



GOVT-2306-022I5
Texas and Local Government
Summer II 2025 (7/7/2025 - 8/8/2025)
Online Course

Instructor Information: Karina M. Lovas

Instructor Email: klovas@com.edu

Student hours and location: By appointment either on-campus or virtually

Required Textbook/Materials:

- *Lone Star Politics Tradition and Transformation in Texas* by Collier, 8th edition, ISBN: 9781071875605 (an older edition is fine too)
- I recommend downloading the Brightspace D2L App so you can keep up with class announcements.

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.

Remember that this is an accelerated, asynchronous online course.
You are expected to be keeping up with reading, lectures, notes, and turning in assignments *regularly*.
Keep this in mind before the semester drop deadline, August 1st, 2025.

Each week, I recommend listening to the lecture and looking at the corresponding notes, and then skimming the chapter, then completing the participation activity. Students who do that generally do well in the course.

- This is an online class, but I know lectures can sometimes be helpful. I post recorded lectures for most chapters we cover; I highly encourage listening to those.
 - For all the chapters we cover, I recommend listening to the lecture, looking at the corresponding notes, and skimming the provided chapter. Some students fill out their study guide as they listen to the lectures, some students take their own notes, some just listen- do whatever works for you.
 - Students who listen to the lectures, skim the chapters, and look at the notes historically do very well on the exams and assignments.
- I don't grade assignments via email! So please be sure you submit your work on D2L.

- **I don't do make-ups/ re-grade assignments.** If you don't follow the instructions for an assignment and it gets a 0, or you do poorly and get a low score, or you miss a participation assignment and get a 0, that grade is final- but I do offer extra credit throughout the semester to make up points.
- Since this is an online class exams are taken virtually with Lockdown Browser. You will need access to a computer with a camera and a quiet-ish room. Make sure to plan to have access to those things before the exams close in availability.
- You will not be able to use any material to take the exams (i.e. no study guide or notecard) however I do provide a study guide to help you study for the test! I will post a Kahoot the week of the test with example questions.
- You are expected to write your assignments in **your own words**- assignments that are obviously generated by AI (includes tools like ChatGPT, Copilot, and Bing and other similar things, as well paraphrasing generators/translators) will receive no credit. On top of the zero, I will submit an academic dishonesty report to the College. *Please* don't do that!

Determination of Course Grade/Detailed Grading Formula:

Requirement	Points
Syllabus Quiz	5
Exam 1	15
Exam 2	15
Participation Activities (5 points x 6)	30
Topic Assignment	10
Position Paper	20
Current Event Paper	5
Total	100

Course Requirements:

Syllabus Quiz (5 points)

Students will take a brief quiz on D2L to demonstrate they are familiar with the class policies and have read the syllabus. It is 10 questions, does not need Lockdown Browser, and it should not take very long to complete.

TO BE COUNTED PRESENT FOR THE CENSUS OF THIS COURSE- YOU MUST TAKE THE SYLLABUS QUIZ OR BE DROPPED! PLEASE MAKE TIME TO TAKE THE SYLLABUS QUIZ

The syllabus quiz needs to be taken on time; I will not reopen it.

Syllabus Quiz due June 4th at 11:59pm.

Exams (2 x15 points)

2 exams will be given throughout the semester. They will be multiple-choice questions with 5 short answer questions (and I usually add 2-4 extra credit short answer questions). You will take the exams on D2L with Lockdown Browser anytime during the days they are assigned. The tests will be worth 15 points each.

The two exams will encompass only material presented from the last examination. Exam 2 will not be cumulative.

Both exams will be taken with Lockdown Browser! Please be sure you are prepared to do that with a suitable connection, computer, and camera before the exams close. There are computer labs available on campus, with decent internet access if you need to use them!

Exam policies:

- You are required to stay on camera for the entire exam.
- You may not stop and start- be sure you give yourself enough time to complete the exam all at once when you start it.
- You are required to complete a thorough room scan, showing your surroundings (not just tilting your laptop side to side), demonstrating that you are not using any materials to aid taking the test.
- You will not be able to use any materials to take the tests. Referencing a study guide, notes, books, phone, or written material while taking the exam will result in a 0 for cheating.
 - However, to help you prepare for the exams- study guides will be provided on D2L. The exams are designed so that if you have interacted with the material (ie listened to the lectures/looked at the notes and chapters) you will do well!

