

Course Syllabus
State and Local Government
Spring 2024
Dr. Elizabeth Searing

Course Information

Title: State and Local Government
Number: GOVT 2306.003 (26145)
Term: Spring 2024
Meetings: MWF 9a-9:50a, AD 2.216

Professor Contact Information

Office Location: GR 3.130
Email Address: Elizabeth.Searing@utdallas.edu
Office Hours: Synchronous Zoom: Mondays, 11a to 1p
Online or in person: By appointment

Course Pre-requisites, Co-requisites, and/or Other Restrictions

There are no formal course pre-requisites or co-requisites.

Modality: In-Person

The course is set to be taught as an in-person course meaning students are expected to attend class. If university policy requires the modality of course instruction to be adjusted, students will receive an email from the instructor with updated course information. Unless required by COVID-19 policy or through OSA, video recordings of the class will not be made available to students.

Student Learning Objectives

- **Effectively communicate issues of societal and personal import with others:** meaningfully and respectfully express your positions and ideas on political and social issues to fellow students, community members, public officials, and representatives

- **Think critically about issues related to government and politics:** analyze and appreciate historical trends in the development of government institutions (constitutions, branches of government, political parties, elections, etc.), and apply knowledge of government institutions and theoretical and scholarly approaches to understand government behavior and current events
 - **Engage academically and professionally with a sense of social responsibility:** recognize that individual actions can have consequences for society just as government actions can have consequences for individuals, and engage with the world around you with awareness and empathy
 - **Exercise personal responsibility in how government functions:** understand how to effectively interact with government to achieve desired outcomes, and begin a lifetime of active engagement with your state and local governments
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Student Learning Outcomes

At the completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the influence founding principles have on today's political structure, including current political and policy debates.
 2. Describe state and local political systems and their ever-changing relationship to the federal government.
 3. Assess the design and function of states' executive, legislative, and judicial branches in comparison to other states/the federal government.
 4. Examine the impact of evolving civil rights and civil liberties protections on state governance.
 5. Analyze issues, public policies, and political culture in the U.S. from an empirical (e.g., evidence-based) rather than opinionated frame.
 6. Identify, describe, and analyze various mechanisms of citizen political involvement including public opinion, political parties, interest groups, and electoral processes.
 7. Apply important theoretical and scholarly approaches to understanding state and local institutions' behavior, citizen involvement, and interactions between citizens and institutions of government.
 8. Consider the above factors when designing, strategizing, and proposing workable policy solutions to complex governmental and societal problems facing state and local governments today.
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Required Textbooks and Materials

There are two required materials for this course: (1) a textbook, and (2) a subscription to a digital learning platform called TopHat. Our textbook is fully integrated into TopHat, which means that you cannot access the textbook without purchasing the TopHat subscription. Upon purchasing your subscription to TopHat and the textbook (ISBN: 9781774127582), you will have full access to the necessary course materials.

Both can be ordered via the **Top Hat Course Link** in the eLearning site for this course. Additional strategies for working with Top Hat are provided in a separate hand-out. If necessary, the Join Code for this course is 914173.

Notes About Class Materials

- These materials are only available to order through the link above or in the invitation link sent to your UT Dallas email address; these items are not available through the UT Dallas bookstore.
- Use your UT Dallas email to subscribe to TopHat.
- If you already purchased a TopHat subscription the Spring 2024 term, you only need to purchase the textbook for this course.
- You only need to purchase the semester-length subscription to complete this course.

Exam Schedule (all times in Central Time Zone)

Assignment	Date Available	Date Due	Content
Exam 1	February 14 from 12:00 AM	February 16 at 11:59 PM	Chapters 1-5
Exam 2	March 27 at 12:00 AM	March 29 at 11:59 PM	Chapters 6-10
Exam 3	May 1 at 12:00 AM	May 3 at 11:59 PM	Chapters 11-15
Final Exam	TBD	Available for 24-period	Chapters 1-15

- If an exam window covers a day we would meet for lecture, we will not meet for lecture in observance of the exam. The date for the Final Exam will be posted when it is made available by the University Registrar.

