

# GOVT 2107: Federal and Texas Constitutions

University of Texas at Dallas • Fall 2019

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## Course Information:

Course: GOVT 2107 section: 0W1  
Meetings: Online @ eLearning

## Instructor Information:

Evan M. Lowe | Office: GR 3.822  
Evan.Lowe@utdallas.edu  
Office Hours: MW 10:30a–12:00p & by appt.

## Course Description

This course is a one credit-hour, online course that covers the Constitution of the United States, the Constitution(s) of Texas, and the ideas that underlie those documents. The course will be divided into three sections, the first of which will cover introductory-level political thought related to constitutionalism. Then we will have one on the US Constitution before finishing with a section on the Texas Constitution.

Enrollment is for students who have completed a minimum of 6 semester hours of GOVT courses but have not satisfied the statutory requirement for the study of the federal and state constitutions. If you're uncertain as to whether or not this course satisfies University requirements, please consult your academic advisor.

## Course Objectives

1. At the conclusion of this course, students who have successfully mastered the material should be able to:
  2. Understand and explain the ideas of political philosophers covered in the course, how they relate to one another, and how these ideas influenced the development and content of the US and TX constitutions.
  3. Define and assess key terms and ideas relevant to American and Texas government, including but not limited to: federalism, rights, liberties, separation of powers, and limited government.
  4. Identify and explain the US Constitution and its parts, including the amendments.
  5. Identify and explain the Texas Constitution, its content, and its historical development.
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## Required Materials

You do not have to purchase a textbook or other material for this course. All readings will be posted on eLearning along with (occasionally) some supplementary material for those interested in learning more.

## Optional/Recommended Resources

Some students may wish to acquire a textbook to better suit their learning style. Since these are *not required*, it does not matter which edition you choose. What follows are some recommendations of books and resources for those who may be interested. In addition to these, you will find optional supplementary readings posted in eLearning, at which I highly recommend you take a look.

### Theory:

- [Key Texts of Political Philosophy: An Introduction](#) (Pangle and Burns)
- [Political Questions: Political Philosophy from Plato to Pinker](#) (Arnhart)
- [History of Political Philosophy](#) (Strauss and Cropsey)

## US Government & Politics:

- [American Government: Institutions and Policies](#) (Wilson et al.) — descriptive and high-level, but with fewer infographics and such that you may be used to in other textbooks
- [American Government: Enduring Principles and Critical Choices](#) (Landy) – focuses on ideas and development; asks for more attention and engagement than most textbooks which try to cater to the TL;DR mentality
- [We The People](#) (Ginsberg et al)
- [The Logic of American Politics](#) (Kernell et al)

## Texas Government and Politics

- [Governing Texas](#) (Casellas et. al.)
- [Lone Star Politics](#) (Collier et. al.)

## General & Non-Textbook Resources

- [The Comparative Constitutions Project](#) – Explores the impact of constitutional arrangements on political and public life. Contains a variety of information and seeks to compare and understand constitutionalism across historical and national lines.
  - [The Texas Politics Project](#) – Hosted at UT Austin, the (former) TX government textbook is no longer available online, though the polling section of their website has a lot of data regarding elements of Texas politics and public opinion.
  - [Texas Tribune](#) – A fairly good resource for reporting related to Texas politics and policy.
  - [Real Clear Politics](#) – An aggregated news and opinion site about US politics, elections, and polling.
  - [BallotPedia](#) – A good resource for information about various institutions and political topics, which is especially good for one looking to compare state institutional arrangements (e.g. voter registration laws, which officials are elected and which appointed)
  - [PEP Talk](#) – An EPPS student-run podcast on issues of Policy, Economics, and Politics. Link takes you to the Apple Podcasts page, but it is hosted on several different podcatcher services/applications.
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## Grading:

Your course grade will be calculated given the following components and their relative weights:

1. Exams (3), each worth 25%
  - a. Final Exam will be optional, and may replace a low exam score.
2. Online Discussion Board Posts (3), worth 25% cumulatively

The grading scale used is as follows: A (90s), B (80s), C (70s), D (60s), F (below 60). +/- breakdown within each letter follow the pattern below. For example, a 83.9 is a B-.

- A+: 97 – 100
- A: 94 – 97
- A-: 90 – 94

Upper bound of range is exclusive, lower bound inclusive

*I do not round course grades.*

## Exams:

Exam dates are listed in the course schedule (below) and will be administered using eLearning.