**Exam 1 open July 14—July 18th
closes July 18th 11:59pm)**

**Exam 2 open August 4-August 7th
(Closes August 7thth at 11:59pm)**

Participation Activities (6 x 5 points)

Up to 30 points will be awarded for class participation and response to 6 prompts.

These regular writings should reflect an understanding of the material and demonstrate that the student has read the notes/skimmed the chapter/listened to the lecture as well as conducted additional research, if applicable.

Participation activities will be due regularly throughout the course beginning July 9th and worth 5 points each (towards 30 total participation points).

These assignments will close after 11:59pm the day after they are due and I will not accept them late after they close on D2L. However, I will offer optional extra credit periodically to earn back some lost points if an activity is missed.

Participation activities are found on D2L in the weekly folders under Content (you can see the due dates on the schedule below as well).

Please follow the instructions for submission. Each activity will have different requirements as to accepted length.

Topic Assignment and Position Paper (30 points total, 10 for topic assignment, 20 for position paper)

This semester, students will write a position paper on one of the following public policy controversies in Texas:

- Should marijuana be recreationally legalized in Texas?
- Should capital punishment be abolished in Texas?
- Should the criminal justice system in Texas be reformed?
- Should the Texas House and Texas Senate be expanded?
- Should the Texas governor be term limited like the U.S president?
- Should the funding apparatus of Texas K-12 schools be changed?
- Should Texas do away with speed limits on interstates and highways?
- Should K-12 education be voluntary for children in Texas?

To ensure a successful paper, there are 2 parts to this assignment. First the topic assignment, where you will choose your topic from the list above and then find at least 3 sources. Then I will grade that with comments and towards the end of the semester you will submit your final paper, which will be at least 1,000 words (about 3 pages), and have at least 4 sources on the works cited.

Topic Assignment (10 points) DUE July 13th at 11:59pm on D2L

To ensure that students will be successful for the position paper, they will first complete a topic assignment. Students will fill out the topic assignment worksheet (linked on D2L) to submit their chosen topic and at least THREE sources (on works cited in MLA, APA, or Chicago style) with a brief explanation on which topic they have chosen, which side they intend to take.

There is a worksheet on D2L that has every component you need for the topic assignment. It will be graded with comments, use these comments for the paper.

Position Paper (20 points) Due July 27th at 11:59pm on D2L

Write a paper taking a position (yes or no) on your chosen issue. Conduct research on the topic, citing at least **FOUR** sources (adding at least 1 from the topic assignment) from credible and reliable publications, web sites, journals, books, etc.

Formulate an argument based on evidence in defense of this position and respond to the objections to this position. Explain how this position impacts the issues of personal responsibility and social responsibility. You will cite your sources within the body of the paper in parenthetical in-text citation.

The paper should be at least 1,000 words (approximately 3-4 pages), double-spaced, with 1-inch margins, and a 12-point Times New Roman Font, with a works cited page with correctly formatted MLA, APA, or Chicago style citations. There should be a works cited (not included in word count) and in-text citations throughout the paper.

Please use the template provided on D2L with the correct formatting and header.

Paper Guidelines:

- Format
 - Template on D2L, citation style on the works cited page can be MLA, APA, or Chicago (as long as it is consistent)
 - Times New Roman
 - 12 Point font
 - Correct header from the template that does not take up half the page.
 - Double-spaced
 - 1-inch margins
 - No end notes
 - Microsoft Word doc or PDF file
- 1,000 words (aim for 3 full pages) not including the works cited page
- Be sure to cite both paraphrased and quoted information. Do not use more than two direct quotes.
- You can use the following sources for topic assignment and paper:
 - Academic journal articles from library databases
 - Newspaper articles (not from editorial section) preferably from print media (like *The Houston Chronicle*, *The Austin American Statesman*, *Texas Monthly*, *Texas Tribune*, *The Economist*, *The Washington Post*, etc. As far as non-print journalism goes local news is usually acceptable, and NPR, AP, Reuters, C-Span, CBS News, and ABC News generally have decent reporting). Texas Tribune is good for Texas specific reporting and doesn't have a paywall!
 - Government sites (the Texas government websites are regularly updated and maintained)
 - Research and polling institutes like Pew
- You may NOT use the following sources:
 - Wikipedia (good starting point to read about your topic, go to the sources that it links)
 - Pro-Con.org
 - Editorials
 - Blogs (including posts on Medium, Thought Catalog, etc)
 - Random lawyers' websites