Readings and Homework

Week	Readings	Assessment	Due Date
Week of January 15	Syllabus and Module 1 - Introduction	Homework 1	January 26
Week of January 22	Module 2 - State Constitutions	Homework 2	January 26
Week of January 29	Module 3 - Federalism	Homework 3	February 2
Week of February 5	Module 4 - Local Governments	Homework 4	February 9
Week of February 12	Module 5 - State and Local Government <i>Feb 14-16: Exam 1 Available</i>	Homework 5	February 13
Week of February 19	Module 6 - Citizen Participation	Homework 6	February 23
Week of February 26	Module 7 - Public Opinion & Lobbying	Homework 7	March 1
Week of March 4	Module 8 - Executive Branch	Homework 8	March 8
<i>Week of March 11</i>	<i>No Class</i>	<i>No Homework</i>	<i>Spring Break</i>
Week of March 18	Module 9 - State Legislatures	Homework 9	March 22
Week of March 25	Module 10 - State Judiciary <i>Mar 27-29: Exam 2 Available</i>	Homework 10	March 26
Week of April 1	Module 11 - Taxes and Spending	Homework 11	April 5
Week of April 8	Module 12 - Criminal Justice	Homework 12	April 12
Week of April 15	Module 13 - Social Welfare, Healthcare	Homework 13	April 19
Week of April 22	Module 14 - Education Policy	Homework 14	April 26
Week of April 29	Module 15 - Environment and Energy Policy <i>May 1-3: Exam 3 Available</i>	Homework 15	April 30
<i>Week of May 6</i>	<i>No Class</i> <i>Final Exam Available TBD</i>	<i>No Homework</i>	<i>Finals Week</i>

Homework Submission

All homework assignments are completed through Top Hat. All homework assignments are due at 5:00 PM CT on the specified date.

- With the exception of Modules 5, 10, and 15, all homework assignments are due on Friday at 5:00 PM CT of the assigned week listed above.
- To avoid overlapping with exams, Modules 5, 10, and 15, are due on Tuesday at 5:00 PM CT of the assigned week listed above. Reminders will be sent by email and announcements will be made in class.

Assessment

Course assessment will be completed using homework, participation, and exams. When calculating final grades, the course policy is to drop a student's lowest three participation grades; lowest two homework assignments; and lowest exam score. These are applied at the end of the semester. If a student seeks additional relief beyond what is described in the syllabus, then the instructor encourages the student to consider a non-academic withdrawal or to withdraw from the course.

Grading Scale

Consistent with UT Dallas policy, students are graded on a plus/minus scale. Grades are rounded to the nearest whole number (for example, a 94.3 is a 94, and a 94.7 is a 95). Please see the grade table below:

Grade	Top of Range	Bottom of Range
A+	100	97
A	< 97	>= 93
A-	< 93	>= 90
B+	< 90	>= 87
B	< 87	>= 84
B-	< 84	>= 80
C+	< 80	>= 77
C	< 77	>= 74
C-	< 74	>= 70
D+	< 70	>= 67
D	< 67	>= 64
D-	< 64	>= 60
F	< 60	

Assignment Weights

Assignment	Weight
Homework	40%
Participation	10%
Exams	50%
Total	100%

Homework - 40%

There are 15 homework assignments in the course. Homework is integrated into the textbook via TopHat and is completed by answering the questions embedded in the weekly readings in each chapter.

Final grades are calculated by taking the percent average of a student's 13 highest homework assignment scores, weighted as 40% of the final grade.

This provides students the flexibility to miss up to two homework assignments without penalty. In order to receive full credit for the homework assignments, students must answer all of the questions in each chapter. The questions are worth one point each and evaluated equally on two factors: participation and correctness. Participation is whether you progressed through the chapter and attempted each question. Correctness is whether you provided the right answer to the question. Questions cannot be reopened after a submission is made. Below is a sample calculation for figuring out a grade on a homework assignment.

- Total number of questions in the chapter: 10
- Total number of questions attempted (participation): 10
- Total number of correct answers (correctness): 8
- Calculation: $(10 * 0.5) + (8 * 0.5) = 9$
- Assignment Score: 90%

Participation - 10%

During each class, there will be a participation task. Some days, the professor will take attendance. Other days, students may be asked to submit a notecard with a brief response to a prompt or provide an attendance verification code via the Top Hat app.

