need to take the retest. Regarding the assignments and quizzes, a 5 point per day penalty will apply. I will not accept quizzes more than two days late or assignments more than 5 days late.

Extra Credit: There may be a bit of extra credit this semester based on in-class activities or perhaps an extra Blackboard activity.

Incomplete Policy: A grade of "Incomplete" may be requested if

1. There is a valid reason for needing the delay
2. The student has completed at least 2 of the exams with at least a "C" grade average
3. The student has completed 2 of the assignments and has received 70% of the possible points
4. The student requests the incomplete and completes the necessary forms before the last week of the semester
5. The student agrees to complete the work no later than 30 days after the end of the semester.

Withdrawal Policy: If you need to drop the course, the last day to do so is **April 23**. I will not drop you from the course. If you stop completing the work, be sure to withdraw yourself.

Academic Freedom: Each student is strongly encouraged to participate in class discussion. In any classroom situation that includes discussion and critical writing, particularly about political ideas, there are bound to be many differing viewpoints. Students may not only disagree with each other at times, but the students and instructor may also find that they have disparate views on sensitive and volatile topics.

Students with Disabilities: Each ACC campus offers support services for students with documented physical, cognitive, or psychological disabilities. Students with disabilities must request reasonable accommodations through the Office for Students with Disabilities on the campus where they expect to take their exams. You must do this no later than the 5th business day of the semester; otherwise, accommodations may not be made for the first exam.

Academic Dishonesty: Do not complete the assignments with anyone. Do not copy information you find on any other website. Academic dishonesty has increased dramatically over the last few years and it will not be tolerated here. If your work on an assignment appears too similar to that of a classmate, or too similar to what appears on a website I will

investigate and bring charges of academic dishonesty if warranted. You may never use anyone else's words without using quotation marks and listing the source of the quote. Failing to use quotation marks and listing the source is plagiarism whether you've used one sentence or 100 sentences from that source. You may never work on an assignment with a classmate unless I've indicated that it is a group project. To do so is collusion and constitutes a violation of college rules and is a punishable action. You, of course, may never use your notes or book when taking the exam. Please note that I take this very seriously. If I find that a student has committed any of the above actions, I will assign a course grade of "F," not just a 0 on that particular assignment.

Student Resources

1. Blackboard: I will load the practice quizzes and other study aids for each chapter of the text onto Blackboard. These aids will help you study for the quizzes and exams. Please take advantage of them. See the description below for information about logging into Blackboard.
2. Study groups : It may be helpful to form groups to study the material. A good recommendation is that you meet once per week. Even if you don't form a study group, consider exchanging names & email addresses or telephone numbers with two or three of your classmates. Use each other as a resource if you miss class or don't understand the material or an assignment.
Name: _____ Contact info: _____
Name: _____ Contact info: _____
Name: _____ Contact info: _____

3. Note-taking from the text : It's important that as you read the chapter you don't do so just so that you can say you have and check that off your "to do" list. You should be reading with a purpose. After you've read the chapter, and highlighted it if you like, go back and outline the chapter - your outline should be at least 3 levels "deep."

In addition to reading and outlining the chapter, be sure to do the following:

Look carefully at any tables, graphs, and text boxes and write down the point being made.

When a comparison is made make note of how Texas compares to other states

Note key terms as you read the chapter, then create a glossary of those terms, listing the definition and example (if possible) for you to study from later.

4. Lecture notes : Take thorough notes during lecture. Rewrite your notes from lecture after every 3-4 class sessions using the methods described in these websites:

<http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/academic/notes2.htm>

<http://www.studygs.net/Lcturnote.htm>

http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/docs/cornell_note_taking.doc


Create outlines or flow charts or diagrams for each topic. Five to seven days prior to an exam, begin studying both your original notes and your condensed notes. Create index cards during this time if you're having difficulty understanding the material. Finally, it's been my experience that for every class missed, your exam score will likely decrease by 6-8 points so don't assume you can get the lecture notes from someone and have that be good enough; it won't be.

5. Tutoring and computer access: ACC has tutoring available in the learning lab in room 4119 if you need help with study skills. As is mentioned above in the discussion of exam essays, ACC has computer centers where you can type-up and/or print your essays. The website for those folks is <http://www.austincc.edu/tutor>

Questions regarding Blackboard

What is it and how will it be helpful? Blackboard is an online server that houses webpages for all ACC courses. It will be helpful because you will find the assignment instructions and study aids there, you will submit your assignments to me there, and your grades will be listed there. In addition I will post announcements there as we go through the semester.

