

**AMERICAN STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
2306
FALL 2011**

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RANGER COLLEGE

Syllabus

Fall 2011

COURSE NUMBER AND TITLE: Government 2306—American State and Local Government

CREDIT HOURS: 3 **HOURS/WK LEC** 3 **HRS/WK LAB:** 0 **LEC/LAB COMB:** 3

Name of Instructor: Nancy Bond

Office Hours: By Appointment, and one-half hour prior to class and following each class meeting.

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I. CATALOG DESCRIPTION

This course is a study of the organization of state and local governments with particular emphasis on the constitution and governmental system of Texas.

II. COURSE GOAL

Students successfully completing this course will have the knowledge to more readily understand how public officials are elected, activities of those elected officials, the politics of government, the role of the governor, legislature, and the judiciary in state government. The student will understand the importance of governmental policies and how government is involved in civil liberties, social welfare, civil rights and the environment at the state level. The student, by understanding how the government functions, will be able to utilize his or her knowledge in developing a base for participating in the governmental process, aware that active participation in our political process is mandatory for responsible American citizens.

III. REQUIRED BACKGROUND/PREREQUISITES

Passing score on THEA or equivalent test.

IV. TEXTBOOK: Brown, Langenegger, Garcia and Lewis. *Practicing Texas Politics*. 2011-2012 Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York.

Lecture, discussion, audio-visual materials, etc.

VI. EXEMPLARY EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES CORE AREA:

C-1 To develop and communicate alternative explanations or solutions for contemporary social issues

C-6 To comprehend the origins and evolution of U.S. and Texas political systems, with a focus on the growth of political institutions, the constitutions of the U.S. and Texas, federalism, civil liberties, and civil and human rights

C-5 To analyze the effects of historical, social, political, economic, cultural, and global forces on the area under study

C-8 To differentiate and analyze historical evidence (documentary and statistical) and differing points of view

C-10 To analyze, critically assess, and develop creative solutions to public policy problems

C-11 To recognize and assume one's responsibility as a citizen in a democratic society by learning to think for oneself, by engaging in public discourse, and by obtaining information through the news media and other appropriate information sources about politics and public policy

VII. INTELLECTUAL COMPETENCIES

C-1 **Reading:** the ability to analyze and interpret a variety of printed materials—books, documents, and articles—above 12th grade level

C-2 **Writing:** the ability to produce clear, correct and coherent prose adapted to purpose, occasion and audience—above 12th grade level

C-3 **Speaking:** ability to communicate orally in clear, coherent, and persuasive language appropriate to purpose, occasion, and audience—above 12th grade level

C-4 **Listening:** analyze and interpret various forms of spoken communication, possess sufficient literacy skills of writing, reading—above 12th grade

C-5 **Critical Thinking:** ability to apply both qualitative and quantitative skills analytically and creatively to subject matter to evaluate arguments and construct alternative strategies

VIII. COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Analyze the federal system of government, emphasizing the relationship between the national and state governments. C-5, C-10
2. Compare and contrast the various political parties and their platforms. C-3, C-5
3. Knowledgeably describe the activities of the state legislature. C-10, C-11
4. Identify various governmental agencies and their functions. C-5, C-7, C-10
5. Study the role of the judiciary in the decision-making process and its effect on society. C-1, C-10

IX. CLASSROOM POLICIES

1. The absence policy as specified in the college catalog will be followed to the letter. Additionally, students will be expected to be punctual in all class attendance.
2. All students are expected to participate in class discussions.
3. Examinations missed because of official absences may be made up within a two week period. Students must consult with instructor regarding dates and times.
4. A “no tolerance” policy is in effect for cheating or plagiarism in any form. Students may be permanently dismissed from class and/or receive a grade of “F” for the semester.
5. Disruptive behavior in class is not acceptable. Students will be directed to leave the classroom upon the first occurrence. Should the behavior be repeated, students will be permanently dismissed from class.
6. **ADA Statement.** Ranger College provides a variety of services for students with learning and/or physical disabilities. The student is responsible for making the initial contact with the Ranger College Counselor. It is advisable to make this contact **before** or **immediately after the semester begins**.

X. ASSESSMENT

Three major examinations will be given during the semester, comprising 75% of the semester grade. Examinations will consist of multiple choice and/or True/False questions along with essay questions. 25% of the semester grade will be comprised of prompt completion of the REQUIRED project, classroom attendance and class participation. You may complete an additional project if you wish for semester credit of 1 to 5 points. Suggestions for projects might include research papers relating to Texas government, Texas governmental actors, or Texas events impacting the citizenry.