Exams - 50%

There are four exams in this course: Exams 1-3 and a Final Exam. Final grades are calculated by taking the percent average of a student's three highest exam scores, weighted as 50% of the final grade. Students may miss up to one exam in the course without adversely impacting their grade. Alternatively, if a student completes all four exams, the three highest exam scores will be used to calculate their final grade. Students are given multiple days to complete Exams 1-3 and exam windows are posted at the start of the semester - please plan accordingly. The Final Exam date is posted later in the semester.

Content for Exams 1-3 are primarily drawn from the lectures but will include some content from the text. For Exams 1-3, each exam covers five chapters worth of content. For example, Exam 1 will only include content from Chapters 1-5 and the accompanying lectures. The Final Exam is comprehensive and will draw on content from Chapters 1-15 in the text.

Exams are conducted online through Top Hat. Exams 1-3 will consist of 40-55 questions, while the Final Exam will consist of at least 100 questions. Students are encouraged to use their notes from class during the exam.

- It is the recommendation of the instructor and the design of the course that students plan to complete Exams 1-3 and use the Final Exam to cover unexpected emergencies or as an attempt to improve their final grade.

Make-Up Exams

Make-up exams are only scheduled for official UT Dallas-sponsored activities and religious holy days. Make-up exams will only be scheduled when the instructor is given sufficient notice of the absence prior to the exam. In this instance, sufficient notice is defined as written (email) notice sent at least 10 business days prior to the start of the exam period. If documentation is required, such as an excuse letter, then sufficient notice is not considered complete until all documentation is received. Plainly, all documentation and notice must be sent to the faculty member by email at least 10 business days prior to the opening of the exam. Students that have a religious holy day observance that conflicts with an exam must notify the faculty member by the end of the second week of the semester so that accommodations can be made. To qualify for a make-up exam, the excused absence event must cover the entire duration of the exam window. If the student can complete an exam during the normal exam window, they are expected to do so in lieu of scheduling a make-up exam. Since exam content is drawn from lectures, all make-up exams will be scheduled after the regularly scheduled exam has occurred.

- Make-up exams will cover the same content as the regularly scheduled exam.
- The make-up exam policy applies to Exams 1-3, it does not apply to the Final Exam.

- The excuse letter for UT Dallas-sponsored activities must come from the faculty or staff member serving as an organizational sponsor. If no such letter can be produced, then the event is not considered an official UT Dallas sponsored activity and is not covered by this policy.
- Pre-planned events including but not limited to vacations, family trip service trip, mission trip, or non-official UT Dallas sponsored activity, are not covered by this policy and therefore are not grounds for requesting a make-up exam.
- Unexpected events including but not limited to negligence, illness, car trouble, bereavement, technical issues are not covered by this policy and therefore are not grounds for requesting a make-up exam.

Additional Exam Information

- For exam availability and dates, please see the Exam Schedule in this document.
- Exams are available for review by request and only during an in-person office hour appointment with the faculty member. Exam reviews will be available one week after the exam has closed. Please note, Exam 3 will not be available for review prior to the Final Exam. Since Exam 3 will be based on the lecture and the Final Exam will draw from the text, this should not create issues when preparing for the Final Exam.
- During exam review, in order to protect exam integrity, copying down exam questions or answers is prohibited.
- If the exam window, the dates the exam is available, would include a class meeting, then we will not meet for class in observance of the exam. Students are expected and assumed to have used this time to complete the exam.
- Coordination or taking the exam as a group is prohibited.
- It is the recommendation and assumption of the instructor that you complete the exam using a computer lab on-campus. This ensures the most reliable connection and reduces the likelihood of individual device settings from interfering with the exam.
- Technical issues attributed to individual device and device settings are not grounds for an exam exemption. This includes but is not limited to: internet dropping, device connectivity or internet drops, images failing to load.
- To minimize technical issues, please see the [Top Hat Support Center](#) for information including recommended browser and device settings.
- **WARNING:** Once opened, the exam is only available for a timed period within the exam availability window. The time begins once you open the exam, and the time cannot be restarted once the exam is opened. Should technical issues arise, you must reach out to the Professor immediately.

