



GOVT-2306-103CL-Spring-2024  
Texas Government  
Tuesday/Thursday 9:30AM – 10:50AM

## Instructor Information

**Name:** Sean Skipworth M.A.,  
**Email:** [sskipworth@com.edu](mailto:sskipworth@com.edu)  
**Phone:** 409-933-8303

## Student Hours (Office Hours): LRC Suite A

Monday- 8:25AM – 9:30AM, 12:20PM – 1:30PM  
Tuesday- 10:50AM – 12:20PM  
Wednesday- 8:25AM – 9:30AM, 12:20PM – 1:30PM  
Thursday- 10:50AM – 12:20PM

**Location:** LRC 252

**Required Textbook:** Lone Star Politics 6<sup>th</sup> Ed. Sage CQ Press 2016 Collier. ISBN 978-1-5443162-6-0 (Required)

**Course Description:** This course covers the origin and development of the Texas Constitution, structure and powers of state and local government, federalism and inter-governmental relations, political participation, the election process, public policy, and the political culture of Texas.

## Determination of Grade

### Course Requirements:

- i. **Quizzes.** Multiple choice quizzes will be given over most chapters covered in the course and are due on Sundays. The due dates of individual quizzes are listed below. The quizzes will be 10 questions in length and students will have 10 minutes in which to take the quiz. Students are allowed three attempts for each quiz and the score will be determined from the last attempt. Students are not required to take the quiz more than once. The quiz questions are drawn from a pool of questions covering the textbook chapter and the audio lecture material; the computer will select 10 questions at random for each attempt that is made. The two lowest quiz grades will be dropped at the end of the semester to account for technical problems or other conflicts. The remaining quizzes will be averaged together to calculate the quiz percentage of the final grade.

- ii. **Oral Exam. Students will be required to complete a midterm and final oral exam. Students should be able to explain the concept they are being tested over in such a way that a person with no information would be able to grasp the material. Students should approach this assignment as a teaching demonstration.**
- a) Students will be given a set of questions in advance of the exam and students will be required to answer one of the questions which will be chosen randomly at the time of the exam.
  - b) The oral exam will be administered privately by the instructor. Once the student's question is chosen they will be given one minute to prepare for their response. Students have a maximum of five minutes to complete their answer.
  - c) Students are allowed to use notes and notecards during their response time. Notes should serve as just that and points will be deducted for students that lean heavily on notes, recycle examples given in class and deliver wooden & scripted responses.
  - d) Students should be as detailed as possible when delivering their response. The assignment is looking for the student to demonstrate a mastery of the material and the instructor will ask follow-up questions with this goal in mind.
  - e) Students are expected to demonstrate basic speaking skills during this assignment. (look up, maintain eye contact, project, etc.) Students are strongly encouraged to visit college tutoring services for help in preparing for this assignment.
  - f) In the case of a large class students may be required to make an appointment to complete their assignment. The instructor will provide further details if individual appointments become necessary. If students do not make an appointment and/or fail to show up when an appointment is scheduled they will receive a zero.
- iii. **Class Discussion: The first class period of each week, unless changed by the instructor or indicated by the course schedule, students will be provided with an article(s) on a political issue and will be required to participate in a class discussion concerning that material. Students should read/watch ALL material posted. Students are required to submit the following position paper to Blackboard each Sunday by 11:55PM unless otherwise noted:**
- a) Students will write a 400, not to exceed 450, word position paper over the work assigned by the instructor. The bibliography and heading do not count towards the required word count. The paper must be written in MLA format, double spaced, and include a bibliography if outside sources are used. Students are expected to utilize proper grammar and syntax. The paper should:
  - b) Choose a position on some aspect of the assigned works for the week. There may be multiple topics in a single assigned reading that could be chosen to form your thesis. Focus one **ONE** of those topics. This position should be arrived at following extensive research on the assigned topic.

