Instructor Information
Name: Dr. J. Mark Skorick
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Office Location: Brookhaven College, Social Science Division K240

Required Course Materials
Textbooks/reading materials:


Note: Special pricing of 30% discount available through the Brookhaven College bookstore only.

- Dallas Morning News, New York Times or access to any other major newspaper. Knowledge of current events is essential to the course activities.

Technology Requirements:
- Internet access (free access available in campus computer labs)
- Active E-mail account (check at least three times per week)
- Basic use of a personal computer (word processing and internet browsing).
- Access to the DCCCD e-campus system: http://dcccd.blackboard.com/

Technical Support:
- Everything you need to know about accessing e-campus, using the tools and contacting tech support is located at this link.

Software Requirements (free versions of these programs are available for download on the link above):
- Microsoft Office or Open Office (word processor and presentation viewer)
- Windows Media Player
- Adobe Acrobat Reader
- All Quizzes/Tests/Exams for this course require the use of the Respondus Lockdown Browser. This must be installed on the computer from which you intend to take a quiz. As part of the course orientation, you will be asked to view the following guide on installing and using the Respondus Lockdown Browser: http://ecampus.support.dccc.edu/v91/studenttutorials/StudentLockDownBrowserv91/StudentLockDownBrowserv91.htm
Course Grading System

Grading Scale (point system)
A = 900 – 1000
B = 800 – 899
C = 700 – 799
D = 600 – 699
F = 0 – 599

Activity Grade Values (*required activity)
*Orientation (1 x 40): 4% = 40 points
Chapter Activities (varies): 21% = 210 points (across all activities)
Mid-term Essay (1 x 250 each): 25% = 250 points
Discussion Postings (2 x 100 each): 20% = 200 points
*Texas Policy Report (50 and 250): 30% = 300 points

Totals: 100% = 1000 points

Course Calendar (Please make note of the deadlines indicated below)

Mandatory Orientation:
The deadline to complete the Orientation is 11:55 pm on Wednesday, November 18th, 2015. Failure to complete the Orientation will result in being listed as a “non-attending” student and possibly being dropped from the course.

Orientation Deadline: November 18th, at 11:55 pm.
Deadline Activities:
- Formal Orientation Quiz (Mandatory)
- Extra credit quiz: Acknowledging Sources (optional)

UNIT 1: FRAMEWORK
Deadline: Sunday, November 29th at 11:55 pm.
Readings: Chapters 1-6
Deadline Activities:
- Activities for Chapters 1-6 Due
- Unit 1 Discussion Forum Due (primary post due 24 hours ahead of deadline)
- Mid-term Essay Due
- Texas Policy Report Proposal due

UNIT 2: GOVERNANCE
Deadline: Wednesday, December 16th at 11:55 pm.
Readings: Chapters 7-13
Deadline Activities:
- Activities for Chapters 7-13 Due
- Unit 2 Discussion Forum Due (primary post due 24 hours ahead of deadline)
- Texas Policy Report due (Mandatory)
- Extra credit essay due (optional)
Section 1 - General Course Information

Introduction to the Instructor
Welcome to American Government. My name is Mark Skorick (I prefer Dr. or Prof. Skorick). I received my Ph.D. in Political Science from Texas A&M University and my B.A. in International Studies from Pepperdine University. My academic interests include American Foreign Policy, International Affairs, and Political Psychology. I have taught many political science courses over multiple topics including, American government, US foreign policy, international relations, conflict and war, and global terrorism. I look forward to the coming semester where we will explore together the varying complex layers of policy and governance that comprise the US political system.

The basic theory of our democratic republic is quite simple: elected representatives translate the will of the people into meaningful action at the state and federal level, with the framework of our Constitution limiting or sanctioning the actions that these individuals may (or may not) take on our behalf. The reality of government in the United States is something a bit messier, however, with multiple interests, parties, principles, institutions, and ideas competing, pushing, pulling and battling over what actually occurs. I hope that this course will allow you to see, understand, and appreciate this complexity.