Major Exam No. 1—Course Objectives S6, S8, B1, B2, B5

Major Exam No. 2—Course Objectives S5, S10, S12, B1, B2, B5

Major Exam No. 3—Course Objectives S6, S7, S10, S11, B1, B2, B5

STUDENT STATEMENT

I have received and read a copy of the syllabus for Government 2306, and I understand the requirements for satisfactory completion of this course. I also understand that I may ask for assistance with outside assignments or any aspect of the course I do not understand by contacting my instructor.

Student Signature and printed name

REQUIRED PAPER

You are invited to write on any of the following four topics, submitting papers on the due date indicated in the syllabus. When writing the paper, be sure that you cover all aspects of the subject you have chosen. The topics and their contents are as follows.

1. What do you get from the state of Texas? (DO NOT CHOOSE IF LIVING IN DORMITORY.)

Among the many services provided by the state of Texas is a program for poor families known as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Formerly known as AFDC, this program provides cash grants to families with dependent children and no other income, food aid through a debit card and medical aid. A “typical” welfare recipient in Texas is the single parent of two dependent children, one of whom is in school. A family such as this is eligible for a cash grant of \$180 per month, food aid of \$330 per month, medical aid for the children and, where available, housing assistance.

- a. With the cooperation of your family or roommates, try living on three-fourths of this allowance for three weeks. (Dorm residents should choose from the other three options for their papers). In other words, for 3 people you will have a total of \$135 in cash to last three weeks and you can spend up to \$247.50 on food in the same period. If you live alone, divide both numbers by 3 and you have \$45 in cash and \$82.50 for groceries for three weeks. If there are more than three of you in the household, then prorate these amounts accordingly. Treat it all as cash for the purposes of this exercise. Remember, however, that if you were actually on welfare, only the cash grant could be used for the purchase of non-food items including rent, telephone and cable bills, car payments, eating out, and even such mundane but necessary items as toilet paper and soap. So even if you do have food money to spare, you can only use it for the purchase of food items in a grocery or convenience store. Do make your rent and car payments, etc., but try to live in every other way as if you were “on welfare.” Keep careful records of your expenditures and record your attitude during this period.
- b. Evaluate the “benefits” the state of Texas provides to needy families. Is the service adequate to meet basic needs? Assume this level of income was all you could expect to have for a year or more. What effect would this have on you and your feeling of self worth?
- c. Write an essay in which you describe this experience, giving the reader as much information as you reasonably can about how you managed on a welfare budget. Describe the way you felt about yourself and your relationships with others while you lived “on welfare.” If you were a representative or senator or governor of Texas, what changes would you make to the TANF program? On the basis of this experience what would you recommend to improve poverty programs in Texas?

2. Observe a legislative body.

- a. Attend a city council meeting or a meeting of the school board or county commissioners court here in Ranger, or in your home city, school district or county, and report what you observed there.
- b. Describe the setting of the meeting room. What do you notice in particular about the way the room is set up? Describe the behavior of the officials. How do they interact with each

other? Are they formal or informal? How do they treat you and other visitors who attend the meeting? How does the meeting proceed? How are decisions made? Are formal votes taken on every issue or does a consensus normally rule? Who seems to be in charge? How does that person relate to the other participants? Describe the issues that were discussed in the meeting. What decisions did the council make the night you attended?

- c. Evaluate the meeting you observed. Is the organization effective? In what ways? If not effective, why is this so? Are any individuals or groups given special treatment, or is everyone treated the same way? Reflecting on your observation, would you say the city or county is well governed? Why? Why not? Were there any decisions made that you would have made differently? Why?
 - d. On a separate sheet, attached to your paper, please give me the date, time, place, and type of legislative body you observed for this assignment. For example: August 30, 2011, 7:00-9:00 p.m., City Hall, Ranger City Council.
3. Interview an elected official.
- a. There are many elected officials in our system, both state and local. At the state level these include the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Comptroller of Public Accounts, Attorney General, Commissioner of the General Land Office, Senators and Representatives. Local officials include the County Judge, Sheriff, Tax Assessor/Collector, County Clerk, School Board Trustees, County Commissioners, etc. Choose one of these officials, make an appointment and interview them in person. Casual conversations and phone calls do not count, though they may be necessary first steps to getting an interview.
 - b. Ask about their work and what they like and dislike about it. Find out why they ran for office and whether they will run again. Describe the work they do and evaluate the role they play in running the county, the city or the state. Why is this office important to the state or locality? What would happen if the office were abolished?
 - c. If you held this office, what would be your priorities? Be realistic and specific in your proposals and explain why you think your priorities should be taken seriously.
 - d. On a separate sheet attached to your paper, please give me the name of the person interviewed, the date, time and place where the interview was conducted and the phone number of the person interviewed. For example: Honorable James A. Johnson, County Judge, Eastland County, at the county court house, September 1, 2011, at 10:30 a.m., 254-555-2020.
4. Observe a court proceeding.
- a. Attend a court hearing. This may be an arraignment, a preliminary hearing, a trial, or whatever your schedule allows. Do commit at least two hours to the observation period. Any court will do, whether Justice of the Peace, County Court, or District Court. You may choose to observe in Eastland, or in your home city or county. However, it must be a current action, one that takes place between August 1 and November 1, 2011, not an event prior to this time.
 - b. Describe what you see at the hearing. Pay particular attention to the setting, the arrangement of the room, and the participants. Notice how the participants relate to one another, whether