- c) **Do not summarize the piece you are writing about.** A few lines of general summary are sufficient, but the bulk of the paper needs to focus on your reaction.
- d) **Students are expected to make use outside sources when researching and writing their reaction papers.** Students must document these sources in a bibliography and via parenthetical citations. Failure to do this is plagiarism. Avoid using lengthy quotes.
- e) You are entitled to your opinion, but you are not entitled to your own facts. Personal opinion cannot be “wrong”, but you can demonstrate poor logic or utilize inaccurate or distorted information. Engage in due diligence when referencing facts and conclusions and think critically about your own reasoning. Points will be deducted for issues in this area. **Anecdotal evidence (I knew someone who...) is rarely sufficient support of an argument.**
- f) Likewise, differing points of view should be given a fair hearing and shouldn't be altered to align with your criticism. Do not construct “strawman” arguments to pick apart and do not engage in ad hominem or unsupported personal attacks.
- g) **At all times students should demonstrate logical critical thinking skills, illustrate clarity of thought when expressing personal opinion, and should support claims and arguments with credible evidence/supporting opinions.**
- h) Dig deeper when writing these papers. Avoid cliché theses like “People should be better educated” or “Politicians should work together more”. The instructor is looking for a clash of ideas, solutions to problems, and a consideration of potential counter arguments to student's ideas. Students should demonstrate they can express an opinion without blindly rejecting arguments against it. Students should strive to follow the truth wherever it leads.
- i) **There may be multiple points that a paper could be written on in a given week, but the word count of these assignments is limited and it is usually best to focus on one aspect of the discussion. It is better to have one well developed idea than to give shallow treatment of several points.**

**Each class meeting, unless contradicted by the course schedule or changed by the instructor, will be devoted to a roundtable discussion.**

The expectations for these roundtable discussions are that:

- i. Students will be prepared to discuss and explore the material assigned for the week.
- ii. Students will be aware of logical fallacies and should be prepared to support arguments and statements factually when appropriate.
- iii. Students will, when applicable, think about the topic in relation to course concepts.
- iv. Students will listen and discuss the views of other students in a respectful and substantive way. (Saying more than “I agree” or “I disagree”)

- v. Students will be fully engaged. Students will refrain from using electronic devices (unless they've been asked to look something up or have received explicit permission to do so), will be awake, and will take notes throughout the discussion.
- vi. The instructor will act as a moderator, guide the discussion, and facilitate an equal opportunity to participate.

Participation in the roundtable discussion is not optional. If no one participates then the class will sit in the room for the entirety of the class time in silence and everyone will receive an F for that day's roundtable grade.

The grade for the Class Discussion portion of the grade will be determined from the combination of the Position Paper grade and the Discussion grade.

**If a student fails to submit the paper component of the assignment they will receive a zero for that week's assignment regardless of whether or not they participated in the class discussion.**

**Note that only five of the paper/discussion assignments will ultimately be graded. One assignment will be selected from week 2 to be graded and another from week 4. One more will be graded near the midterm point and two others will be graded around the last week of the semester. The lowest Discussion assignment will be dropped.**

**Grading Formula:**

Class Discussions: 50%

Quizzes: 30%

Midterm Oral Exam: 10%

Final Oral Exam: 10%

**Late Work & Make-Up Work:** Late work will not be accepted. The two lowest quizzes will be dropped to account for technical problems and/or "life" issues. Severe medical issues and major emergencies (not scheduled conflicts) may be grounds to allow for an extension on major assignments, but the granting of an extension is not guaranteed and the chance of one being granted will be effected by the timeliness in which the situation is reported to the instructor. Documentation (a doctor's note or the like) would also be required.

**Attendance Policy:** Students will need to devote additional time outside of class to study course content and complete assignments. Each student is different, but it's reasonable to expect to spend anywhere from 3 – 4 hours per week to study, complete outside readings/audio lectures, and to complete assignments. Students should log in each week day at minimum to check for announcements.

**Communicating with your instructor:** ALL electronic communication with the instructor must be through your COM email. Due to FERPA restrictions, faculty cannot share any information about performance in the class through other electronic means.