Final Exam

The Final Exam is comprehensive and will cover Chapters 1-15. It will exclusively draw on content from the text and will not cover content from the lectures. The Final Exam will be longer than Exams 1-3 but students will have more time to complete it. Again, it is the recommendation of the instructor and the design of the course that students plan to complete Exams 1-3 and use the Final Exam to cover unexpected emergencies or as an attempt to improve their final grade.

The date and time for the final exam will be updated once the schedule for finals week has been announced.

Course Policies

Communication

- Emails about the course must be sent using your UT Dallas email and have GOVT 2305 in the subject line. Failure to do so may result in a delayed response from the instructor. Per UT Dallas policy, I will not respond to student emails sent from non UT Dallas email accounts.
- Expect all email messages to be responded to within two business days. Business days are defined as Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM CT while the university is open. Weekends and university closures are not considered business days. I.E., if you email on Friday evening after 5:00 PM, then the expected reply window is up to 5:00 PM on the following Tuesday.
- You may also reach out to the instructor using eLearning. Please see the [eLearning](#) tutorials for additional information and guides.

Attendance

As an in-person course, attendance is expected. In addition to strongly influencing the Participation Grade, the lectures will contain content which is not covered in the textbook but will appear on course assignments. Based on historical performance, students that attend class on a regular basis perform up to 13% better on exams and 10% better in the course overall compared to students that do not attend class.

- Office hour appointments are not designed to be used as a substitute for class lectures. If the instructor believes a student to be abusing office hours as a means of not attending the lectures, the instructor reserves the right to limit office hour usage.
- To incentivize attendance, there will be content covered and made available through the lecture which will not appear in the textbook but will appear on the exam. Partial notes are provided through the textbook slides. To support the attendance policy, annotations or additions to the slides which are used in the lecture are not provided - students are expected to engage in note-taking during the lecture.

- Consistent with the incentive outlined above, if a student misses class, they are encouraged to seek notes from a fellow classmate or to schedule an appointment during office hours. Lectures are not recorded and copies of class notes will not be sent by the instructor if a student misses class.
- A student's attendance record will be determined by the Participation Task in class. If a student misses the task, then they will not be recorded as having attended class - emails or communications claiming attendance in lieu of the task are not accepted.
- If a student is experiencing difficulty utilizing the sign-in portal, they should reach out to the instructor as soon as possible to resolve the issue.

Late Work

Late work is not accepted. The student's lowest two homework grades and lowest exam score will be dropped. To accommodate the start of the semester, graded assignments do not begin until the second week of class. However, all students are expected to have access to TopHat and the textbook by the end of the first week of class. Inability to access the platform and textbook are not acceptable reasons for failing to access the material in the course. If a student is experiencing issues accessing TopHat, the textbook, or exams, email the instructor ASAP.

Courseroom Citizenship

This course is meant to serve as an introductory survey of the U.S. State and Local Government. Course material may cover topics that some considered to be controversial or provocative - the instructor will do their best to present this material in the context of the subject being discussed. It is incumbent on students to treat all members of the classroom with respect and to maintain a cordial atmosphere as we engage in discussions.

Incomplete Grades

Incomplete grades are at the discretion of the instructor AND may only be considered if a student has completed at least 70% of the coursework. In this course, 70% of the coursework is determined based on the number of assignments completed, not the relative weight of the assignments to the final grade. Additionally, when determining whether 70% of the assignments are completed, the assignment drop policies DO NOT apply and any recorded 0 on assignments will be treated as incomplete coursework. By default, if the course drop policies provide sufficient relief, then an incomplete grade will not be awarded. Additionally, students are not entitled to an incomplete grade and the instructor will exercise discretion based on the circumstances and totality of the student's participation in class including efforts to complete exams, homework, and attending class. See the UT Dallas Undergraduate Catalog for additional details.