Course Content
GOVT 2306 is designed to introduce students to the organization, the principles and the various functions of the Texas state government. Together we will analyze the history, structure, changes, and continued evolution of politics in the state of Texas. In addition, we will explore a variety of contemporary political issues as they relate to the course material. This course does cover some historical information, but is primarily a study of modern politics (not history).

This is one of the rare collegiate courses where watching television (the news) will greatly benefit you. In addition, I highly encourage you to stay informed about current events issues that are related to the course via print, televised and electronic media. These additional resources will be of great assistance in your efforts to understand the content covered in this course.

The larger effort in this course is to understand how and why Texas has created a vast, dynamic and complex governmental system at the state and local levels. Upon completion of this course, you will have the knowledge and analytical skills necessary to better understand the philosophy, structure and institutional processes which govern the state we live in. More importantly, this course will provide you with the resources necessary to participate in politics and make informed decisions in the future.

Section 2 - Course Policies and Performance Guidelines

Guidelines for all Coursework
All course assignments must comply with the following requirements to be considered a completed work (incomplete items will receive a zero). Please read these requirements carefully:

- **The deadline for activities is indicated in the course calendar.** All assignments due for each lesson must be submitted prior to the unit deadline date at 11:55 pm.
- **Each “mandatory” activity must be submitted to earn credit for the course.** The two mandatory activities are identified in the syllabus with an asterisk (*).
• The Mid-term essay and Texas Policy Report must have a simple cover page with the following information: Your name, course / section #, semester, word count and essay topic. Word counts do not include citations, quotes, cover pages, or a bibliography. Do not put photos, artwork, or other embellishment on the cover page.

• The formatting requirements for all assignments are: typed / word processed, double-spaced, size 12 font, Arial or Times New Roman script, 1 inch margins (default setting), and a limited number of grammatical errors.

• The course textbook, Wikipedia, internet search engines, blogs and similar items are examples of unacceptable research sources at the collegiate level. Each student is expected to utilize high quality sources (academic journals, scholarly articles, current laws/policy, court cases, etc) for writing assignments. There is a tool built into the course to help you obtain quality sources for your writing assignments. It is labeled “research center” on the main menu of the course. For current events related information, use a newspaper, news magazine or news website.

• All key arguments, assertions, claims, and facts must be supported with research.

• The writing assignments are intended to assess your comprehension of the material. Only your own words will count toward the writing requirements.

• All assignments are expected to meet college level writing expectations. Papers that are filled with incorrect spelling and grammar will not be accepted. All answers are to be in essay format and the expectation is for each student to engage the topics using critical analysis. Please do not attempt to provide simplified or elementary answers if you wish to earn credit for your work. Take the time to fully explain your ideas and demonstrate the depth of your understanding to earn the grade you want.

• The minimum writing expectation for each assignment or activity must be satisfied to earn a grade. Incomplete assignments will receive a zero. There is no credit for partial work.

• Failure to identify sources is plagiarism. APA or MLA citation style is mandatory for all outside sources in all written work (essays and discussion board assignments). All references are to be documented within the body of the assignment using parenthetical citations and on a works cited page.

• Use parenthetical citations. Do not use footnotes or endnotes.

• Do not use first person in a college essay unless the assignment specifically requires or asks for it.

• All pages of an assignment (cover page, body text, and works cited) are to be submitted as one electronic file to the appropriately titled online dropbox. Assignments will not be accepted via any other delivery method, unless prior approval was obtained.

• There is a specific course policy regarding late work. Quiz and discussion board activities are excluded from the late work policy and are always due by the stated deadline. Late work will only be accepted in a case where there are extenuating circumstances that the instructor was informed about in advance of the deadline.

• Assignments submitted online must be in one of the following file formats: doc (or docx), rtf, odt, or pdf. Other document formats are unacceptable.

Communications Etiquette

• E-mail – Please allow 48 hours for a reply via e-mail. There may be periods where it may take longer to get a reply (such as weekends and holidays). Professional email correspondence mandates the correct salutation (“Dr. Skorick” or “Prof. Skorick”), correct spelling (do not “text” me via email) and proper grammar/punctuation.

• Dialogue – Personal attacks, racial or ethnic slurs, outbursts or other inappropriate forms of communication will result in immediate removal from the class and possibly from the college
(see academic freedom statement). Think about what you are saying, before you hit the send or submit button.

- **Personal Requests** – I am happy to assist you with any questions you may have about the course, about the news, or even college life in general. However, personal requests for exemptions to course policies will not be granted unless there is a legitimate reason. It is a form of discrimination by the instructor to grant exceptions without basis. Any exceptions made may require documentation and will only be considered in advance of a deadline. Please refrain from asking the instructor to engage in unprofessional or unethical behavior, such requests will be ignored.

**Late Work Policy**
Ample time has been allotted to complete each Lesson activity. All assignments are expected on or before the deadline indicated in the syllabus. **Extensions are very rarely given, and only in the case of emergency circumstances.** Any student that needs to submit a late paper must contact me in advance of the deadline for approval and to make alternative arrangements. You may be required to provide some form of written documentation in order to substantiate a request to submit a late assignment.

If approved, late work will be considered for up to 50% of the original value of an assignment. Late work must be submitted within 48 hours of the original deadline (including weekends and holidays). If the assignment has not been submitted within the time allotted after the original deadline, it will receive a zero. Due to time constraints, **late work will never be accepted in the final week of the course (the final course deadline).** Quiz and discussion forum activities are excluded from the late work policy and are due by the stated deadline.

**Online Course Attendance**
Students are expected to log-in and utilize e-campus for a minimum of three hours per week and dedicate a significant amount of time to studying and working on assignments. **As a minimum expectation, you should login to the course and check your e-mail at least three times per week.** You are free to work ahead at your own pace. However, be sure to avoid falling behind. Each unit deadline will serve as a benchmark for your overall progress in the course. Remember, the distance education environment requires a high degree of self-discipline and intrinsic motivation. Time management is something many students struggle with, so make a schedule for this course and stick to it. Trying to work on all the assignments a day before a deadline is a recipe for disaster.

**Course E-mail / Announcements**
There are frequent updates posted in the course announcements area and sent out via e-mail. This is the primary avenue of communication for this course. Each student is expected to read the information and keep current with the course. Many frequently asked questions are addressed via announcements and some may contain vital course information. These are official course communications, so bear in mind that you will be held accountable for the information provided.

**Course Honor Code**
Scholastic dishonesty is a violation of the DCCCD Student Code of Student Conduct. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating on a quiz, plagiarism, and collusion. Students are expected to complete all course work by their own efforts and in their own words.

When you cite or paraphrase another author, you are required to properly acknowledge all sources with a parenthetical citation in the body text and provide a bibliographic listing on a works cited page. If you
have any questions about citations, contact me immediately. Any attempt to submit work that is not a product of your own efforts will result in an automatic “F” for the assignment and the course. In addition, you may face disciplinary action by the college administration leading up to expulsion from the college.

The college uses a plagiarism prevention program known as “SafeAssign.” Since all papers will be electronically submitted for review, I implore you to avoid procrastinating and begin your work as soon as possible. Time seems to be the largest factor in a student’s decision to plagiarize. Details on how to submit your work to the dropbox will be posted in the course announcement area.

Statement of Academic Freedom
The collegiate environment is one that promotes tolerance, understanding, communication and equality. Use the guidelines below in your interactions with the instructor and your peers:
Students are provided with the opportunity to demonstrate their comprehension of political issues and express their understanding of key points in this course. The discussion format in particular is an opportunity for students to enjoy their constitutional right to free speech and expression. This is not intended to serve as a platform for one to express their political ideology or personal feelings about a given issue. It is a forum for an intellectual dialogue and an exchange of ideas. Again, the expectation is that you will conduct yourself to the standards befitting a college student engaged in an intellectual dialogue (both inside and outside the classroom).

Academic freedom will be protected and respected by all students and the instructor. However, there are some limitations on free speech. Hateful, sexist, racist, hurtful, or otherwise obscene comments that are intended as a personal attack will not be tolerated. Additionally, any dialogue that does not specifically pertain to the topic at hand will not receive an audience. At the instructor's discretion, a student that violates these guidelines may be removed from the course and possibly from the college.

