

Texas Government (GOVT-1306) – Fall 2025

Instructor Information:

Instructor: Dr. Curtis McDowell

Building:

Classroom:

Class Time:

Course Dates:

Course Description:

This course provides an in-depth exploration of Texas government and politics through the lens of *Lone Star Politics: Tradition and Transformation in Texas* (9th ed.) by Collier, Galatas, and Harrelson-Stephens. Students will examine the historical foundations, institutional structures, and evolving political culture of Texas. Topics include the Texas Constitution, federalism, political participation, elections, parties, interest groups, the legislative and executive branches, the judiciary, civil rights, and local governance. Emphasis is placed on critical analysis of contemporary issues and the dynamic relationship between tradition and transformation in Texas politics. By the end of the course, students will be equipped to evaluate the unique political landscape of Texas and its impact on broader national trends.

Course Overview and Goals:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Understand the historical and cultural context of Texas politics and how it influences contemporary political behavior and institutions.
2. Analyze the structure and function of Texas government, including its legislative, executive, and judicial branches.
3. Evaluate the role of political actors such as voters, parties, interest groups, and media in shaping public policy in Texas.
4. Compare and contrast Texas's political system with that of the federal government and other states.
5. Interpret and critique public policy issues affecting Texas, including budgeting, civil rights, and local governance.
6. Develop informed perspectives on the challenges and opportunities facing Texas in a rapidly changing political environment.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):

SLO #	Description
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1. Explain the origin and development of the Texas constitution
2. And its relationship with the US Constitution.
3. Describe the structural functions of the Texas government, including the legislative, executive and judicial branches.
4. Analyze the role of political culture, ideology, and public opinion in shaping Texas politics.
5. Explain the impact of Federalism on state and local governance in Texas.
6. Identify the mechanisms of political participation, including voting elections, political parties, and interest groups.
7. Discuss civil liberties and civil rights in the context of Texas law and policy.
8. Examine the organization and responsibilities of local governments in Texas, including counties, municipalities and special districts.
9. Assess the budgeting and policy-making process in Texas, including revenue sources and expenditures.
10. Apply critical thinking skills to contemporary political issues and debates affecting Texas.
11. Demonstrate an understanding of the ethical dimensions of political decision making and public service.

Why Attendance Matters – Attendance Policy

In-person classroom discussions and learning are essential for developing a deeper understanding of political systems and current events. They foster critical thinking, respectful debate, and collaborative learning. Consistent attendance ensures students stay engaged and benefit from peer and instructor insights. Attendance will be taken at every class. Please be proactive and email Dr. McDowell if you anticipate being absent. The University attendance policy is in effect for this course. Please refer to Policy 7.005 Student Attendance at <https://www.untDallas.edu/hr/upol>.

Required Textbook:

Collier, K., Galatas, S., & Harrelson-Stephens, J. (2023). *Lone Star politics: Tradition and transformation in Texas* (8th ed.). CQ Press.

Course Schedule:

Lone Star Politics – 16-Week Course Schedule

Week	Assignments	Due Date	SLOs
Week 1	Chapter 1: Introduction to Texas Politics Video Quiz, Chapter Quiz, Discussion 1	Aug 30	Identify key themes in Texas political culture and historical development
Week 2	Chapter 2: Texas Constitutions Video Quiz, Chapter Quiz, Discussion 2	Sep 6	Analyze the evolution and structure of Texas constitutions
Week 3	Chapter 3: Federalism and Intergovernmental Relations Video Quiz, Chapter Quiz, Discussion 3	Sep 13	Explain Texas's role in the federal system and intergovernmental dynamics
Week 4	Chapter 4: Political Participation and Voting Video Quiz, Chapter Quiz, Discussion 4	Sep 20	Evaluate voter behavior, turnout, and barriers to participation
Week 5	Chapter 5: Campaigns and Elections Texas Style/ Chapter 6: Political Parties Video Quiz, Chapter Quiz, Discussion 5	Sep 27	Assess campaign strategies and election systems in Texas. Compare party organizations and their influence in Texas politics
Week 6	Midterm	Oct 4 th	Midterm – Chapters 1 – 6
Week 7	Chapter 7: Organized Interests Video Quiz, Chapter Quiz, Discussion 7	Oct 11	Examine lobbying, interest groups, and their policy impact
Week 8	Chapter 8: The Texas Legislature Video Quiz, Chapter Quiz, Discussion 8	Oct 18	Describe legislative structure, process, and representation
Week 9	Chapter 9: Texas Governors Video Quiz, Chapter Quiz, Discussion 9	Oct 25	Analyze gubernatorial powers and leadership styles
Week 10	Chapter 10: The Plural Executive and Bureaucracy Video Quiz, Chapter Quiz, Discussion 10	Nov 1	Understand the plural executive and bureaucratic functions
Week 11	Midterm 2	Nov 8 th	Midterm 2 – chapters 7 - 10
Week 12	Chapter 11: The Texas Judicial System Video Quiz, Chapter Quiz, Discussion 11	Nov 8	Evaluate judicial selection, structure, and justice delivery
Week 13	Chapter 12: Civil Rights and Liberties in Texas Video Quiz, Chapter Quiz,	Nov 15	Explore civil rights history and contemporary issues in Texas

