

Texas Government Syllabus

Welcome to Texas Government!!!

Objectives:

The State of Texas has outlined a series of learning objectives for students taking Texas Government. The learning objectives are as follows:

- 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 the issues, policies, and political culture of Texas

My Objectives: While the course will necessarily cover the above topics, my big picture goal is to have students leave this class with enough information to feel like informed voters, citizens and/or Texas residents. I love teaching Texas government, because I believe it is an important subject for everyone living in our great state! While most of our current media attention is focused on national level politics, many of the policies that affect you on a daily basis actually come out of Austin. For example, want to know why you have to take this class regardless of major or interest? Because, the Texas Education Higher Education Coordinating Board says you have to. Who appoints them, and how did they get this power? Stay tuned for Chapter 9.

Contacts and Communication

Office Hours: I will be available for online for regular offices hours every Wednesday from 3-4 PM. However if you would like to schedule an appointment on zoom at a different time, please let me know because my schedule is very flexible. Unfortunately, I am not in San Antonio, but out at our Bryan/College Station RELLS campus, so I will not be able to do in-person offices hours.

Email: kscofield@tamusa.edu

Phone Number: 979-803-1653 This is a google voice number. If you hate to email feel free to call or text. Just make sure I know who you are and what you are texting about.

Communicating with the Class: I will leave information that the whole class may need to know on the "Announcement" tab on Black Board. I will also leave general feedback and clarification if there was an issue that several people had trouble with the homework. So be sure to check the Announcement tab once or twice a week, and before exams, to make sure you are not missing information.

Textbook

We will be using Governing Texas by Norton. You have already paid for the Textbook as part of your tuition and should be able to access the correct links from blackboard. DO NOT PAY for access. If you are having issues accessing please let me know.

Grading

The Final Course Grade will be composed of the following:

Weekly Reading Assignments 3%
Weekly Inquisitive Assignments 7%
Weekly Online Assignments 30%
Exams 1-3 30%
Final Exam 15%
Podcast Project 15%

Weekly Reading Assignments

Most weeks I will have you read a chapter out of the textbook and complete questions at the end of chapter. These are just meant to be easy questions to check comprehension, and you can answer them multiple times, so this is just a low-stakes participation assignment. I do not accept late assignments. The lowest Reading grade will be dropped.

Weekly Inquisitive Assignments

Most weeks I will have you then do an interactive Inquisitive Assignment after reading the chapter. Make sure to do the assignments in order so that they make the most sense. There is a tutorial on how to do the Inquisitive assignments in blackboard. I do not accept late assignments so the lowest Inquisitive grade will be dropped.

Weekly Online Assignments

Each week students will complete online chapter assignments (there will typically be around 1-3 assignments per week). All the Chapter assignments will be due on Sunday at 11:59 PM of that week. These will include: short video lectures, YouTube videos, news articles, ted talks, exercises out of the textbook, etc. Each activity will include questions or written exercises. Students will be given a separate grade for each activity (so a student will receive multiple grades a chapter). All of these grades will be averaged together to represent 25% of the student's overall grade. Students will be graded on the accuracy and completeness of their answers. The lowest two activity grades will be dropped. I will not accept late online assignments.

Exam Grade (Tests 1, 2, and 3)

We will have three multiple choice tests throughout the semester. Each Exam will be worth 10% of your grade for a total of 30%. Dates for the Exams are on the schedule. Students cannot go back and take an exam once it is closed, so due dates are important. However, the final exam grade can replace a low-test grade. (So for example, if a student forgets test 2 and gets a zero but they score a 75 on the final, they will also be given a 75 for test two).

Podcast Project

The Podcast Project will have two components:

- Serial Podcast Quizzes

We will listen to several episodes of the Serial Podcast on criminal justice throughout the semester (podcasts will also be due Sunday night on the week they are assigned). Each podcast will come with a podcast quiz that students can take while they are listening to the podcast. Students will not be able to take the quiz once it is closed. I will drop the lowest quiz grade.

- Presentation Grade

Students will have the option of doing a group or solo presentation on an assigned topic relating to the serial podcast and its relationship to Texas government. Group presentations should be around five min. in length and solo presentations should be around 3 min. If students choose the group option, those groups will be assigned via blackboard. Presentations will be recorded and posted to blackboard. Groups will also be asked to evaluate team members. All students will also be required to watch other presentations and comment.

Final Exam

The final exam will be multiple choice and will cover materials from the entire course. I do not give reviews for the shorter exams but will send out a review for the final. If your final grade is higher than one of your individual exam grades, then it can also be used to replace that lower grade.