- Avoid the lower tier news publications. This means NO Huffington Post, the Federalist, New York Post, CNN, BuzzFeed, The Daily Beast, Daily Mail, MSNBC, Fox News, OAN, The Blaze, Epoch Times, InfoWars, Occupy Democrats, Breitbart, Drudge Report, etc. etc.
- Avoid interest group websites (e.g. ACLU, Planned Parenthood, NRA, etc) as they have an agenda in providing information.
- You may not use papers you wrote in other classes.

Rubric for Final Position Paper:

Content (10 points)	<p>7-10 points</p> <p>Notes from the topic assignment were taken, content of the paper is topical to the assignment, correct and well presented, conveys understanding of the topic choice, a coherent argument is being made, with strong supporting points, and the overall point of the paper is well thought out and overall, well done. Sources are cited throughout the paper.</p> <p>Paper demonstrated the importance of social and personal responsibility.</p> <p>The paper is long enough.</p> <p>Care was taken to proof-read.</p>	<p>3-6 points</p> <p>Not all the content is relevant to the assignment, writing was not proof-read/lack of effort was put forth, there are obvious points to the argument that are left out, not enough elaboration/paper does not meet length requirements, some information is erroneous or factually wrong, no point is being made.</p> <p>Not enough discussion of social or individual responsibility. Paper is not long enough.</p> <p>There are not enough citations.</p>	<p>0 -2 points</p> <p>The paper does follow the assignment, information is overwhelmingly wrong, no point is being made</p>
Sources (5 points)	<p>5 points</p> <p>Sources are reputable and scholarly, works cited page is correctly done, there are in-text citations in the paper</p>	<p>2-4 points</p> <p>Sources are not all from reputable places, citations have some problems, some errors within works cited page with formatting, notes not taken on the sources from topic assignment. There are not enough in-texts.</p>	<p>0 points</p> <p>Citations are not used correctly or are missing, works cited page is incomplete or absent/has major errors</p>
Formatting (5 points)	<p>5 points</p> <p>Paper is double spaced, correct margins, header is correct and does not take up half the page, etc</p>		<p>0 points</p> <p>Directions not followed.</p>

Current Event Paper (5 points)

Students will find a news article about a topic relevant to the class (so Texas state or Texas local government/politics) from a reputable news source (preferably print media reporting, such as *The Washington Post*, *the Houston Chronicle*, *Texas Tribune*, *Wall Street Journal*, or another newspaper, but other reputable news like *CBS News* or *AP* is okay as well- Texas Tribune has good Texas reporting AND no paywall) and read it and consider how it applies to concepts they have learned in the course.

- The news article needs to be from a news outlet, written by a reporter (so **not** a government memo, or interest group bulletin, or an academic journal article).
- The chosen article should be recent (**published within a month of the due date, so since May 22nd, 2025**).

- The article must focus on news that is pertinent to the **Texas state or local** government's actions and/or the interaction between the government and the people.

For the paper, students will submit a 1-2 (at least 1 full page) paper about the article.

Your paper should be a summary and then an analysis of the article you have chosen.

- Analysis within the context of political science means that you are putting an action or a topic in the broader scope of government and its interaction with citizens. SO, **You will relate the article to what you have learned in this class.**
 - For example, if you pick an article about something Congress is currently doing you will explain that and then relate it to things we learned over the semester like concepts of federalism, what we learned about the powers of Congress, what we learned about the Constitution and why they gave those powers to Congress, etc.