Where is the Blackboard site and how do I sign on? It's at <http://aconline.austincc.edu> (notice there is no www). To sign on, you first need an ACCeID if you do not have one. To get that information, go to ACC's main

webpage at www.austincc.edu and look at the bottom right for the [ACCeID Manager Login](#)  link. Follow the instructions to receive your eID and password. Once you have this, go to the Blackboard site and login using your ACCeID and password and you will find the link to our Govt course. If you need help, call ACC's help desk at 223-help.

What if I do log on but don't see a link to this Govt course? While in Blackboard, click on the "My ACC" tab or "Courses" tab at the top left and this should reload the "my courses" screen.

What should I do once I'm on the page for our course? Once at our site, be sure to read all the information I've posted for you through the links on the left (labeled "announcements," "assignments," etc.).

How often should I check our Blackboard page? Make it a habit to check for announcements / updates on our Govt page once a week.

Course Calendar for Govt 2306

Week 1 (Jan 17, 19) Introduction – read chapter 1.

Week 2 (Jan 24, 26): Texas Political Culture – Chapter 1

Our point here will be that each state has a culture, or set of ideas and values, that dominate the thinking of the citizens. In Texas, our culture is dominated by the individualistic and traditionalistic styles. This political culture influences the opinions of Texans, who we vote for and why, and how our opinions can be influenced.

Week 3 (Jan 31, Feb 2): Tx Constitution – Chapter 2

Our point here will be that Texas's current constitution, which was written in 1876, attempts to maximize voter control and limited government but achieves neither of these and actually achieves the opposite unfortunately.

Week 4 (Feb 7, 9): Interest Groups – Chapter 3

Here, we will not only explain why interest groups are particularly influential in Texas, but also how they go about getting what they want, and we will pay special attention to the importance of language, imagery, and emotion.

Assignment 1 is due February 9

Week 5 (Feb 14, 16): Political Parties in Texas – Chapter 4

We will explain how Texas moved from a state dominated by the Democratic Party to one that leans strongly Republican and we will ask whether Texas could lean back in the coming years.

Quizzes for chapters 1-4 due February 16

Exam 1 over Chapters 1-4, February 21

Week 6-7 (Feb 23, 28, March 1) Voting, Campaigns, Elections – Chapter 5

We will discuss the different types of elections (such as primary elections, general elections and special elections), but more interestingly, we will see how to win in an election in Texas.

Week 8-9 (Mar 6, 8, 20,22): The Texas Legislature – Chapters 6-7

We will discuss several topics regarding the Texas Legislature including the usual discussion of how a bill becomes a law, and more importantly, why the legislature, which is constitutionally powerful, cannot seem to solve problems very effectively.

Spring break (March 11-17)

Week 10 (Mar 27, 29): The Texas Governor - Chapter 8

Texas governors are given very little real power in the Texas Constitution. Our question in this discussion will be – how do Texas governors attempt to overcome their constitutional weaknesses? As a follow up we will look at what Governor Perry has experienced in his efforts to overcome these weaknesses.

Assignment 2 is due March 29

Week 11 (April 3): The Administrative State – Chapter 9

Here we will discuss the other executive level officials such as the Attorney General, Land Commissioner, etc.

Quizzes for chapters 5-9 due April 3

Week 11: **Exam 2 over Chapters 5-9, April 5**

Week 12 (April 10, 12): The Judiciary and Justice- Chapters 10-11

We will briefly discuss the court structure of Texas and discuss some of the issues facing the criminal justice system.

Week 13 (Apr 17, 19): Local Government – Chapter 12

We'll discuss the issues facing local governments, such as dealing with growth, transportation issues, and providing health care. These governments impact your daily life more than any other level of government but are constrained by too little funding, often have inflexible structures and too little public support.

Week 14 (Apr 24, 26): Texas's Economy and Financing – Chapter 13

Our point here will be simply that Texas's tax system is ineffective, vulnerable, and unfair.

Week 15-16 (May 1, 3, 8) Issues in Public Policy – Chapter 14-15

We'll discuss poverty, education and other issues facing Texas.

Assignment 3 is due May 1

Quizzes for chapters 10-15 due May 8 (Chapter 15 quiz is extra credit)

Week 16: **Exam 3 over Chapters 10-14, May 10**