

# Political Science 207 - Honors

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2061 Allen (Bush Academic Building)  
Office Hours: MWF 9-11 or before and after class.  
845-5021

## MAJOR EMPHASIS AND COURSE GOALS

This is a course on comparative state and local government with emphasis on the state of Texas. The course attempts to answer the following questions. How and why do state and local governments differ from each other and how are they similar to each other? How and why is Texas similar to or different from other states?

Since local government is equally as important in term of its impact on the lives of citizens about one third of the course will be devoted to that subject. The student will hopefully develop an understanding of how state and local government impact their lives and this will enable them to better deal with these governments in the future.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Two books required:

Kevin B. Smith, Alan Greenblatt and John Buntin, *Governing States and Localities*, CQ Press, 2005.

Gary M. Halter, *Government and Politics of Texas: A Comparative View*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. McGraw-Hill, 2008.

Also, you will be asked to visit the web site-- [www.mhhe.com/halter5](http://www.mhhe.com/halter5) for some assigned materials. The student Study Guide for the Halter text is also available and gives an outline of each chapter.

## EXAMS AND GRADING SYSTEM

There are three exams. The final is not comprehensive and covers the material indicated below. The format of each exam will be essay. More detail later. Each exam will count equally.

A= 90 -100	D=60-69
B= 80-89	F=50-0
C=70-79	

## **CLASS ATTENDANCE**

Class attendance and participation in discussions is required. Since this is a small class students are expected to participate in class discussions.

## **READING ASSIGNMENTS AND LECTURE TOPICS**

Students are encouraged to complete the reading assignments before the class. This may increase your understanding of the material. The texts have been selected to both complement the lectures and expand upon the material covered. The exams will contain questions from the reading material. Yes, you do have to read the texts. Class attendance will also be of great benefit to you.

1. Introduction to the Study of Government. Smith, Ch 1 and Ch 1. Halter, Ch. 1
2. The Constitutional Setting. Smith, Ch 3 and Ch. 2, Halter, Ch. 2
3. State and Communities in the Federal System, Smith, Ch 2 and Halter, Ch. e
4. Political Participation, Elections and Interest Groups. Smith, Ch 4 and 5 and. Halter, Ch. 3 ,4 ,6.
5. Political Parties, Smith, Ch. 5 and Halter, Ch. 5

First exam on material in sections 1-5 above.  
Date announced well in advance.

6. The State Legislature, Smith, Ch 6, Halter, Ch. 7.
7. The Governor, Smith, Ch. 7, Halter, Ch. 8
8. The Judiciary, Smith Ch. 8 and 13, Halter, Ch. 9.

Second Exam on material in sections 6-8 above  
(Date announced well in advance)

9. Money, Taxes and Budgets. Smith, Ch. 11 and Halter, Ch. 11.
10. Forms of Local Government, Smith, Ch 10 and Halter, Ch. 11.
11. Participation in Community Politics, Smith, Ch 10 and Halter, Ch.11.
12. Community Power Structures. No readings

## **Study Questions for Exams.**

Below are study questions for each of the three exams. Write an essay answering each question using materials in texts and from lectures. Use these essay answers to study for the exam. A separate Study Guide for the Halter text contains essay questions which you may find helpful.

**Study Question For First Exam: Sections 1-5.** Introduction, State constitution, Political Participation, Interest Group, and Political Parties.

### **Section 1--Introduction**

1. Discuss the concept of political culture and indicate how it impacts on state politics. Be able to discuss the four cultural regions of Texas and their influence on state politics in Texas today.
2. Explain the changing demographics of the Texas population and the likely impact this will have on Texas politics and government.
3. Discuss the economic regions of Texas.

### **Section 2--Constitutions**

4. Explain the purposes and functions of state constitutions.
5. Discuss the possible explanations for state constitutional emphasis on legislative powers.
6. Identify the different procedures utilized in amending state constitutions.
7. Discuss the problems often encountered in amending state constitutions. What groups traditionally favor constitutional revision and what groups oppose and why?

### **Section 3--Federalism**

8. Discuss the arguments for and against centralized/decentralize government.
9. Discuss the structure of American Federalism by examining the elastic clause, interstate commerce clause, equal protection clause of the 14th amendment and the power to tax and spend money.