Please provide in-text citations when you are summarizing the article and a properly composed works cited entry (MLA or Chicago is acceptable, APA if you must) of the article. There should be an in-text citation as well as a works cited entry for your article at the end of the paper.

Formatting will be the same as the position paper and there is a template provided on D2L with the correct formatting. I also post an example of a full credit paper!

Current Event Paper Due August 3, 2025 on D2L.

Current Event Paper Rubric			
	Excellent	Satisfactory	Needs work
Content 2 points (NOTE: submitting a paper about news article not within 1 month will result in a 0 for the whole assignment, keep that in mind)	2 points Article chosen is topical to the class (so about the state or local government), the article is explained clearly, it is obvious that the student understands the article and concept, there are citations, and there is enough information to get a sense of the overall issue. There are in-text citations. (NOTE: submitting a paper about news not within 1 month will result in a 0 for the whole assignment, keep that in mind)	1 point Article is mostly topical to the course, explanation missing some info, missing in-texts, not thoroughly proofread, there are not sufficient citations in the text.	0 points Article is not topical to the class, and/or it is clear the student does not understand the issue.
Analysis 2 points	2 points The paper conveys understanding of the topic of the news article and clearly relates it with specifics to what we have learned in the course. There are in-texts citations. Care has been taken to proof-read the paper.	1 point The paper has broad analysis loosely relating to class material, lacks specifics. Needs to be proof-read again. No in-text citations.	0 points The paper lacks analysis relating to the class material and/or paper is riddled with errors, lack of care shown to proof-read before submission.
Format and Works Cited 1 points	1 point The single news article has a (mostly) correct works cited entry and in-text citations. Template was used with correct header.		0 points No works cited entry and/or formatting directions not followed

Determination of Course Grade/Detailed Grading Formula:

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Total	100

LETTER GRADE ASSIGNMENT:

I will add up all your points earned over the semester (including any extra credit points) to find your final grade.

Letter Grade	Final Score
A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	0-59

Late Work, Make-Up, and Extra-Credit Policy:

- The syllabus quizzes and the 2 exams cannot be taken late, please plan on taking them during the time they are open.
 - Give yourself enough time just in case you have technical difficulties.
- The weekly participation activities will be accepted the day after they are due and not accepted after they close on D2L.
 - If you miss a participation activity, later in the semester there is an opportunity to complete optional activities to earn back some missing points.
- I will accept the other written assignments (topic assignments, paper, and current event paper) late with a 24-hour grace period with no points lost, no need to inform me. Anything after 24 hours late will incur a penalty (starting with 2 points off). Please inform me if you are having trouble so I can try and assist.
 - I will not accept written assignments more than 10 days after they are due, and I cannot accept anything after August 6th, as the semester ends.
- I do **not** re-grade assignments. If you submit something and it earns a poor grade or a 0, there is not a re-do or a makeup opportunity. Please do not email me to ask if you can make up something. However, I do offer extra credit opportunities.
- Ensure that you upload the correct file for your assignment submissions. Take a moment to review your submission before finalizing.
 - If you submit something incorrectly you may immediately resubmit. However, once the due date has passed and I open the assignment to grade it, the wrong file will receive a 0. **It is important to verify your submission accuracy before the deadline to avoid any loss of credit.**

- **You are expected to write your assignments in *your* own words- assignments that are obviously generated by AI (or a paraphrasing generator or similar device) will receive no credit. On top of the 0, I will submit an academic dishonesty report to the College. *Please don't do that!***
- Extra Credit: There will be several opportunities to earn extra credit over the course of the semester. Opportunities to earn extra credit will include sporadic written assignments, exam questions, and possible events outside of class. I will not offer extra credit on an individual basis, so coming to me at the end of the semester hoping to earn several extra points will not be possible.

Attendance Policy:

You are expected to be logging into class on D2L regularly and submitting assignments weekly! Not logging in and participating can result in being dropped from the course.

