

POS 2112 State and Local Government and Politics

Instructor: Dr. Christopher Olds

Meeting Time: Online asynchronous

Credit: 3 units, letter grade (including +/- modifiers)

Classroom: Canvas online learning management system

Office Hours: M 4:30 to 7:30 p.m., and by appointment via Skype or GIA office

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Specific Goals of the Course

The primary goal of this course is to introduce students to the mechanics of how state and local governments operate in the United States. In examining the variation in the structure of, and the behavior exhibited by state and local political systems across the country, students will learn reasons as to why all of this variation exists. In addition, students will be able to explain the implications of this variation on political decision-making. Students should gain a greater sense as to the opportunities that individual citizens have to influence state and local political systems. Useful skills that will serve you well in the future will be developed:

- the ability to think critically about differing viewpoints by evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of evidence
- the ability to communicate your ideas in a clear way in audiovisual and written formats
- the ability to perform extended research of multiple sources to concisely summarize what is currently known about a topic

Course Objectives

As the instructor of this course, I expect that my students at the end of the course will:

1. Be able to define and evaluate concepts pertaining to state and local government in the United States.
2. Be able to analyze the factors that help explain how and why state and local governments function in unique ways.
3. Be able to assess how state and local political systems originated and have evolved over time.
4. Be able to communicate to others with precision and clarity about contemporary controversies regarding state and local political systems in the United States.
5. Be able to review, analyze, and connect preexisting research in a useful and coherent way.
6. Be able to express arguments rooted in substantive evidence.
7. Be able to respectfully and intelligently critique arguments made by others.
8. Be able to develop concise essays that are thorough, focused, and informative for readers.
9. Be able to use technology to visually and verbally communicate your ideas to others with precision and clarity.

USF Statement on Academic Accommodations for a Disability

Students in need of academic accommodations for a disability may consult with the Office of Students with Disabilities Services (SDS) to arrange appropriate accommodations. Students are required to give reasonable

notice prior to requesting an accommodation.

Note: The Americans with Disabilities Act is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides 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 an accommodation, please contact USF Student Disability Services as soon as possible.

Academic Honesty

◇ Any handouts used in this course are copyrighted. Handouts means all materials generated for this class, which include, but are not limited to: syllabi, notes, essay prompts, and review sheets. Because these materials are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy the handouts unless the instructor expressly grants permission.

◇ Lectures cannot be recorded, unless special accommodations for disability are required.

◇ Lecture notes may not be sold. Lecture slides may not be distributed outside of Canvas.

◇ No form of academic dishonesty (cheating, plagiarism, etc.) will be tolerated. As commonly defined, plagiarism consists of passing off as one's own the ideas, words, writings, etc., which belong to another. In accordance with this definition, you are committing plagiarism if you copy the work of another person and turn it in as your own, even if you have permission of that person. This includes copying material from books, reports, journals, pamphlets, handouts, other publications, web sites, etc., without giving appropriate credit for those ideas and/or without identifying material as quotations when taken directly from another source.

◇ Students should complete USF's on-line plagiarism tutorial, which may be found at:

<http://davon.etg.usf.edu/share/plagiarism/>

◇ Violation of these rules, even if you unintentionally violate them, can result in disciplinary action including a grade penalty (an FF in the course), suspension, dismissal, and expulsion from USF. If you have any questions regarding plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty, please consult the relevant sections of the USF student catalogs, and/or ask me for further explanation.

USF Writing Center

For free assistance with written assignments and class projects, an appropriate option is to make an appointment at the USF Writing Center, which is located inside the main library. The Writing Center is comprised of people trained in writing and communication, and can assist with strategies for developing and researching topics, writing drafts, organizing ideas, and revising assignments.

For more information about the Writing Center, to make an appointment, or for online writing resources, please go to <http://usf.edu/writing/>.

USF Statement on Emergencies

In the event of an emergency, it may be necessary for USF to suspend normal operations. During this time, USF may opt to continue delivery of instruction through methods that include but are not limited to: Canvas, email messaging and/or an alternate schedule. It is the responsibility of the student to monitor the Canvas site for each class for course specific communication, as well as the main USF website, emails, and MoBull messages for important general information.

Note: Examples of an emergency could be a hurricane, tornado, institution-wide power outage, etc.

Course Format

The course is focused heavily on student participation. Active learning is a major emphasis in my approach to teaching. A major portion of class is devoted to class discussion that will occur in the discussion forum section of the Canvas learning management system. A positive environment is a good learning environment, and is especially important in a course with little face-to-face interaction between students and the instructor. Students must show respect to their peers and the instructor at all times.