	Discussion 12		
Week 14	Chapter 13: Local Government in Texas Video Quiz, Chapter Quiz, Discussion 13	Nov 22	Compare city and county governments and their roles
	Thanksgiving Break – No Class	—	—
Week 15	Chapter 14: Fiscal Policy and Budgeting Video Quiz, Chapter Quiz, Discussion 14	Dec 6	Assess Texas’s budgeting process and fiscal priorities
Week 16	Final Exam and Course Wrap-Up	Dec 12	Final Exam – chapters 11– 14

Assignment Deadlines and Communication Policy:

All **video quizzes**, **chapter quizzes**, and **assignments** are due **every Friday by 11:59 PM**. **Weekly discussions** must be submitted by **Saturday at 11:59 PM**. Late work will not be accepted unless the student has notified the instructor **at least 24 hours prior to the due date**. All course-related communication must be conducted through **Microsoft Outlook email**. Messages sent via Canvas will not be monitored or responded to.

Grade Determination: *(example of percentage grading)*

A =; i.e. 90% or better

B = i.e. 80 – 89 %

C = i.e. 70 – 79 %

D = i.e. 60 – 69 %

F = i.e. less than 60%

Grading Breakdown:

Chapter Quizzes – 25%

Midterm Exam (2) – 20%

Final Exam – 25%

Discussions (14) – 15%

Video Quizzes (12) – 15%

Campus Policies:

All students must follow University of North Texas at Dallas' policies on academic integrity, accessibility, and classroom conduct. For full details, visit www.UTDallas.edu.

Assignment Policy:

The University attendance policy is substantially in effect for this course. Please refer to Policy 7.005 Student Attendance at <http://www.untDallas.edu/hr/upol> I will monitor attendance for the first five weeks in order to identify those who may be in peril of failing the class. However, you will be treated as responsible adults for most of the semester: You miss class at your own peril, and frequent class absences will cost you participation points. Details of attendance policy will be discussed in class during the first session.

Class attendance and participation is expected because the class is designed as a shared learning experience and because essential information not in the textbook will be discussed in class. The dynamic

Nature of this course makes it difficult for students to make-up or to receive credit for missed classes. Attendance and participation is essential to your ability to demonstrate proficiency in the subject.

If you must miss a single, isolated class, you need not notify the instructor, but it becomes your responsibility to obtain notes of the missed class from your colleagues. I do not post the notes of my lectures. Before you ask the professor, what was missing, you should have reviewed notation for the missed class.

In the case of extended absences due to illness or crises, you are expected to inform the instructor as soon as possible about the extent of your absence, preferably, before the absence occurs. You may be required to produce written evidence of the reasons for your absence.

In all cases, missing exams and other assignments requires a good-faith effort on your part to inform the instructor of your absence beforehand. Unless you have a rock-solid reason for missing the test, you will not be permitted to make it up.

Diversity/Tolerance Policy: Students are encouraged to contribute their perspectives and insights to class discussions. However, offensive and inappropriate language (swearing) and remarks offensive to others of nationalities, ethnic groups, sexual preferences, religious groups, genders, or other ascribed statuses will not be tolerated. Disruptions, which violate the Code of Student Conduct, will be referred to the Dean of Students, as the instructor deems appropriate. (UNTD Policy 7.001)

Class-Specific Policies:

Do not attempt to communicate with the professor through the Blackboard mail function. I do not check it and I will not respond. Communicate through my official university e-mail listed at the top of this syllabus. I communicate with you by responding to whatever e-mail address you use to send your message. General notices are posted as announcements on Blackboard and/or as email to your official university address. Failure to check your email is no excuse for missing changes in test dates or assignments

Exam Policy:

Exams should be taken as scheduled. No makeup examinations will be allowed except for documented emergencies or prior notification of your absence (See Policy 7.005 Student Attendance at <https://www.untDallas.edu/hr/upol>).

University Policies and Procedures:

Students with Disabilities (ADA Compliance):

The University of North Texas at Dallas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Disabilities Services Office (DSO) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the DSO will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodation at any time; however, DSO notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delays in implementation. Note that a student must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet/communicate with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Disability Services Office website at <http://www.untDallas.edu/disability>. You may also contact them by phone at 972-338-1777; by email at UNTDdisability@untDallas.edu on the first floor of the Student Center.