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:

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

Student Learner Outcome	Maps to Core Objective	Assessed via this Assignment
Explain the origin and development of the Texas constitution.	Critical thinking and communication skills	Exams and participation assignments
Describe state and local political systems and their relationship with the federal government.	Critical thinking and communication skills	Exams and participation assignments

Describe separation of powers and checks and balances in both theory and practice in Texas	Critical thinking and communication skills	Exams and participation assignments
Demonstrate knowledge of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of Texas government.	Personal responsibility, critical thinking, and communication skills	Exams, current event paper, position paper, and participation assignments
Evaluate the role of public opinion, interest groups, and political parties in Texas.	Social and personal responsibility and communication skills	Topic assignment and position paper

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 exams is an extremely serious offense and will result in a grade of zero on that exam and the student will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for the appropriate discipline action.

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.

You are expected to write your assignments in your own words- assignments that are obviously generated by AI will receive no credit. On top of the zero, I will submit an academic dishonesty report to the College.

Student Concerns: If you have any questions or concerns about any aspect of this course, please contact me (my email is klovas@com.edu or you can message me on D2L). **If, after discussing your concern with me, you continue to have questions/concerns, please contact Department Chair, Shinya Wakao at 409-933-8107 or swakao@com.edu.**

Course outline:

This is the tentative schedule for the course. Please keep an eye on D2L (the calendar and announcements) in case changes need to be made.

Date	Chapters	Topic
Week 1 Monday, July 7- Sunday, July 13	1 & 2	<p>Welcome</p> <p>Texas History and Politics</p> <p>Texas Political Culture</p> <p>SLOS: 1, 7</p> <p>Texas Constitutions</p> <p>SLOS: 1, 2, 3</p> <p>Federalism</p> <p>SLOS: 2, 3</p> <p>Texas Legislature</p> <p>SLOS: 3, 4</p> <p>Syllabus Quiz Due by Thursday July 9th 11:59pm (PLEASE TAKE THE SYLLABUS QUIZ FOR THE CENSUS- YOU MAY BE DROPPED FROM THE CLASS IF YOU DO NOT)</p> <p>July 9th Participation Activity 1 (Intro) due</p> <p>July 13th Participation Activity 2 (Political Culture) due</p> <p>July 15th Participation Activity 3 (Legislature) due</p> <p>July 13th TOPIC ASSIGNMENT DUE by 11:59pm</p>
Week 2 Monday, July 14 Sunday, July 20	3 7 8 and 9 10 11	<p>Exam 1 open July 14—July 18th (closes July 18th 11:59pm)</p> <p>Texas Governors and Executive Branch</p> <p>SLOS: 3, 4</p> <p>Texas Judicial System</p> <p>SLOS: 3, 4</p> <p>July 20 Participation Activity 4 (Governors) due</p>
Week 3 Monday, July 21 Sunday, July 27	4 5 12	<p>Civil Liberties and Civil Rights in Texas and Criminal Justice in Texas</p> <p>SLOS: 2, 4, 7</p> <p>Voting and Elections in Texas</p> <p>SLOS: 6</p> <p>Political Parties</p> <p>SLOS: 5</p> <p>Local Government in Texas</p> <p>SLOS: 2, 7</p> <p>July 19 Participation Activity 5 (Local Government) due</p> <p>July 27th Position Paper Due</p>

Week 4 Monday, July 28 Sunday, August 3	6 13 14	Budget, Finances, and Policy SLOs: 7 Interest Groups SLOs: 5 Public Policy in Texas Education Policy in Texas SLOs: 2, 5, 7 August 1 Participation Activity 6 (Budget) due August 1: LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW FROM Summer II 2025 COURSES August 3rd: Current Event Paper Due
“Week” 5 Monday, August 4- Thursday, August 7 th		Exam 2 open August 4-August 7th (Closes August 7th at 11:59pm)

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_2024-2025_v6.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, Student Accessibility Services Coordinator

Phone: 409-933-8919

Email: AccessibilityServices@com.edu

Location: COM Doyle Family Administration Building, 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 2nd 5-week session is August 1.

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 or communityresources@com.edu.

Nondiscrimination Statement:

The College District prohibits discrimination, including harassment, against any individual on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, age, veteran status, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender (including gender identity and gender expression), or any other basis prohibited by law. Retaliation against anyone involved in the complaint process is a violation of College District policy.