Since we will be engaging in discussion about controversial political topics through the online forum, you will in all likelihood encounter a statement you disagree with. Regardless, you must not belittle, shout down, insult, or mock another person for their position. Doing so can lead to a person's dismissal from the course. The goal of the course is not for you to spout off your ideological views about different political topics. This is a political science course, not a politics course. The goal of the course is to encourage everyone to think in an impartial and critical way about state and local government. The focus of the discussion is on state and local government in the United States.

Grades

Grades will be based on your performance in four assignments. Students can earn one hundred points in this course. Please note that this is a course where extra credit assignments are not made available. Your grades will reflect your performance on the four assigned tasks only. Please note that weekly participation in the course is essential, as a substantial portion of the grade is devoted to the quality and frequency of engagement in the discussion forum. Since the course is asynchronous, students are obviously expected to be diligent and exercise effective time management when completing tasks for the class. Every assignment is intended to demonstrate an individual student's mastery of the materials, so you are not allowed to collaborate on assignments or submit an assignment as a group.

Due to the nature of the class, late assignments are not accepted unless a note from an appropriate source confirms a university excused reason for the work needing to be submitted late. **Students must provide legitimate documentation for any instance where a student will not meet an assignment deadline that meets university guidelines for a permissible absence. This documentation must be provided the same business week of the absence. Documentation can be left in the GIA department main office and should be time-stamped by a GIA office worker.**

Please note that in the first week of class, there is a syllabus quiz that requires completion. A student has three tries to get a perfect score on the syllabus quiz. If a student does not take the quiz, or does not get a perfect score after the allotted three tries, the student will be dropped from the class. The student must have completed the syllabus quiz with a perfect score before Friday at 5 p.m. EST of the first week of classes. The score on the quiz does not count toward the final grade calculation. Students must also participate in the "Introducing Yourself" discussion during the first week of classes. Failing to participate as specified in the directions of the discussion thread will result in the student being dropped from the course. No student who either fails to complete the syllabus quiz or discussion participation in the first week as directed will be granted a late add after they have been dropped.

All assignments are submitted over Canvas. Only submit assignments via email in those rare instances where Canvas is down and inaccessible. Turning in assignments after the due date and saying Canvas was down when you tried to turn it in is not acceptable.

Item #1: Class Discussion Participation (52 points, 4 points each possible for thirteen discussion threads)

Students will be expected to write a brief three to five paragraph analysis of the discussion question raised for the week, and post their entry in the discussion thread for that specific week. There will be thirteen graded discussion questions over the course of the semester. Students must post their individual analysis by Wednesday at 11:59 p.m. EST. **Students will not earn credit for submitting their analysis after this**

deadline. Every individual student is expected to reply to the entries made by at least three other students in the class, respond to the comments other students make about your own entry, as well as comments from the instructor or the teaching assistant if they arise. The replies to your classmates, the instructor, and the teaching assistant are due by Sunday at 11:59 p.m. EST. **Students will not earn credit for submitting their replies to others after this deadline.** Ignore when Canvas says there is no due date to the discussion; since there are two different due dates within a single thread, Canvas itself cannot recognize this. Please follow the due dates listed here in the syllabus.

Each comment should be substantive, and be written with formal spelling, grammar, and punctuation. All posts in the discussion forum must engage with the course materials, in particular, the course reading. You will not receive full credit if you refuse to analyze the course reading. Evaluate the course materials in your own words (do not rely on direct quotes from the reading), and do not rely on outside sources. Up to four points can be earned each week for this assignment, with the number of points determined by whether each post makes a contribution to the overall discussion, engages with the course materials, and follows the formatting guidelines specified here.

Do not wait until the last minute to submit your contributions to the discussion, as that limits the ability for everyone to converse with each other. Please note that for each discussion thread, people are randomly assigned into smaller discussion groups to encourage an easier to manage discussion.

Participation in the discussion threads is essential. Since the class is broken down into smaller groups, not participating hurts not only yourself, but the ability of other students to participate. If a student does not participate at all and does not provide a post in three discussion threads over the course of the semester, the student will automatically receive an F as the final grade for the entire class.

Item #2: Roper Center Survey Evaluation (15 points)

For this assignment, the student will evaluate the responses to a survey question about any topic discussed in the course pertaining to state and local politics. The USF Library hosts the Roper Center Public Opinion Archives. Through this resource, students will search for a survey question regarding one of the topics discussed in the course (e.g. term limits of state legislators, federalism, executive powers of governors, ballot initiatives and referendums, etc.). Once a question is selected, students will perform a write-up about the demographic breakdown of responses to that question. In this paper, students should discuss why this particular survey question is relevant to one of the topics discussed in the course. There should be a discussion about the specific survey group/organization the survey question comes from, the time period in which the survey information was collected, and the number of respondents to the question. It is expected that there is a breakdown of responses to the question along demographic categories using the iPoll+ feature of the Roper Center online repository. There should be a discussion of whether the student thinks any of the survey findings are surprising or unique given what they were exposed to in the assigned course materials. The length of the paper should be about three to four pages.