formally or informally. Who seems to be in charge? How does that person behave? What do they do? Who decides the outcome? What effect does their behavior have on the proceedings and the outcome of the process? What was the outcome? What was decided? Try to stay long enough to find out the result or check on it in the newspaper or by calling the clerk of the court.

- c. Evaluate the proceeding that you observed. How effective was the court in handling the case before it? From your perspective as a citizen was justice done in this case or not? Why? Why not? If you were the judge what would you do differently?
- d. On a separate sheet please identify the court proceeding you observed, the location of the court, the name of the judge, the date and time that you attended and the phone number of the court administrator or clerk. For example: District Court, 259th Judicial District, Eastland County, Honorable John Doe presiding, September 22, 2011, 9:00-12:00 noon, 254/555-1212.

EXTRA CREDIT PAPER

You may, if you wish, submit a paper for extra credit. This paper may earn a maximum of five percentage points to be added to your overall grade. Extra credit papers are due no later than specified on the class syllabus schedule. The paper requires you to answer the following question.

5. Does Texas need an income tax?
 - a. The public schools of Texas are funded by a combination of property taxes assessed and collected locally and state funds given on a per student basis. However, not all property is equally valued. Property poor districts must tax themselves at high rates to collect modest amounts of money per student while property rich districts can raise substantial amounts with relatively little effort. One way to overcome this inequality is to tax incomes instead of property, a procedure that requires a constitutional amendment subject to voter approval. Your task is to argue for or against this proposal, making sure that you anticipate and counter the strongest possible arguments that may be used against your position.
 - b. Write your paper in the form of a memorandum addressed to the governor or your state legislators mapping out the pros and cons of your proposal and ending with a recommendation for them to pursue. You might consider sending them copies when you have finished.

You may also, if you choose, review a book (I will be pleased to provide a copy) or write a research paper on Governor Perry, currently vying for the nomination for the Republican candidate for the next presidential election.

FORMAT

The required paper(s) should each be at least three full pages in length. This means three full pages of text, not including diagrams, graphs, figures, pictures, lists of keywords, footnotes, endnotes, bibliographies and appendices. More than three pages is beneficial, less will be graded with extreme prejudice. (If you have not thought deeply enough about your paper to write at least three full pages you need to think about it more.) All papers, including the extra credit paper, should have a cover sheet with your name, the number and section of this course, the number of the paper (1, 2, 3, or 4) and a descriptive title of the paper. Example:

Your Name
Government 2306
Paper #1: Living on Welfare in Texas

Be sure to write complete sentences and check for spelling and other grammatical errors. Treat these papers as formal papers. All papers **should be stapled on the top left hand corner. PLEASE do not put them in folders or binders.**

Citations may be given in footnotes or endnotes or parenthetically. I have no style preferences. Whatever style sheet you choose, please use it consistently. If you cite any source other than the text, please attach a complete citation in a bibliography appended to your paper. End notes, bibliographies, diagrams, figures, pictures, lists of words, appendices, etc., again, do not count as part of the text.

EVALUATION OF PAPERS

You are asked to reflect on your understanding of the state of government and politics in Texas. I shall be looking for evidence to support your opinions, not raw, undigested, thoughtless opinions strung together to meet the minimum page length. To do well in this course you must become a thoughtful observer of politics in Texas, a prerequisite to becoming an active and effective citizen. The papers will be evaluated according to the following standards. Each standard is worth a maximum of 25 points.