Class Policies

Late Work Policy

I will not be accepting late work, since it is very easy to fall behind in an online class. Instead, I will drop grades as discussed in the above section.

Plagiarism

For this course it is important that all work is in the student's own words. The goal of the online activities is to make sure that students understand the materials being covered in the course. Therefore, I want students to explain answers in their own words. Any answers not in the student's own words will be given a zero. Any answer that is copied from another student will be given a zero. While quoting large blocks of text with an appropriate citation is not plagiarism, it will not be acceptable in this course. I would rather students attempt to explain information in their own words and be slightly incorrect than to simply copy and paste the relevant information from the textbook or other sources.

AI Policy

This course assumes that all work submitted by students will be generated by the students themselves, working individually or in groups. Students should not have another person/entity do the writing of any portion of an assignment for them, which includes hiring a person or a company to write assignments and/or using artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT. Use of any AI-generated content in this course qualifies as academic dishonesty and violates Texas A&M-San Antonio's standards of academic integrity.

If I suspect students of using AI in order to write or rewrite answers, I will give that student a zero for the assignment, pending a zoom meeting with me to discuss the situation and use of AI. Please do not use AI to "clean up" your assignments either, as it can be difficult to tell at that point if it is the student's own work. Assignments will be graded based on content rather than grammar or spelling, so I would rather have a messy answer that is in the student's own words, than one that looks exactly like AI. There is a lot of information on Texas Government on the internet, some of it is true, some of it is false, and some of it is just extraneous to this course. AI generators can not really distinguish between these categories, which is why I do not want them used on assignments.

Schedule (Fall 2026)

The weekly schedule below outlines what topics we will be covering each week. Please note that Exams will be open on Black Board for a 3 day window, but once you start the exam you will have 30 minutes to complete it. (Final exam will be longer). All weekly assignments are due Sunday at 11:59 PM. Students will have weekly assignments due EVERY Sunday. Dates below follow the official TAMUSA Fall 2026 academic calendar (classes begin Monday, August 24, 2026 and end Friday, December 11, 2026).

Week One 8/24 to 8/30

- Chapter One Political Culture
- Chapter Two Federalism and the Constitution

Week Two 8/31 to 9/6

- Chapter Two Federalism and the Constitution Continued

Week Three 9/7 to 9/13

- Texas and the Federal System
- Note: Monday, 9/7 is Labor Day (University Closed). This will not affect online due dates.

Week Four 9/14 to 9/20

- Test Number One
 - Over Chapters 1, 2, 3,
 - 9/14 to 9/16
- Chapter Four Public Opinion and the Media

Week Five 9/21 to 9/27

- Chapter 5 Political Parties

Week 6 9/28 to 10/4

- Chapter 6 Campaigns and Elections

Week 7 10/5 to 10/11

- Test Number Two
 - Over Chapters 4, 5, 6
 - Will be Open 10/5 to 10/7
- Chapter 7 Interest Groups and Lobbying

Week 8 10/12 to 10/18

- Chapter 8 Tx Leg

Week 9 10/19 to 10/25

- Chapter 9 Governor

Week 10 10/26 to 11/1

- Test Number 3
 - On Chapters 7, 8, 9
 - Will be open 10/26 to 10/28
- Chapter 10 the Judiciary

Week 11 11/2 to 11/8

- Chapter 11 Local Government

Week 12 11/9 to 11/15

- Chapter 12 and 13 Public Finance and Public Policy

Week 13 11/16 to 11/22

- Chapter 14 Crime and Corrections

Week 14 11/23 to 11/29

- Note: Wednesday, 11/25 is a Study Day (No Classes); Thursday-Saturday, 11/26-11/28 is Thanksgiving Holiday (University Closed)
- We will have extra credit instead of regular assignments for the week of Thanksgiving.

Week 15 Nov 30- Dec 6

- Podcast Project Due Dec 5
- Comments on Other Projects Due 6
- Extra credit Due 12/6

Week 16

Final Exam Open 12/5 to 12/11

General School Policies and Resources

Academic Accommodations for Individuals with Disabilities

Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to providing all students with reasonable access to learning opportunities and accommodations in accordance with The Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, Disability Support Services is located in the Central Academic Building, Suite 210. You can also contact us via phone at (210) 784-1335, visit us <https://www.tamusa.edu/Disability-Support-Services/index.html> or email us at dss@tamusa.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 Support Services and their instructors as soon as possible.