**Core Objectives:**

1. **Critical Thinking Skills:** Students will demonstrate creative thinking, innovation, and the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information.
2. **Communication Skills:** Develop, interpret, and express ideas through written, oral, and visual communication.
3. **Social Responsibility:** Students will demonstrate intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities.
4. **Personal Responsibility:** Evaluate choices and actions of others or one's own, and relate consequences to ethical decision-making.

<b>Student Learner Outcome</b>	<b>Maps to Core Objective</b>	<b>Assessed via this Assignment</b>
1. Explain the origin and development of the Texas constitution.	None	Chapter Quiz
2. Describe state and local political systems and their relationship with the federal government.	None	Chapter Quiz
3. Describe separation of powers and checks and balances in both theory and practice in Texas.	None	Chapter Quiz
4. Demonstrate knowledge of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of Texas government.	None	Chapter Quizzes
5. Evaluate the role of public opinion, interest groups, and political parties in Texas.	Social Responsibility	Discussion Forum
6. Analyze the state and local election process.	None	Chapter Quizzes
7. Describe the rights and responsibilities of citizens.	None	Chapter Quizzes
8. Analyze issues, policies, and political culture of Texas.	Critical Thinking Skills	Chapter Quizzes
9. Develop, interpret, and express ideas through written communication.	Communication Skills	Discussion Assignment

10. Evaluate choices and actions of others or one's own, and relate consequences to decision-making.	Personal Responsibility	Discussion Assignment
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**Academic Dishonesty:** Any incident of academic policy will be dealt with in accordance with college policy and the Student Handbook. Academic dishonesty – such as cheating on an assignment is an extremely serious offense and will result in a **grade of zero** on that assignment and the student will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for the appropriate discipline action.

**COM is committed to a high standard of academic integrity among its students and faculty. In becoming part of the COM academic community, students are responsible for honesty and independent effort. As stated in the COM Student handbook, failure to uphold these standards, includes, but it is not limited to, the following: plagiarizing written work, cheating, on exams or assignments and collusion among students on an exam or project without specific permission from the instructor.**

Cheating includes look at or copying from another student's exam/quiz, having another person take an exam/quiz or complete a project or assignment for you, bringing unauthorized notes, texts, or other materials into class with you for an exam (this includes cell phones and texting of ANY kind during an exam), and obtaining or distributing an unauthorized copy of an exam or any part of an exam.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is using someone else's words or ideas and claiming them as your own. Plagiarism is a very serious offense. Plagiarism includes paraphrasing someone else's words without giving proper citation, copying directly from a website and pasting it into your paper, using someone else's words without quotation marks. Any assignment containing any plagiarized material will receive a **grade of zero** and the student will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for the appropriate discipline action.

**There is no technical difference between intentional and unintentional plagiarism; forgetting to cite is not a defense.**

Many students enrolled in the course have taken college level composition courses and EVERY student has at least taken high school English. The instructor will answer any questions a student has in regards to plagiarism, **but it is the responsibility of the student to ensure that they have not committed plagiarism.** Numerous resources exist online that discuss quotes, paraphrasing, and how to avoid plagiarism.

**Link(s) to resource(s) about ways to avoid plagiarism:**

<http://en.writecheck.com/ways-to-avoid-plagiarism/>

**Student Concerns:** If you have any questions or concerns about any aspect of this course, please contact me using the contact information previously provided. If, *after discussing your concern with me*, you continue to have questions, please contact Shinya Wakao at 409-933-8107 or [swakao@com.edu](mailto:swakao@com.edu)

## **Course Calendar**

**WEEK ONE: January 16<sup>th</sup> – January 21<sup>st</sup>**

Review of Syllabus & Other Course Documents

**WEEK TWO: January 22<sup>nd</sup> – January 28<sup>th</sup>**

Introduction to Government, & **Position Paper Due**

**WEEK THREE: January 29<sup>th</sup> – February 4<sup>th</sup>**

Introduction to Texas Government, **Chapter Quiz (Introduction to Government and Introduction to Texas Government) Due**

**WEEK FOUR: February 5<sup>th</sup> – February 11<sup>th</sup>**

Texas Constitution, & **Position Paper Due**

**WEEK FIVE: February 12<sup>th</sup> – February 18<sup>th</sup>**

Federalism, **Chapter Quiz (Texas Constitution and Federalism) & Position Paper Due**