### **Section 4-- Participation, Elections and Interest Groups**

11. Identify and discuss the various forms of political participation.
12. Discuss the factors that affect voter turnout among the states; socioeconomic characteristics, legal factors, party competition, region, political history.
13. Discuss interest groups in state politics, pointing out the strongest such groups and source of their strength.
14. Discuss the relationship between socio-economic conditions in a state and the strength and

activities of interest groups and political parties.

### **Section 5-- Political Parties**

15. Discuss the formal organization of political parties in Texas.
16. Define a competitive party system, indicate how one can measure competitiveness and point out the factors which lead to a competitive party system in a state.
17. Identify the various kinds of primary elections and indicate how they are used.

### **Questions For Second Exam: Sections 6-9. Legislature, Governor, and the Judiciary.**

#### **Section 6-- Legislature**

1. Discuss the socio-economic characteristics which legislators share with their constituents and those that they do not share with their constituents.
2. Discuss what motivates people to run for legislative office and why many retire early.
3. Discuss the three issues raised by reapportionment--equity of representation, minority of representation and political gerrymandering.
4. Discuss the formal and informal rules of legislatures and point out how they affect the policy making process.
5. Discuss the formal committee system in state legislatures.
6. Discuss the importance of role playing in legislatures: leadership roles; role of the expert; partisan roles; delegate and trustee roles.
7. Discuss the role of the governor and other state official in the legislative process.
8. Discuss the role played by interest groups in the legislative process.

#### **Section 7-- Governor**

9. Identify and discuss the various roles that a governor is expected to play. What limitations are placed on the ability of the governor to play these roles?
10. Discuss the variations in the following gubernatorial powers; tenure; appointive/executive powers; veto powers; budgetary powers. Indicate how these are used to determine formal powers of governors.

#### **Section 8-- Judiciary**

11. Discuss how style of judicial decision-making differs from legislative or executive decision-making.

12. Discuss the arguments for and against elected judges, appointment of judges and the merit or Missouri Plan. Discuss what difference each system makes, in the kind of person who gets elected to the judiciary.

13. Discuss the impact of the death penalty on crime. What evidence is there that the death penalty reduces crime?

14. Discuss the structure of state court systems generally and in Texas specifically.

### **Study Questions For Third Exam. Sections 9-12. Local Governments**

**Date for third or final is May 2, 2008 from 12:30-2:30**

#### **Section 9--Money, Taxes and Budgets**

1. Discuss tax capacity, tax equity and per capita taxes.
2. Compare and contrast regressive and progressive taxes and explain how this applies to Texas.
3. Discuss the major sources of revenue for state and local governments and indicate the important of each.
4. Discuss the various sources of non tax revenue.
5. Discuss the major expenditures of state governments and Texas.

#### **Section 10-- Forms of Local Government**

6. Discuss the basic structure and organization of county governments and its weakness.
7. Discuss needed reform in Texas county government and why this is not likely to happen.
8. Discuss special district government, pointing out advantages and disadvantages of their use and the reasons why their use has increased.
9. Discuss the legal status of local governments in relation to state governments. Why are they creatures of the state?@
10. Discuss the meaning of home rule and general law cities.
11. Describe the process of incorporation (granting city charters) and how extra territorial jurisdiction (ETJ) affects the incorporation process.
12. Discuss the differences between a mayor council (strong and weak mayor), commission and council manager form of government.
13. Discuss the resources available to city managers that enable them to be "strong" executives.

### **Section 11-- Political Participation in Local Politics.**

14. Explain the nonpartisan elections, the reasons behind their use and their impact on local politics.
15. Compare and contrast the different methods of electing city councils, giving the advantages and disadvantages of each.
16. Discuss the reason for the formation of political machines in the nation's largest cities in the 19th century and the functions they performed.
17. List and discuss the objectives of the reform movement and the reasons for the decline of the political machine.
18. Discuss the factors and conditions associated with low voter turnout in municipal elections.
19. Discuss the problem of political accountability in local politics and what factors aggravate this problem? What factors contribute to congruence between the views of community residents and the views of their council members.
20. Discuss the role of interest groups in local politics.

### **Section 12--Community Power**

21. Discuss the elite and pluralist models of community power. The methods used to study community power and the weaknesses of each method and model.

#### ADA Statement:

The Americans with Disabilities act is a federal anti discrimination statute that provided comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation, please contact the Department of Student Life, Services for Students with Disabilities in Room 126 of the Koldus Building or call 845-1637.