Academic Learning Center

The Academic Learning Center provides free course-based tutoring to all currently enrolled students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Students wishing to work with a tutor can make appointments through the Brainfuse online tutoring platform. Brainfuse can be accessed in the Tools section of Blackboard. You can contact the Academic Learning Center by emailing tutoring@tamusa.edu, calling (210) 784-1307, or visiting the Central Academic Building, room 202.

Counseling/Mental Health Resources

As a college student, there may be times when personal stressors interfere with your academic performance and negatively impact your daily functioning. If you are experiencing emotional difficulties or mental health concerns, support is available to you through the Student Counseling Center (SCC). To schedule an appointment, call 210-784-1331 or visit Madla 120.

All mental health services provided by the SCC are free and confidential (as the law allows). The Student Counseling Center provides brief individual and group therapy, crisis intervention, consultation, case management, and prevention services. For more information on SCC services visit <https://tamusa.edu/studentcounseling>

Crisis support is available 24/7 by calling the SCC at 210-784-1331 (after-hours select option '2').

Additionally, the TELUS Student Support App provides a variety of mental health resources to including support for in the moment distress, an anonymous peer to peer support network, mental health screenings, podcasts, and articles to improve your mental wellbeing.

Emergency Preparedness

JagE Alert is Texas A&M University-San Antonio's mass notification. In the event of an emergency, such as inclement weather, students, staff and faculty, who are registered, will have the option to receive a text message, email with instructions and updates. To register or update your information visit: <https://tamusa.bbcportal.com/>.

More information about Emergency Operations Plan and the Emergency Action Plan can be found here: <https://www.tamusa.edu/about-us/emergency-management/>. Download the SafeZone App (<https://safezoneapp.com/>) for emergencies or call (210) 784-1911. Non-Emergency (210) 784-1900.

Financial Aid and Verification of Attendance

According to the following federal regulation, 34 CFR 668.21: U.S. Department of Education (DoE) Title IV regulation, a student can only receive Title IV funds based on Title IV eligibility criteria which include class attendance. If Title IV funds are disbursed to ineligible students (including students who fail to begin attendance), the institution must return these funds to the U.S. DoE within 30 days of becoming aware that the student will not or has not begun attendance. Any student receiving federal financial aid who does not attend by the census date will have their financial aid terminated and returned to the DoE. Please note that any student who stops attending at any time during the semester, a Care report will be submitted, and you will possibly be dropped from the class. Your financial aid may have to be recalculated and a portion of your federal aid may have to be returned to the DoE.

Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center

The Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center supports graduate and undergraduate students in all three colleges as well as faculty and staff. Tutors work with students to develop reading skills, prepare oral presentations, and plan, draft, and revise their written assignments. Our language tutors support students enrolled in Spanish courses and students composing in Spanish for any assignment. Our digital studio tutors support students working on digital projects such as eportfolios, class presentations, or other digital multimedia projects. Students can schedule appointments through JagWire under the Student Services tab. Click on "Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center" to make your appointment. The Center offers face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous digital appointments. More information about what services we offer, how to make an appointment, and how to access your appointment can be found on our website at <https://www.tamusa.edu/academics/>.

Meeting Basic Needs

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to submit a CARE referral (<https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/Student-Rights-and-Responsibilities/file-a-report.html>) for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable them to direct you to available resources.

Military Affairs

Veterans and active-duty military personnel are welcomed and encouraged to visit the Office of Military Affairs for any question involving federal or state VA Education Benefits. Visit the Patriots' Casa building, room 202, or to contact the Office of Military Affairs with any questions at military.va@tamusa.edu or (210)784-1397.

Religious Observances

Texas A&M University-San Antonio recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or course work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes.

The Six-Drop Rule

Students are subject to the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 1231 passed by the Texas Legislature in 2007. SB 1231 limits students to a maximum of six (6) non-punitive course drops (i.e., courses a student chooses to drop) during their undergraduate careers. A non-punitive drop does not affect the student's GPA. However, course drops that exceed the maximum allowed by SB 1231 will be treated as "F" grades and will impact the student's GPA.

Statement of Harassment and Discrimination

Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equal opportunity, and human dignity. To fulfill its multiple missions as an institution of higher learning, A&M-San Antonio encourages a climate that values and nurtures collegiality and the uniqueness of the individual within our state, nation, and world. All decisions and actions involving students and employees should be based on applicable law and individual merit. Texas A&M University-San Antonio, in accordance with applicable federal and state law, prohibits discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or pregnancy/parenting status. Individuals who believe they have experienced harassment or discrimination prohibited by this statement are encouraged to contact the appropriate offices within their respective units.