**WEEK SIX: WEEK SIX: February 19<sup>th</sup> – February 25<sup>th</sup>**

Local Government, **Chapter Quiz & Position Paper Due**

**WEEK SEVEN: February 26<sup>th</sup> – March 3<sup>rd</sup>**

Texas Legislature, **Chapter Quiz (No Position Paper Due)**

**WEEK EIGHT: March 4<sup>th</sup> – March 10<sup>th</sup>**

Texas Executive, **Chapter Quiz & Position Paper Due**

**WEEK NINE: March 18<sup>th</sup> – March 24<sup>th</sup>**

Texas Judiciary, **Chapter Quiz, Position Paper Due & Midterm Oral Exam**

**WEEK TEN: March 25<sup>th</sup> – March 31<sup>st</sup>**

Political Participation & Voting, **Chapter Quiz & Position Paper Due**

**WEEK ELEVEN: April 1<sup>st</sup> – April 7<sup>th</sup>**

Political Parties, **Chapter Quiz & Position Paper Due**

**WEEK TWELVE: April 8<sup>th</sup> – April 14<sup>th</sup>**

Interest Groups, **Chapter Quiz & Position Paper Due**

**WEEK THIRTEEN: April 15<sup>th</sup> – April 21<sup>st</sup>**

Social Policy, **Chapter Quiz Due**

**WEEK FOURTEEN: April 22<sup>nd</sup> – April 28<sup>th</sup>**

**Course Review**

**WEEK FIFTEEN & SIXTEEN: April 29<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday, May 7<sup>th</sup>**

**Final Oral Exam**

## **Institutional Policies and Guidelines**

**Grade Appeal Process:** Concerns about the accuracy of grades should first be discussed with the instructor. A request for a change of grade is a formal request and must be made within six months of the grade assignment. Directions for filing an appeal can be found in the student handbook [https://www.com.edu/student-services/docs/Student\\_Handbook\\_2023-2024\\_v2.pdf](https://www.com.edu/student-services/docs/Student_Handbook_2023-2024_v2.pdf). *An appeal will not be considered because of general dissatisfaction with a grade, penalty, or outcome of a course. Disagreement with the instructor's professional judgment of the quality of the student's work and performance is also not an admissible basis for a grade appeal.*

**Academic Success & Support Services:** College of the Mainland is committed to providing students the necessary support and tools for success in their college careers. Support is offered through our Tutoring Services, Library, Counseling, and through Student Services. Please discuss any concerns with your faculty or an advisor.

**ADA Statement:** Any student with a documented disability needing academic accommodations is requested to contact Kimberly Lachney at 409-933-8919 or [klachney@com.edu](mailto:klachney@com.edu). The Office of Services for Students with Disabilities is located in the Student Success Center.

**Textbook Purchasing Statement:** A student attending College of the Mainland is not under any obligation to purchase a textbook from the college-affiliated bookstore. The same textbook may also be available from an independent retailer, including an online retailer.



**Withdrawal Policy:** Students may withdraw from this course for any reason prior to the last eligible day for a “W” grade. Before withdrawing students should speak with the instructor and consult an advisor. Students are permitted to withdraw only six times during their college career by state law. The last date to withdraw from the 1<sup>st</sup> 8-week session is February 28. The last date to withdraw from the 16-week session is April 22. The last date to withdraw for the 2<sup>nd</sup> 8-week session is May 1. The last date to withdraw for spring mini session is May 29.

**FN Grading:** The FN grade is issued in cases of *failure due to a lack of attendance*, as determined by the instructor. The FN grade may be issued for cases in which the student ceases or fails to attend class, submit assignments, or participate in required capacities, and for which the student has failed to withdraw. The issuing of the FN grade is at the discretion of the instructor. The last date of attendance should be documented for submission of an FN grade.