Canvas Instructure Accessibility Statement: *optional if you do not use Canvas for the course*

University of North Texas at Dallas is committed to ensuring that online and hybrid courses are usable by all students and faculty including those with disabilities. If you encounter any difficulties with technologies, please contact our ITSS Department. To better assist them, you would want to have the operating system, web browser and information on any assistive technology being used. The Canvas Instructure Accessibility Statement is provided at <https://www.canvaslms.com/accessibility>.

NOTE: Additional instructional technology tools, such as Turnitin, Respondus, Panopto, and publisher cartridge content (i.e. MyLab, Pearson, etc.) may NOT be fully ADA compliant. Please contact our Disability Office should you require additional assistance utilizing any of these tools.

Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity is a hallmark of higher education. You are expected to abide by the University's code of Academic Integrity policy. Any person suspected of academic dishonesty (i.e., cheating or plagiarism) will be handled in accordance with the University's policies and procedures. Refer to the UNT Dallas Academic Integrity Policy in the appropriate Catalog at <http://dallascatalog.unt.edu>.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabrication of information or citations, facilitating acts of dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students.

Web-based Plagiarism Detection: Please be aware in some courses, students may be required to submit written assignments to Turnitin, a web-based plagiarism detection service, or another method. If submitting to Turnitin, please remove your title page and other personal information.

Discussion Community Tolerance Policy:

Students are encouraged to contribute their perspectives and insights to class discussions. However, offensive & inappropriate language (swearing) and remarks offensive to others of particular nationalities, ethnic groups, sexual preferences, religious groups, genders, or other ascribed statuses will not be tolerated. Disruptions which violate the Code of Student's Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct will be referred to the Dean of Students as the instructor deems appropriate (UNTD Policy 7.001 found at <https://www.untDallas.edu/hr/upol>). ***The Code of Student's Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct (UNTD Policy 7.001 found at <https://www.untDallas.edu/hr/upol>)*** describes disruption as the obstructing or interfering with university functions or activity, including any behavior that interferes with students, faculty, or staff access to an appropriate educational environment. Examples of disruptive behavior that may result in a student being directed to leave the classroom include but are not limited to: failure to comply with reasonable directive of University officials, action or combination of actions that unreasonably interfere with, hinder, obstruct, or prevents the right of others to freely participate, threatening, assaulting, or causing harm to oneself or to another, uttering any words or performing any acts that cause physical injury, or threaten any individual, or interfere with any individual's rightful actions, and

harassment. You are encouraged to read the Code of Student's Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct for more information related to behaviors that could be considered disruptive.

Course Evaluations:

Students' evaluations of teaching effectiveness are a requirement for all organized classes at UNT Dallas. This short survey will be made available to you at the end of the semester via your campus email, providing you a chance to comment on how this class is taught. I will not have access to the results of the evaluations until after final grades have been posted. I am very interested in the feedback I get from students, as I work to continually improve my teaching. I consider students' evaluations to be an important part of your participation in this class.

Bad Weather Policy:

Campus facilities will close and operations will be suspended when adverse weather and/or safety hazards exist on the UNTD campus or if travel to the campus is deemed dangerous as the result of ice, sleet or snow. In the event of a campus closure, the Marketing and Communication Department will report closure information to all appropriate major media by 7 a.m. That department will also update the UNTD website, Facebook and Twitter with closing information as soon as it is possible. For more information please refer to <http://www.untdallas.edu/police/resources/notifications>.

Inclement Weather and Online Classes:

Online classes may or may not be affected by campus closures due to inclement weather. Unless otherwise notified by your instructor via e-mail, online messaging, or online announcement, students should assume that assignments are due as scheduled.

Technology Assistance: In order to successfully access the materials in Canvas, UNT Dallas advises that your computer be equipped with the minimum system requirements listed on the first page of the syllabus.

If you experience difficulty accessing or using components of the course, try using Google Chrome browser. If you still experience technical difficulties, first, notify your instructor.

If the problem is still not resolved, call Distance Learning at the phone number listed on the first page of the syllabus. Also, no matter what browser you use, always enable pop-ups.

For more information see:

- UNT Dallas Canvas Technical Requirements:
<https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10721>

Canvas Instructure Support & Unsupported Operating Systems:
<https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10720>

Remove this page, write your questions, sign and email to me by third day of class.

I have read and reviewed the syllabus, and I understand that I am responsible for understanding the policies of the course.

_____ Student signature

_____ Student name (printed)

_____ Date signed

I have the following questions about the course syllabus and policies: