

# PSCI 3010: American State and Local Government

Fall, 2025

Monday & Wednesday, 11:00 - 12:20  
Classroom: BLB 073

Instructor: Dr. Yu-hsien Sung (she/her/hers)

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Office: Wooten Hall 166

Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday, 13:00 - 14:30; please use the link to book an appointment.

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## Course Description

This course aims to offer a comprehensive introduction to American state and local government. We will examine how various American states and local governments operate, highlighting similarities and differences across those localities. We have three primary goals in this class. First, this class will provide a basic understanding of what state and local governments are and their powers, responsibilities, and roles within the political system of the United States. Second, it will introduce you to the various branches of political institutions, including legislatures, executives, courts, and bureaucracies, and how they function at the state and local levels. Third, it aims to give students a strong grasp of how these political institutions influence the broader social, political, and economic characteristics of different states and localities in the U.S.

While it is not possible to cover every state and locality in the U.S., our goal is to familiarize students with the comparative method, equipping them with this approach that uses similarities and differences as the basis for systematic explanation. Any two states or localities that you can think of will differ and be similar in a number of ways. Students will learn how variations among states and localities can be used to explain a wide range of political phenomena. Additionally, over the course of the semester, we will explore the diverse challenges and opportunities present in American states.

## Required Materials

- Smith, Kevin and Alan H. Greenblatt. *Governing States and Localities* CQ Press, 2021.
- Supplementary reading will be posted on Canvas.

## Course Objectives

The goal of this course is to expose students to literature on comparative politics. During this semester students will:

1. Identify the ways state and local governments can affect daily life.

2. Identify the three systems of government and how they divide power.
3. Develop skills that allow you to systematically explain the differences between states.

## Course Format

This class is designed as an in-person lecture.

## Canvas

This course has a Canvas site accessible at <https://canvas.unt.edu>. The site includes administrative details, assignments, and student grades. I encourage you to check it regularly.

## Course Expectation

Students are responsible for reading the assigned materials before class, completing assignments and exams in a timely manner, engaging in the course, and maintaining a positive learning environment in the classroom.

## Office Hours

I will hold office hours on Monday and Wednesday from 1:00- 2:30 PM. **Please sign up for office hours in advance using the Calendly link:** <https://calendly.com/yhsien-sung/20min>

## Investigation Assignment (1)

Throughout the semester, I will provide topics that allow students to select different issues and compare why policy variations exist among states. Students submit assignments on Canvas.

## Multiple Choice Assignments (3)

Throughout the semester, students must complete three multiple-choice assignments for each of the assigned chapters in the textbook. These assignments will be posted on Canvas, where you will complete them online.

## Exams (4)

There will be four exams in this course: **Exam 1, 2, 3**, and a cumulative **Final Exam**. Exams will cover material from the main chapters and will consist of 50 multiple-choice and true/false questions designed to assess your understanding of key concepts. You are expected to be familiar with the themes and ideas presented in the assigned readings, lectures, activities, and discussions. To succeed, it is essential to attend class, take thorough notes, and complete all readings and assignments on time.

Make-up exams will only be offered if you have a **documented, university-approved absence**. If you know in advance that you will miss an exam due to a university-excused reason, such as participating in UNT activities or observing religious holidays, you must arrange to take the exam **before** your absence. Without proper documentation of an excused absence, you are required to take the exam as scheduled. If you do have a valid excuse and need to take a make-up exam, you must complete it within one week of the original exam date. However, if you miss an exam due to a non-documented or non-excused reason (e.g., work, oversleeping, traffic, confusion about the exam time, lack of internet access, etc.), you will not be able to make up the exam.

## Grading Policy

Grades will be weighted in the following way:

- **15%** Multiple Choice Assignments
- **60%** Exams (The lowest score out of the four exams will be dropped)
- **15%** Investigation Assignment
- **10%** Attendance

## Late Assignments

Assignments must be submitted on time. Work turned in late without prior notice will incur a **penalty of 5 points per day**. For example, if an assignment is due on August 18 but submitted on August 20, 10 points will be deducted.

In the event of extenuating circumstances (e.g., a family emergency, hospitalization), students may be eligible for a short extension. All such requests must be processed through the Dean of Students' Office (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/dean-of-students/contact.html>). That office is responsible for verifying the nature of the circumstances and will communicate directly with me if accommodations are warranted. I do not grant extensions or make-up opportunities unless I receive official notification from the Dean of Students.

## Important Dates

Due Date	Assignment/Exam
9/3 11:59PM	Multiple Choice Assignment 1
9/22	Exam 1
10/6 11:59PM	Multiple Choice Assignment 2
10/22	Exam 2
11/5 11:59PM	Multiple Choice Assignment 3
11/19	Exam 3
12/3	Investigation Assignment
12/8	Final Exam

## Grading Scale

The grading scale is as follows:

- A = 90 - 100
- B = 80 - 89.99
- C = 70 - 79.99
- D = 60 - 69.99
- F = 59 and below

## Communication

Email is a good way to contact me. Please include "PSCI 3010" in the subject line to make sure that email does not get lost. Allow 24 hours for a response during the week, and 48 hours during the weekend.

**I will NOT discuss grades over email**, so you will need to meet with me to discuss any issues with your grade. This is related to federal law protecting student information. That being said, if you would like to discuss your performance and course grade, you must set up a meeting with me.

Please note that I do not give extra credit to students simply because they are getting a bad grade, as it is not fair to other students. If you do not do well on your assignments or exams, I encourage you to see me for assistance as soon as possible. I am happy to work with you, but it is your responsibility to pay attention to your performance and seek help if you need it.

## Changes to the Course

I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus as needed throughout the semester. Any adjustments to course requirements will be announced in class and on Canvas with at least 48 hours' notice. It is your responsibility to stay informed of any updates during the semester.

## UNT Policies

### Artificial Intelligence and Academic Integrity

In this course, I want you to engage deeply with the materials and develop your own critical thinking and writing skills. For this reason, the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools, e.g., Claude, ChatGPT, and Gemini, is not permitted. While these tools can be helpful in some contexts, they do not align with our goal of fostering the development of your independent thinking. Using GenAI to complete any part of an assignment, exam, or coursework will be considered a violation of academic integrity, as it prevents the development of your own skills, and will be addressed according to the Student Academic Integrity policy.

Additionally, tools like ChatGPT are not allowed as they blur authorship and misrepresent your independent work. All work must be your own.

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

<https://vpaa.unt.edu/ss/integrity>

### Americans with Disabilities Act Statement

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should

be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website at <http://disability.unt.edu/>.

## **Emergency Notification and Procedures**

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to the UNT Learning Management System (LMS) for contingency plans for covering course materials.

## **Acceptable Student Behavior**

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at <https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>.

## **Sexual Discrimination, Harassment, and Assault**

The University has procedures in place that aim to be aware of the needs of those who make an institutional report of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Procedures include informing individuals about their right to file criminal charges as well as the availability of counseling, health, mental health, victim advocacy, legal assistance, visa and immigration assistance and other services on and/or off campus, as well as additional remedies to prevent contact between a complainant and a respondent, such as housing, academic, transportation and working accommodations, if reasonably available. The University will make such accommodations, if the victim requests them and if they are reasonably available, regardless of whether the complainant chooses to report the crime to the UNTPD or local law enforcement.

Anyone can report prohibited conduct by notifying the Dean of Students Office (940.565.2648), the Title IX Coordinator (940.565.2759) or the UNT Police Department (940.565.3000). The online reporting form is found at <http://report.unt.edu>.

## Course Reading and Assignment Schedule:

### Monday, August 18: Course Introduction

- Read the syllabus.
- Purchase the required *Governing States and Localities* textbook.

### Wednesday, August 20: Key Concepts and American State Politics

- Chapter 1
  - The Impact of State and Local Politics on Daily Life
  - The Comparative Method in Practice

### Monday, August 25: Key Concepts and American State Politics

- Chapter 1
  - Basic Differences Among States and Localities
  - Recognizing the Stakes

### Wednesday, August 27: Federalism

- Chapter 2
  - Federalism: The Power Plan
  - System of Power
  - The Advantages and Disadvantages of Federalism

### Monday, September 1: **Labor Day, No Classes**

### Wednesday, September 3: Federalism

- Chapter 2
  - The Development of Federalism
  - The Supreme Court: The Umpire of Federalism
  - Multiple Choice Assignment 1 due September 3 at 11:59 PM.**

### Monday, September 8: Constitutions

- Chapter 3
  - Operating Instructions
  - What State Constitutions Do
  - The Evolution of State Constitutions

### Wednesday, September 10: **No Class**

- Dr. Sung attending the American Political Science Association Annual Conference.

### Monday, September 15: Constitutions

- Chapter 3
  - Formal Constitutional Changes
  - Differences Between State Constitutions

**Wednesday, September 17: Review Day****Monday, September 22: Exam 1**

Exam 1 will be held in class during the regular class period, 11:00 to 12:20 PM.

**Wednesday, September 24: Finance**

- Chapter 4
  - Filling the Till and Paying the Bills
  - Show me the Money

**Monday, September 29: Finance**

- Chapter 4
  - Taxing Variations Among State and Local Governments
  - The Budget Process

**Wednesday, October 1: Political Attitudes and Participation**

- Chapter 5
  - Political Attitudes and Participation
  - The Role of Elections
  - State Supervision of Elections

**Monday, October 6: Political Attitudes and Participation**

- Chapter 5
  - Voting in America
  - What Elections Are Used For
  - Public Opinion
  - Multiple Choice Assignment 2 due October 6 at 11:59 PM.**

**Monday, October 13: Parties and Interest Groups**

- Chapter 6
  - Parties and Interest Groups
  - A Primer on Political Parties
  - The Shape of Contemporary Parties

**Wednesday, October 15: Parties and Interest Groups**

- Chapter 6
  - Parties Competition
  - Third Parties and Independents

**Monday, October 20: Review Day****Wednesday, October 22, Exam 2**

- Exam 2 on Finance, Political Attitudes and Participation, and Parties and Interest Groups.
- Exam 2 will be held in class during the regular class period, 11:00 to 12:20 PM.

**Monday, October 27: Legislatures**

- Chapter 7
  - Legislatures: The Art of Herding Cats
  - The Job of Legislatures

**Wednesday, October 29: Legislatures**

- Chapter 7
  - Organization and Operation of Legislatures
  - State Legislators

**Monday, November 3: Governors and Executives**

- Chapter 8
  - Governors and Executive
  - The Job of Governor
  - The Powers of Governors

**Wednesday, November 5: Governors and Executives**

- Chapter 8
  - Becoming Governor
  - Other Executive Offices
  - Multiple Choice Assignment 3 due November 5 at 11:59 PM.**

**Monday, November 10: Courts**

- Chapter 9
  - Turning Law into Politics
  - The Role and Structure of States Courts

**Wednesday, November 12: Courts**

- Chapter 9
  - Selecting Judges
  - Prosecution and Defense of Cases in State Courts
  - How Courts Are Changing



**Monday, November 17: Review Day**

**Wednesday, November 19: Exam 3**

- Exam 3 on Legislatures, Governors, and Courts.
- Exam will be held in class during the regular class period, 11:00 to 12:20 PM.

**November 24-30: Thanksgiving Break - No Class**

**Monday, December 1: Local Government**

- Chapter 11
  - Municipalities
  - Working within Limits

**Wednesday, December 3, Review Day**

**Monday, December 8, Final Exam 10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.**