Section 3 - Course Activities, Assignments, and Exams

* Indicates a course requirement. Failure to submit a compulsory assignment will result in a failing grade (F/N) for the course.

*Orientation Activity (*Mandatory)
As stated in the course catalog and on your registration forms, all INET courses have a mandatory orientation process. For this course, the process will be completed totally online. Once it has been completed, your attendance and participation will be reported to the college administration to certify you in the course. All registered students are to complete the orientation activities by the stated deadline. The Orientation deadline is 11:55 pm, November 18th, 2015.

Any student that fails to complete the mandatory orientation quiz will be reported as non-attending and will get a grade of N on their final transcript. If you do not properly withdraw, this will show up as an F on your permanent records. Be sure that your intentions are made clear to the registration office during the first day of the course.

Course Readings, Lectures and Presentations
Each student is expected to read the assigned material as detailed in the course calendar. In addition, there is a corresponding video for each chapter (approx. 30 minutes each) and a Virtual Lecture
(PowerPoint presentation) posted online that further address the assigned reading material. Students will be held accountable for assigned materials via the course assignments, discussion forums and quizzes. The textbook readings create the core of the online course experience. The supplemental materials are there to reinforce key points and help you succeed. Making appropriate use of the materials will have a significant impact on your grades.

It is vital that you manage your time and maintain a high degree of self-discipline to ensure your success in any college course. The course schedule has been designed to spread apart the major course topics so that you are able to comprehend the material. If you fall behind, it is difficult to adequately address the topics and this often creates a snowball effect leading to failure.

**Chapter Activities (video quiz, animation quiz, post-quiz)**

There are several short activities for each chapter. These activities are designed to cater to a variety of learning styles and help facilitate comprehension of the assigned readings from the textbook. The design is to assess your reading comprehension one chapter at a time, rather than assessing your ability to recall information from multiple chapters. The testing window for the assigned reading will be the start and end date of a given unit (see the course calendar for details). The activities must be completed within the unit it was assigned.

Each student may have unlimited attempts on the video and animation quizzes using a normal internet browser. However, the post-quiz will be limited to two attempts and the higher grade will be recorded.

The post-quizzes are not comprehensive. Each post-quiz covers detailed material from the assigned chapter. The quizzes are automated; they are generated from a pool of hundreds of questions. The grade will post immediately after submission (in most cases). **Each student will have two attempts per post-quiz.** The higher grade will be recorded. There will be 20 randomly generated multiple-choice questions per post-quiz. You will have 30 minutes to complete each post-quiz. The quizzes are **not** designed to be “open book.” By design, there is not enough time to look up each question. You must be prepared for each quiz by reading the assigned chapter. Do not procrastinate, give yourself time to complete each quiz in sequence as you progress through the unit. You may move at your own pace ahead of each deadline. I suggest completing the readings and quizzes well ahead of each deadline so you can focus on the primary unit activities (essays and forums).

**All post-quizzes require the use of the Respondus Lockdown Browser.** This must be installed on the computer from which you intend to take the quiz. Once a post-quiz has started, you will not be able to leave, back out or close the quiz screen. Instructions on installing and using the Respondus Lockdown Browser can be found here: [http://ecampus.support.dcccd.edu/v91/studenttutorials/StudentLockDownBrowserv91/StudentLockDownBrowserv91.htm](http://ecampus.support.dcccd.edu/v91/studenttutorials/StudentLockDownBrowserv91/StudentLockDownBrowserv91.htm)

It is strongly suggested that you do not take the post-quiz on a computer with a wireless connection. On rare occasions, there may be an issue with the quiz pool. I will address those issues on a case-by-case basis.

There are several steps you can take to ensure you do not have a problem during a quiz. Detailed information will be provided to help ensure your computer is configured to interact with the e-campus system. Again, please contact the tech support team in case of a problem. However, they cannot and
will not re-set a quiz. Tech support can assist in helping identify the source of any potential problem. I will not re-set a quiz due to a technical error that could have been avoided.