- **Exams are non-collaborative.** These assessments are designed to test *your* mastery of the material, not your ability to collaborate to answer questions correctly. I take this seriously and so should all of you. (See academic dishonesty policy below).
- **Exams are available for 24 hours on Fridays of the week listed.** Exams will become available for you at 12:01am on the date of the exam, and will close at 11:59pm. It is your responsibility to *complete* (not begin) the exam by 11:59pm. See the Course Schedule (below) for exam dates.
- **Exams will be limited to 45 minutes.** Once you begin the exam, you must complete it in 45 minutes. This is sufficient time to answer the questions, but *not* sufficient time to look up answers to each question. You must prepare for these as you would an in-class exam if you wish to be successful.
- **Content and Question Types.** Each exam will include material covered during the unit in question. Only the final exam will be cumulative (material from the entire course). Questions types will vary; most questions will be multiple choice, but some short answer and other types may appear.
- **Make-up exams** will be made available for students whose *University sponsored* activity conflicts with our exam. You must email me *before* the exam to request an alternative time. Other extenuating circumstances may be considered, but are entirely at the instructor's discretion. Given the flexible nature of these exams, I will be rather strict in allowing exceptions to the scheduled time. You should note the exam dates in your calendar so that you do not accidentally create a problem for yourself.
- **Optional Final Exam.** The optional final will differ somewhat from the unit exams. It will be longer because it is cumulative. As a result, you will also have more time to complete it. Question style and type will be similar to unit exams. If you choose to take the final exam and perform better than on one of your unit exams, the final exam score will replace the lowest unit exam score when I calculate your course grade.

## Discussion Board Information:

- Each of the three units of the course will have discussion board assignments, each **open for one week on eLearning** (Monday at 12:01a – Sunday at 11:59p). Posts must be made during the period of availability. **Discussion posts will not be reopened for any reason.**
- You will be required to **respond to each of the four discussion boards** throughout the semester. I will calculate this portion of your course grade from the three highest scoring posts; the low score will be dropped, but you must participate in each of the four discussions. The dropped grade is intended to give you time to get comfortable with the process, but that only works if you contribute.
- For each discussion board post, I will create a thread with some thoughts and questions to which you are to respond meaningfully. You should contribute to the thread with your ideas.
  - Commenting on and engaging the posts of others is encouraged.
  - I am less interested in your *opinions* than I am your *ideas*, by which I mean that you should endeavor to express your thoughts relevant to the prompts in a way that shows reasoned consideration and comprehension of material presented in the course.
  - The instructional purpose of these posts is to assess your comprehension of course instructional content, so what is being evaluated is your knowledge of material and ability to synthesize that knowledge in a meaningful way. Examples and personal anecdotes are fine, but be sure to tie them into course material in a way that demonstrates mastery of concepts and topics.
  - Beyond the instructional purpose of the posts, I also hope that they give students the opportunity to engage in lively discussion with one another about government and politics.

## Instructor Policies

### Conduct

- **Be respectful and polite.** This course covers issues relevant to political life and government. I am as certain that many of you have strong opinions on some of these matters as I am that those with strong opinions are likely to disagree with others who also have strong opinions. This course is *not* a political campaign and, thus, is not the place to ridicule those with whom you disagree. Disagreement is fine, but please note that *we* are respectful of others and that we are primarily interested in meaningful discussion of ideas rather than partisan or ideological promotion/attack.
  - This does not mean that we all must be “nice,” which I understand to be shallow. [This](#) humorous blog post about politeness communicates something about what I mean. Excerpted and stylized: “You don’t *have* to have an opinion. You don’t *need* to make a judgment.” We can and do have opinions and make judgments, but we ought to endeavor to do those things *after* consideration and *not* because we feel we have an *obligation* to have an opinion or judgment about each and every thing. Give yourself time and, perhaps most importantly, *freedom* to opine and judge on the basis of consideration and thought.

### Email

Since this is an online course, email is the best form of communication with me and with others. When emailing, please use your UTD email address. Grades cannot and will not be discussed via email, however – federal law (FERPA) prohibits this. If you are unable to make office hours for grade discussions, please make an appointment and we can find a time that works for both of us.

The instructor’s rules for emailing are as follows. If your email does not follow these rules, I will not respond. Please be appraised.