Students must type the dataset analysis in a word-processing computer program and follow specific formatting rules (12-pt. Times New Roman font, double spaced, and one inch margins on all sides). Microsoft Word .doc files are preferred. Students will be expected to avoid frequent spelling and grammatical errors when writing their evaluation. The student should cite any academic resources used by following the citation guidelines presented in the American Political Science Association Style Manual. **Every dataset analysis assignment must be checked for academic integrity by submitting the work to TurnItIn's plagiarism monitor via Canvas.** Refer to the class calendar at the end of the syllabus for due date.

Note: If you are in another one of my courses this semester, you are not allowed to submit the same dataset analysis for multiple classes.

The scoring of this assignment is based on the following (out of 15 points possible)

- 4 Points: The student clearly states the actual survey question they selected, and provides an explanation

for why they believe that question is relevant to one of the topics discussed in the course materials about state and/or local government

- 3 Points: The student provides relevant background information about the dataset the survey question is derived from
- 4 Points: The student describes the breakdown of responses to the survey question along major population demographic categories, and also describes if any set of responses confirms or contradicts information presented in any of the course materials (either lectures or readings)
- 4 Points: The writing has an easy to follow structure (introduction-body-conclusion). The student avoids frequent spelling and grammatical errors

Item #3: Digital Presentation (18 points)

In this project, students will create a digital presentation that elaborates upon the subject matter of one of the 35 chapters in the *State and Local Government: 2014-2015 Edition* book. The student must produce the content themselves (e.g. provide their own narration, use their own words in the presentation and not those words written/spoken by someone else, etc.). The digital presentation can be an audio only podcast, or an audiovisual short film. In the presentation, the student will summarize what are the fundamental issues or concerns discussed in the specific chapter they selected, why they found the chapter to be of interest, and chronicle what scholarly sources and research organizations have to say about the subject matter. In the discussion, the student will cover what aspects they found the most interesting in their research of other academic sources about the topic. The length of the digital presentation should be around six to ten minutes. A good tool to find academic sources is the Google Scholar feature in the USF Library website. If the USF Library website does not have the material, you can request that they can acquire it for you from another library for free. When using the Google Scholar feature of the USF Library website, some good sources to start from include the following:

- Journal named *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*
- Journal named *State and Local Government Review*
- Journal named *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*
- Journal named *Local Government Studies*
- Journal named *Urban Affairs Review*
- Journal named *Legislative Studies Quarterly*

Some organization websites that present research information worth exploring include the following (click on name to reach the website directly)

- Website named Initiative & Referendum Institute at the University of Southern California
- Website named Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
- Website named National Conference of State Legislatures
- Website named The Council of State Governments Presents Knowledge Center
- Website named The Pew Charitable Trusts Presents Stateline
- Website named National Center for State Courts
- Website named National Institute on Money in State Politics

There are many free options to record and post an audio only podcast, such as Chirbit, Clyp, or SoundCloud. More about these resources can be found on Google. There are a variety of options in terms of producing a free audiovisual short film, such as WeVideo or PowToon. Students can also check out materials from, or use programs housed in USF's Digital Media Commons located in the USF Library. The website for the digital media commons is located at the following address: <http://www.lib.usf.edu/digital-studio/>

All submissions must include a link that works to a page hosting the finished project (such as a SoundCloud page with playable audio, or a YouTube page with a playable film). It is the responsibility of the student to post their project in its finished state at the time of the deadline. If the student does not provide a working link to the project at the time of the deadline, they cannot receive credit for the assignment. It is essential that the student checks that the link they submit is to a digital presentation that can be played.

The scoring of this assignment is based on the following (out of 18 points possible)

- 6 Points: The student provides a through summary of the key aspects/considerations regarding the subject matter of the chapter they selected. The student offers details of what various research sources have said about the subject matter. The student contrasts what the research sources say on the subject matter to what was discussed in the original chapter. The student cites the research sources used in the presentation
- 6 Points: The student provides audio and/or visual content that is clear to follow, easy to understand, and does not use the words of others. Everything is presented in the student's own words
- 6 Points: The student provides sufficient detail in their presentation, such that the length of the presentation is around six to ten minutes in length. The content of the overall presentation is appropriate for an academic course

Item #4: Analytical Essays (15 points)

For this assignment, students will be presented with prompts that they have several days to complete. The essays are open note and open book, but you cannot collaborate with anyone in completing the responses. All papers must be typed in a word-processing computer program and follow specific formatting rules (12-pt. Times New Roman font, double spaced, and one inch margins on all sides). Microsoft Word .doc files are preferred. Students will be expected to avoid frequent spelling and grammatical errors when writing their papers. The student should cite all course resources used when constructing responses using citation guidelines presented in the American Political Science Association Style Manual. **Every submission must be checked for academic integrity by submitting the assignment to TurnItIn's plagiarism monitor via Canvas.**

Refer to the class calendar at the end of the syllabus for distribution and due date for the analytical essays. Each separate prompt should be answered in their own separate essay. Each essay must take the form of a traditional essay, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Essays will be graded for accuracy, clarity, appropriate usage of course materials, and adherence to stylistic guidelines.