**Mid-term Essay**

Writing assignments are the primary assessment of your learning in this course. Reading the material and taking a quiz does not fully demonstrate your command of the information. For this reason, the majority of your grade will be based on your written work.

There is a list of essay options for this assignment. Pick one topic from the list provided. Each prompt can be downloaded (in Word format) at any time, so please plan ahead to determine which essay you wish to complete. The final product must be submitted to the SafeAssign dropbox labelled for this activity. Detailed procedures on using the SafeAssign dropbox are provided in the course orientation.

The deadline for the Mid-term essay clearly identified in the course calendar. Once the deadline passes, the grade will be recorded as a zero if no assignment has been submitted or if a submitted assignment does not meet the minimum expectations. It is suggested that you identify which essay you want to work on at the start of the course and consistently progress toward a final draft.

All course readings, supplements and activities are expected to have been examined prior to writing the Mid-term essay. The assignment must utilize at least 3 high quality academic sources (academic journals, scholarly articles, current laws/policy, court cases, etc). There is a tool built into the course to help you obtain quality sources for your writing assignment, it is labeled “research center” on the main menu of the course. For current events related information, use a newspaper, news magazine or news website. The course textbook, Wikipedia, internet search engines, blogs and similar items are examples of unacceptable research sources at the collegiate level.

As always, the essay is to be in your own words. A fundamental expectation of college work is that all key arguments, facts, assertions and claims are supported with research (i.e. parenthetical citations). When a source has been cited, you are expected to acknowledge the source in the body of your text and on a works cited page using formal MLA or APA citation format. The essay must be completed using the formatting guidelines provided in the syllabus as “Guidelines for all Coursework.” Detailed directions on what is expected for the essay have been provided in the guidelines for each assignment. Any additional information will be provided during the semester. The essay will be graded with an assessment rubric, it has been provided for your reference in the “resources” area of the course.

The Mid-term essay is to be 4-6 pages in length. The **minimum writing requirement is two full pages (around 800 words). Anything less than the minimum writing expectations will be considered incomplete and will result in a zero.** Simply meeting the minimum expectation does not guarantee a C, it only qualifies the assignment for a grade. If you want to earn a high grade, take the time to carefully respond to each question with research and critical thought.

**Discussion Board Assignment**

General guidelines:
Each discussion board assignment consists of two parts, a primary thread and a reply, **both** of which must be completed in order to receive credit for the assignment. For each discussion board assignment, the primary thread and the reply must be made by the unit deadline for the assignment to be considered complete.
The expectation is that students have completed the assigned readings prior to engaging the discussion topic, and not before. This allows the discussions to remain relevant to the assigned topics. You may not go back and address discussion topics once the Unit has been completed. The deadline for the discussion postings will be the end of each Unit as noted in the syllabus. Again, both the original and reply posting must be submitted for the activity to be considered complete. You must post your word count at the end of your original and reply posting.

Part I - Original Posting Guidelines:
During each unit, you are expected to post an answer (in your own words) to the primary set of questions posed for the discussion forum. Please do not wait until the deadline to make your submission. You and your peers are expected to reply to each other’s posting, so try to allow enough time to reply. Each activity involves an element of independent research and critical analysis. The questions address your understanding of central themes in the textbook and your ability to think critically about the course material.

Your responses are to be in essay format. Be sure to fully explain your position, citing quality sources to support all key arguments, facts, assertions and claims. You cannot get an “A” on this assignment unless research is appropriately used in both the original and reply postings. High quality sources include academic journals, scholarly articles, current laws/policy, court cases, etc. In addition, you may cite a newspaper, news magazine, news website, court case, or an actual law for current events related information. The course textbook, Wikipedia, blogs and similar items are examples of unacceptable sources for college level work. The grade for the original posting will be determined by the quality, depth and originality of your writing. The minimum writing requirement is 250 words for the original posting, be sure to add your word count at the end of the posting.

Part II – Reply Posting Guidelines:
The second part of each discussion forum involves a reply to a primary posting made by at least one of your peers. You may chose to reply more often, but the minimum expectation is for each student to engage in a dialogue with one person in each forum. It is preferable that you reply to a posting that does not have any replies, so that everyone may receive some degree of feedback. Your reply or comment doesn’t need to be quite as extensive as the original posting, but it must be of substantial academic and intellectual value. The best replies are ones which incorporate research to support key arguments, claims, facts and assertions.