1. **CLARITY.** How clear is your description? Aim to write in your own voice as clearly as you can, expressing yourself with minimum ambiguity. Be sure that your paper has a beginning, a middle, and an end.
2. **CONTENT.** How complete is your treatment of the topic? Have you described your subject as fully and completely as you can?
3. **EVIDENCE.** Do you support your ideas with objective evidence from an identifiable source? Have you anticipated the strongest possible argument that could be used against your conclusion and countered it?
4. **STYLE.** Is your paper grammatically correct and free of typographical and spelling errors? The way you express yourself is as important as what you say. Remember that all good writing requires re-writing.

**APPENDIX I
SEMESTER CALENDAR**

Week I

(August 24) Introduction to class, outline of semester objectives, reading responsibilities emphasized

Week II

(August 31) Discussion of initial text chapter, background of Texas political system, the cultural background of the state.

Week III

(September 7) Discuss Chapter 2—Federalism and The Texas Constitution

Week IV

(September 14) Discuss Chapter 3, Local Government, REVIEW FOR TEST

Week V

(September 21) FIRST MAJOR EXAM

Week VI

(September 28) Discuss Chapter 4, Political Parties

Week VII

(October 5) Discuss Chapter 5, The Politics of Elections

Week VIII

(October 12) Mid-Term Discuss Chapter 6. The Politics of Interest Groups

WEEK IX

(October 19) Discuss Chapter 7, The Legislature

WEEK X

(October 26) Discuss Chapter 8, The Executive Branch, REVIEW FOR SECOND MAJOR EXAM

WEEK XI

(November 2) SECOND MAJOR EXAMINATION

WEEK XII

(November 9) Discuss Chapter 9, Public Policy and Administration

WEEK XIII

(November 16) Discuss Chapter 10, Law, Courts and Justice OUTSIDE PROJECT DUE

WEEK XIV
(November 23)

THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY – CLASSES WILL NOT MEET

WEEK XV
(November 30)

Discuss Chapter 11, Finance.

WEEK XVI
(December 7)

REVIEW FOR FINAL EXAMINATIONS

WEEK XVII
(December 14)

Final Examinations.

**APPENDIX I
SEMESTER CALENDAR**

Week I

August 22) Introduction to class, outline of semester objectives, reading responsibilities emphasized

Week I

(August 24) Discussion of initial text chapter, background of Texas political system, the cultural background of the state.

Week II

(August 29) Discuss Chapter 2—Federalism and The Texas Constitution

Week II

(August 31) Continue discussion of Chapter 2

Week III

(September 5) LABOR DAY HOLIDAY

Week III

(September 7) Discuss Chapter 3, Local Government

Week IV

(September 12) Continue discussion of Chapter 3 REVIEW FOR TEST

Week IV

(September 14) , FIRST MAJOR EXAM

Week V

(September 19) Discuss Chapter 4, Political Parties

WEEK V

(September 21) Continue discussion of Chapter 4

WEEK VI

(September 26) Discuss Chapter 5, The Politics of Elections

WEEK VII

(September 28) Continue discussion of Chapter 5

WEEK VIII

(October 3) Discuss Chapter 6. The Politics of Interest Groups, .

WEEK VIII

(October 5) Continue discussion of Chapter 6

WEEK IX

(October 10) Discuss Chapter 7, The Legislature

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WEEK IX
(October 12) MID-TERM Continue discussion of Chapter 7.

WEEK X
(October 17) REVIEW FOR SECOND MAJOR EXAMINATION

WEEK X
(October 19) SECOND MAJOR EXAM

WEEK XI
(October 24) Discuss Chapter 8, the Executive Branch

WEEK XI
(October 26) Continue discussion of Chapter 8

WEEK XII
(October 31) Discuss Chapter 9, Public Policy and Administration

WEEK XII
(November 2) Continue discussion of Chapter 9

WEEK XIII
(November 7) Discuss Chapter 10, Law, Courts, and Justice

WEEK XIII
(November 9) Continue discussion of Chapter 10

WEEK XIV
(November 14) Continue discussion of Chapter 10 OUTSIDE PROJECT DUE

WEEK XIV
(November 16) Begin discussion of Chapter 11, Finance

WEEK XV **NOVEMBER 21-15 THANKSGIVING BREAK**

WEEK XVI
(November 28) Continue discussion of Chapter 11

WEEK XVI
(November 30) Test Makeup Day

WEEK XVII
(December 5) Continue Chapter 11 discussion EXTRA CREDIT PAPERS DUE

WEEK XVII **Review for Final Exam**
(December 7)

**WEEK XVIII Discuss Outside Projects, continue Final Examination Review
(December 12)**

**WEEK XVIII
(December 14) Final Examination – Time to be determined.**