Final grades are out of one hundred points possible-

Grade Score

A+= 98.6-100

A = 91.5-98.5

A-= 90.0-91.4

B+= 88.6-89.9

B = 81.5-88.5

B-= 80.0-81.4

C+= 78.6-79.9

C = 71.5-78.5

C-= 70.0-71.4

D+= 68.6-69.9

D = 61.5-68.5

D-= 60.0-61.4

F = 59.9 or less

FF= Academic dishonesty

Grade Appeals: If a student has an issue with the grade they earned for one of the assignments, the student must write a one-page explanation describing what aspect or aspects the evaluation missed. A twenty-four hour cooling off period is required, meaning you cannot submit an appeal within the first twenty-four hours after you receive an assignment grade. The written appeal can only be submitted between the second and fourth day after you receive an assignment back. Please note that if you submit a grade appeal, the work can potentially be scored lower than the initial grade if the second review of the assignment suggests there are additional issues or problems with the assignment. Appeals should be submitted via e-mail.

Course Materials

There are two texts that are required. These books are frequently discounted on online sites like Amazon.com. They can also be rented.

Moncrief, Gary, and Peverill Squire. 2013. *Why States Matter: An Introduction to State Politics*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Smith, Kevin B., and Jayme L. Neiman, eds. 2015. *State and Local Government: 2014-2015 Edition*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

The specified version of this book must be acquired, and not any prior version. Prior versions are totally different, and do not include the overwhelming majority of the material included in this version of the book.

Reading Schedule

Week One - Introduction to the Class and Getting to Know Each Other

No readings

Week Two - Federalism and Intergovernmental Relations

- *Why States Matter: An Introduction to State Politics* Chapters 1 and 2

Week Three - Federalism and Intergovernmental Relations continued

- *State and Local Government: 2014-2015 Edition* Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4

Week Four - The Policymaking Environment: A General Overview

- *Why States Matter: An Introduction to State Politics* Chapters 3 and 4

Week Five - The Policymaking Environment: Legislatures

- *State and Local Government: 2014-2015 Edition* Chapters 14, 15, and 16

Week Six - The Policymaking Environment: Executives

- *State and Local Government: 2014-2015 Edition* Chapters 17, 18, and 19

Week Seven - The Policymaking Environment: Courts

- *State and Local Government: 2014-2015 Edition* Chapters 20, 21, and 22

Week Eight - The Policymaking Environment: Bureaucracies

- *State and Local Government: 2014-2015 Edition* Chapters 23, 24, and 25

Week Nine - Policy Challenges

- *Why States Matter: An Introduction to State Politics* Chapter 5

Week Ten - Policy Challenges continued

- *State and Local Government: 2014-2015 Edition* Chapters 32, 33, 34, and 35

Week Eleven - Elections, Parties, and Interest Groups

- *Why States Matter: An Introduction to State Politics* Chapter 6

- *State and Local Government: 2014-2015 Edition* Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9

Week Twelve - Elections, Parties, and Interest Groups continued

- *State and Local Government: 2014-2015 Edition* Chapters 10, 11, 12, and 13

Week Thirteen - Fiscal Systems: Budgets and Taxes

- *Why States Matter: An Introduction to State Politics* Chapter 7
- *State and Local Government: 2014-2015 Edition* Chapters 29, 30, and 31

Week Fourteen - Local Government In Depth

- *State and Local Government: 2014-2015 Edition* Chapters 26, 27, and 28

Week Fifteen - Wrapping Things Up

- *Why States Matter: An Introduction to State Politics* Chapter 8

Class Calendar of Important Dates of Graded Assignments

- February 15 Item #2 Due at 11:59 p.m. EST on Canvas (Roper Center Survey Evaluation)
- March 22 Item #3 Due at 11:59 p.m. on Canvas (Digital Presentation)
- April 20 Item #4 Distributed on Canvas (Analytical Essays)
- April 24 Item #4 Due at 11:59 p.m. on Canvas (Analytical Essays)

Syllabus subject to change at instructor's discretion