Be sure to directly address the main points made in the original posting. “Good posting” or “I agree” will not suffice for this part of the assignment. This is an opportunity for a free exchange of ideas, so take advantage of the opportunity to learn from your classmates. Any personal attacks are grounds for immediate removal from the course and possibly the college. As always, your grade will be based on the quality and originality of your feedback. The minimum word count is 100 words per reply posting, be sure to add your word count at the end of the posting.

*Formal Assessment Guidelines – Texas Policy Paper

Introduction

This activity is an opportunity for you to closely examine a contemporary policy issue facing the state of Texas. Over its history, the Texas government has had many conflicts with the national government as
part of the dynamics under a federal system of governance. These disputes have heated up in recent years, and include immigration policy, education policy, environmental policy, social welfare policy and many others issues. Select one of personal interest and objectively outline the nature of the dispute. This will allow you to work towards finding a solution.

Take into consideration constitutional disputes as well as political, economic and cultural differences. Look at the history underlying the dispute, how it is playing out within the governing institutions, and how you think the issue may be resolved, assuming that is possible.

Completing this activity is a mandatory component of this course. It serves as the standard course assessment for all GOVT 2306 students. Failure to submit this project in its entirety will result in a failing grade for the course.

**Step 1:** Identify the issue and how both the US government and Texas government have been currently addressing it (historical perspective).

**Step 2:** Gather a minimum of three scholarly research articles and additional news/current events relevant to the topic.

**Step 3:** Submit a one page proposal to the appropriate dropbox by the date specified in the course calendar. The proposal should:

- Identify the topic in a single paragraph
- Include a bibliography listing the 3 primary sources. The bibliography should be formatted using APA or MLA citation style.

**Step 4:** Prepare a formal policy report that is a minimum of 1000 words (excluding cited text), which includes a discussion of the following:

- A statement of the current policy
- Reasons for initiating changes
- Policy options to be considered
- Pros and cons of each option
- Recommended course of action
- Reasoning for selecting that course of action

The grading standards used to assess the quality of your work for this policy paper will be detailed in a grading rubric, which will be provided during the semester.

It is strongly suggested that you use the library database at the start of the semester to begin researching a topic. This assignment requires carefully planning throughout the semester. Refer to the course calendar for the specific due date. The final draft is to be submitted via the submission guidelines identified by the instructor.

**NOTE:** Procrastination on this project has resulted in many students, who were otherwise passing, having to fail and repeat the course.
Section 4 - DCCCD Institutional Information

DCCCD Institutional polices can be found on the following website: http://www.brookhavencollege.edu/about/vpi/Pages/Syllabus-Addendum.aspx

INSTRUCTOR’S RIGHT TO MODIFY: The instructor has the right to add, delete, or revise this course syllabus.

GOVT 2306 – Texas Government. This is a Texas Common Course Number.
Prerequisite: The following must be met: (1) DREA 0093 or English as a Second Language (ESOL) 0044 or have met the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) Reading Standard AND (2) DWRI in 0093, or English as a Second Language (ESOL) 0054 or have met the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) Writing Standard.

Course Description: 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. Coordinating Board Academic Approval Number 4510025125.

Student Learning Outcomes for GOVT 2306

Upon successful completion of this course, students will:

1. Explain the origin and development of the Texas constitution.
2. Describe state and local political systems and their relationship with the federal government.
3. Describe separation of powers and checks and balances in both theory and practice in Texas.
4. Demonstrate knowledge of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of Texas government.
5. Evaluate the role of public opinion, interest groups, and political parties in Texas.
6. Analyze the state and local election process.
7. Identify the rights and responsibilities of citizens.
8. Analyze issues, policies and political culture of Texas.

Core Objectives for GOVT 2306

1. Critical Thinking Skills: to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information
2. Communication Skills: to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication
3. Social Responsibility: to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities.
4. Personal Responsibility: to include the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making.