Academic Integrity

Every student at UT Dallas is expected to exercise independent thought and expression as he or she strives for academic achievement. Incorporated in the quest for intellectual growth are the expectations of honesty, originality in written and oral expression, a respect for the exchange of ideas, and acknowledgement and recognition of the abilities and contributions of others. Please see the university's [academic integrity](#) page for details and tips.

Academic dishonesty is unacceptable under any circumstances. This includes but is not limited to plagiarism, collusion, cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, failure to contribute to a collaborative project, and sabotage. All work submitted in this course must be your own; you may not engage in unauthorized collaboration or make use of ChatGPT or other AI composition software. If a student is thought to be engaging in academic dishonesty, they will be referred to the Office of Community Standards and Conduct. For additional details on what may constitute academic dishonesty, please refer to the [university's webpage](#).

- The syllabus outlines drop policies for homework and exams. Any student found to have engaged in academic misconduct or dishonestly by the Office of Community Standards and Conduct will be unable to utilize the drop policies to cover academic sanctions. For example, if the OCSC recommends a student receive a zero on an exam, the syllabus policy which drops a student's lowest exam score will not cover that zero. In this example, the student will have earned a zero on the sanctioned exam and the student's lowest exam score from the remaining three exams will be dropped. Put another way, any sanctioned issued by the OSCS for an assignment will be reflected in a student's final grade and will not be covered by or subject to the course assignment and exam drop policies.

Academic Accommodation Information

It is the policy of The University of Texas at Dallas to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and state and local regulations regarding students and applicants with disabilities. In compliance with these laws, the Office of Student AccessAbility (OSA) is dedicated to maintaining an environment that guarantees students with disabilities full access to educational programs, activities and facilities.

It is the student's responsibility to identify himself/herself to OSA and to provide documentation of a disability. Strict documentation guidelines exist for different types of disabilities. See the [OSA website for details](#). The student meets with OSA, who determines appropriate accommodations after reviewing documentation prepared by a licensed professional.

Instructors are under no obligation to provide accommodations for a student who does not identify himself/herself as a student with a disability. If a student requests accommodations for a disability but has not provided the faculty member with an Accommodation Letter from OSA, the instructor will immediately refer the student to OSA. Any documentation received from OSA must cover the current semester. Letters from OSA which do not cover the current semester must be updated before the accommodations will be implemented. Failure to have a current letter on-file is not sufficient grounds to reopen or make-up assignments that would otherwise be covered by an OSA accommodation.

Classroom Conduct Requirements Related to Public Health Measures

UT Dallas will follow the public health and safety guidelines put forth by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), and local public health agencies that are in effect at that time during the Fall 2021 semester to the extent allowed by state governance. Texas Governor Greg Abbott's Executive Order GA-38 prohibits us from mandating vaccines and face coverings for UT Dallas employees, students, and members of the public on campus. However, we strongly encourage all Comets to get vaccinated and wear face coverings as recommended by the CDC. Check the [Comets United: Latest Updates webpage](#) for the latest guidance on the University's public health measures. Comets are expected to carry out [Student Safety](#) protocols in adherence to the Comet Commitment. Unvaccinated Comets will be expected to complete the [Required Daily Health Screening](#). Those students who do not comply will be referred to the Office of Community Standards and Conduct for disciplinary action under the [Student Code of Conduct – UTSP5003](#).

Class Recordings

Students are expected to follow appropriate University policies and maintain the security of passwords used to access recorded lectures. Unless the Office of Student AccessAbility has approved the student to record the instruction, students are expressly prohibited from recording any part of this course. Recordings may not be published, reproduced, or shared with those not in the class, or uploaded to other online environments except to implement an approved Office of Student AccessAbility accommodation. Failure to comply with these University requirements is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct.

The instructor may record meetings of this course. These recordings will be made available to all students registered for this class if the intent is to supplement the classroom experience. If the instructor or a UTD school/department/office plans any other uses for the recordings, consent of the students identifiable in the recordings is required prior to such use unless an exception is allowed by law.

Comet Creed

This creed was voted on by the UT Dallas student body in 2014. It is a standard that Comets choose to live by and encourage others to do the same:

“As a Comet, I pledge honesty, integrity, and service in all that I do.”

The descriptions and timelines contained in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.