**Early Alert Program:** The Student Success Center at College of the Mainland has implemented an Early Alert Program because student success and retention are very important to us. I have been asked to refer students to the program throughout the semester if they are having difficulty completing assignments or have poor attendance. If you are referred to the Early Alert Program you will be contacted by someone in the Student Success Center who will schedule a meeting with you to see what assistance they can offer in order for you to meet your academic goals.

#### **Resources to Help with Stress:**

If you are experiencing stress or anxiety about your daily living needs including food, housing or just feel you could benefit from free resources to help you through a difficult time, please click here <https://www.com.edu/community-resource-center/>. College of the Mainland has partnered with free community resources to help you stay on track with your schoolwork, by addressing life issues that get in the way of doing your best in school. All services are private and confidential. You may also contact the Dean of Students office at [deanofstudents@com.edu](mailto:deanofstudents@com.edu) or [communityresources@com.edu](mailto:communityresources@com.edu).

**Classroom Conduct Policy:** College of the Mainland requires that students enrolled at COM be familiar with the Standards of Student Conduct, which can be found in the on-line Student Handbook. Students should act in a professional manner at all times. Disruptive students will be held accountable according to college policy. Any violations of the Code of Conduct will result in a referral to the Office for student Conduct and may result in dismissal from this class.

The instructor seeks to provide equal educational opportunities without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, age, handicap, or political affiliation. This course may cover sensitive issues and controversial material upon which many people have deeply held beliefs. In the interest of promoting critical thinking, and serious thought and discussion, students should be prepared to have their views challenged by the instructor and/or fellow students.

#### **Disclaimers**

1) The syllabus is subject to change in order to clarify, expand, or create new course policies and/or requirements. Students will be informed of any changes made to the course syllabus.

2) Students should not attempt to log back into timed assignments when they are completed and/or the time expires. If you close out a timed assignment once it has begun the timer will continue to run and accessing the assignment again once the time is up can cause your grade to be posted as a zero. This is a “user end” error and no accommodation will be made for it.

3) Federal privacy laws prohibit me from discussing a student’s performance with anyone other than the student in question or college/high school support staff (such as counselors, department chairs, etc.) If you are a dual credit student please let your parents know that they must contact the high school directly for information on your performance in this course.

4) The evaluation of many grades in this course requires objective evaluation and is done at the instructor’s discretion.

**Technology Outage Policy:** In the event you experience a technology problem, it is your responsibility to communicate immediately with your instructor and the DE department at College of the Mainland (COM). It is a good idea to make a screenshot of the error and email it to me as well as the Distance Education Helpdesk. Contacting COM’s Distance Education department can be accomplished by submitting a ticket anytime at <http://com.parature.com> or via live chat Monday to Friday from 8 AM to 5 PM whenever the college is open.

**Technical Compliance Statement:** This class uses Brightspace for notes, lectures and assessments. Each student must maintain Internet access throughout this course. Additionally, students are expected to maintain a state of technical compliance, including (but not limited to): up-to-date software as required by the instructor; a stable Internet connection, etc.. The instructor is not required to give consideration for lost/missing/unacceptable work stemming from technical non-compliance and/or end-user technical issues. Failure to maintain Internet access shall not constitute a valid excuse for missed work. Any student who cannot keep up with the coursework owing to a lack of computer or Internet must drop the course.

In short, if you fail to complete an assignment because your computer crashes or loses internet access, you forget to attach a file or click submit on an assignment, or you did not use the appropriate browser or operating system you are not entitled to make up an assignment. **If the assignment was not completed due to your error it cannot be made up.**

If you find yourself encountering an error when submitting a written assignment via Brightspace your best bet would be to send that assignment to me via an email attachment and explain the situation.

### **Student Success Tips**

- Be familiar with all policies stated in this syllabus
- Log in to the course each week day to check for announcements
- Take notes as you listen to the audio lectures and read through the textbook chapters
- Do not procrastinate and avoid turning in assignments right at the deadline
- Communicate with the instructor as soon as you feel you are having difficulty

- Be prepared to adjust your study habits and behavior to improve in the course. Take responsibility for your performance in the class even (especially) if you experience difficulties in life beyond your control.