Texas A&M University-San Antonio faculty are committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students and for the university as a whole. If you have experienced any form of sex- or gender-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic or dating violence, or stalking, know that help and support are available. A&M-San Antonio's Title IX Coordinator can support those impacted by such conduct in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more. The university strongly encourages all students to report any such incidents to the Title IX Coordinator. Please be aware that all A&M-San Antonio employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as counselors and trained victim advocates) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the university. This means that if you tell a faculty member about a situation of sexual harassment, sexual violence, or other related misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the university's Title IX Coordinator (titleix@tamusa.edu, 210-784-2061, CAB 439K). If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting requirement, you can contact the Student Counseling Center at (210) 784-1331 or visit them in Madla 120.

Pregnant/Parenting Students

Texas A&M-San Antonio does not require a pregnant or parenting student, solely because of that status or issues related to that status, to (1) take a leave of absence or withdraw from their degree or certificate program; (2) limit the student's studies; (3) participate in an alternative program; (4) change the student's major, degree, or certificate program; or (5) refrain from joining or cease participating in any course, activity, or program at the University. The university will provide such reasonable accommodations to pregnant students as would be provided to a student with a temporary medical condition that are related to the health and safety of the student and the student's unborn child. These could include maintaining a safe distance from substances, areas, and activities known to be hazardous to pregnant individuals and their unborn child; excused absences because of illness or medical appointments; modified due dates for assignments; rescheduled tests/exams; taking a leave of absence; and being provided access to instructional materials and video recordings of lectures for excused absences, if these would be provided to any other student with an excused absence. Pregnant/parenting students are encouraged to contact the Title IX Coordinator with any questions or concerns related to their status (titleix@tamusa.edu; 210-784-2061; CAB 439K).

Texas A&M-San Antonio has also designated the Title IX Coordinator as the liaison officer for current or incoming students who are the parent or guardian of a child younger than 18 years of age. The Title IX Coordinator can provide students with information regarding support services and other resources.

Students' Rights and Responsibilities

The following statement of students' rights and responsibilities is intended to reflect the philosophical base upon which University Student Rules are built. This philosophy acknowledges the existence of both rights and responsibilities, which is inherent to an individual not only as a student at Texas A&M University-San Antonio but also as a citizen of this country.

Students' Rights

1. A student shall have the right to participate in a free exchange of ideas, and there shall be no University rule or administrative rule that in any way abridges the rights of freedom of speech, expression, petition and peaceful assembly as set forth in the U.S. Constitution.
2. Each student shall have the right to participate in all areas and activities of the University, free from any form of discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and pregnancy/parenting or veteran status in accordance with applicable federal and state laws.
3. A student has the right to personal privacy except as otherwise provided by law, and this will be observed by students and University authorities alike.
4. Each student subject to disciplinary action arising from violations of university student rules shall be assured a fundamentally fair process.

Students' Responsibilities

1. A student has the responsibility to respect the rights and property of others, including other students, the faculty, and administration.
2. A student has the responsibility to be fully acquainted with the published University Student Rules found in the Student Handbook, Student Code of Conduct, on our website, and University Catalog, and to comply with them, as well as with federal, state, and local laws.
3. A student has the responsibility to recognize that student actions reflect upon the individuals involved and upon the entire University community.
4. A student has the responsibility to recognize the University's obligation to provide a safe environment for learning.
5. A student has the responsibility to check their university email for any updates or official university notifications.

We expect that students will behave in a manner that is dignified, respectful, and courteous to all people, regardless of sex, ethnic/racial origin, religious background, sexual orientation, or disability. Conduct that infringes on the rights of another individual will not be tolerated.

Students are expected to exhibit a high level of honesty and integrity in their pursuit of higher education. Students engaging in an act that violates the standards of academic integrity will find themselves facing academic and/or disciplinary sanctions. Academic misconduct is any act, or attempt, which gives an unfair advantage to the student. Additionally, any behavior specifically prohibited by a faculty member in the course syllabus or class discussion may be considered as academic misconduct. For more information on academic misconduct policies and procedures please review the Student Code of Conduct (<https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/student-rights-and-responsibilities/documents/Student-Handbook-2022-23.pdf>) or visit the resources available in the OSRR website (<https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/student-rights-and-responsibilities/academic-integrity.html>).