1. **Include a salutation, your name, the course and section number, and a direct question.** I teach several courses and need to know the course and section in which you are enrolled in order to effectively respond. Similarly, emails that express a concern but have no question do not help generate effective responses.
2. **Check the syllabus first** for an answer to your question. If the question is directly answered in the syllabus, I will not respond to the email. This is not only a matter of efficiency, but also one that encourages you to be responsible for your own education and experience in this course.
3. **No texting language.** When you send emails that don’t use the right words or punctuation I have a hard time knowing what you mean and won’t respond to the message even if it makes sense because you can’t expect someone else to know what you mean. I also don’t know (and don’t care to find out) what “common” abbreviations for phrases (eg. TIL, ymmv, imho) mean. Don’t expect someone else to be responsible for deciphering your message. This is a good rule not only for this course but also for emailing and communication in general, and is a matter of clarity and professionalism.
4. If you don’t receive a response to your email in a reasonable amount of time, *please* follow up to remind me. I try to respond to all emails within 24–48 hours, but some may be accidentally overlooked.
  - a. The exception would be Friday night and Saturday, when I do not email.

## Miscellanea

### Comet Creed

This creed was voted on by the UT Dallas student body in 2014, and is a standard that comets both choose to live by, and to encourage others to follow as well.

*"As a Comet, I pledge honesty, integrity, and service in all that I do."*

In short: academic integrity will be taken seriously, and violations will be reported according to University policy. Don't cheat.

For more information on [academic integrity](#) and [academic dishonesty](#), please see the hyperlinked pages at the Office of Community Standards and Conduct website.

### Syllabus Policies and Procedures

The information found at the following link constitutes the University's policies and procedures segment of the course syllabus. Please see <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies> for these policies.

### Religious Observances

I will make accommodations for religious holidays and observances that conflict with course assignments and due dates. It will be the student's responsibility to bring any conflict to my attention so we can discuss the accommodation. Must be notified prior to conflict.

### Sexual Discrimination Policy

The course will abide by Title IX & UT Dallas' sexual harassment and sexual misconduct policy (UTDBP3102). Please find the policy details here: <https://policy.utdallas.edu/utdbp3102>

Incidents in or out of class may be reported here: <http://www.utdallas.edu/oiec/complaints/>

### ADA Compliance

The course follows policies and procedures articulated by UT Dallas with respect to ADA compliance. ([Policy UTDBP3100](#))

Qualifying students seeking reasonable accommodation for a disability should see the Office of Student Accessibility, which will determine eligibility and implementation plans for reasonable accommodation. Student seeking accommodation should see the OSA and bring the action plan to the course instructor as early as possible in the course. Should you choose not to use the accommodation, you may. Nevertheless, to use the accommodation approved by OSA, the instructor must have the documentation ahead of time.

### Mental Health

Students who feel anxious, overburdened, or otherwise in need of support, should be aware of the resources UT Dallas offers with respect to mental health. The Student Counseling Center provides services and programs to assist students in achieving emotional well-being and to help manage personal demands that may get in the one of your academic success. They provide counselling, learning disability assessments, and a variety of other services. Please see their website for more information: <http://www.utdallas.edu/counseling/>

## Course Schedule<sup>1</sup>

### Unit 1: Theoretical and Philosophic Foundations

Week of 8/19: Introduction to class and political thought

Week of 8/26: Aristotle

Week of 9/2: Locke | **Discussion 1**

Week of 9/9: Montesquieu

Week of 9/16: Tocqueville | **Discussion 2** | **Exam 1**

### Unit 2: The United States Constitution

Week of 9/23: Constitutional History & Development

Week of 9/30: Congress

Week of 10/7: The Executive

Week of 10/14: The Judiciary | **Discussion 3**

Week of 10/21: Civil Liberties & Civil Rights | **Exam 2**

### Unit 3: The Texas Constitution

Week of 10/28: Texas in the Federal System

Week of 11/4: TX Constitutional History & Development

Week of 11/11: Texas Legislature

Week of 11/18: Texas Executive | **Discussion 4**

Week of 11/25: **No Class (Fall Break & Thanksgiving Holiday)**

Week of 12/2: Texas Judiciary | **Exam 3**

### Final Exam

Week of 12/9: Finals Week (scheduled day of final exam pending University publication)

NOTE: Readings for each week will be posted in eLearning. Please contact me if there is any confusion about what the assigned readings are.

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<sup>1</sup> The descriptions and timelines contained in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor. Any changes will be communicated and the modified syllabus posted.