

POLS 212: State Government

Fall 2009

Tues/Thurs 3:30-4:45pm

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### **Course Description**

The United States is quite remarkable in the world for the extent to which our political system is decentralized and for the amount of governmental power that is placed in the hands of sub-national actors. State governments are often far “closer to the people” than the federal government, making countless decisions that directly affect their residents – but where these decisions can make life very different depending on which side of a state border one lives. Moreover, the role of the states has increased over the past 20 years as devolution has been embraced by both political parties. However, Americans tend to know very little about the states and how they work.

This course will provide an overview of the operation of America's federal system and of the politics, institutions, and policies of state (and local) governments. Through comparative analysis, we will examine the tremendous diversity that exists within and between states, and aim to explain *why* states have chosen to govern themselves in different ways. And in all cases, we will keep a close eye on how these political and institutional differences affect policy choices, in turn affecting the lives of citizens in very real ways.

### **Course Requirements**

*Grading:*

40% - Papers

20% - Midterm

25% - Final

10% - Participation

5% - Map quiz

*Map quiz:*

We will routinely use individual states as examples in our discussions, and it is important to have a basic context for where these states are located. For example, for reasons we will discuss, the region in which a state is located often shapes many of its policy decisions. We will therefore have a short map quiz on **Thursday, September 3**, in which you will have to fill in the names of a certain number of states on a blank map.

*Exams:*

The midterm will be in-class on **Thursday, October 15**. The final exam will be held at the time appointed by the registrar in December. The final will largely cover material from the second half of the semester, but there will be one over-arching essay question that requires knowledge of material from the entire semester.

If you miss an exam, the grade is automatically a “0,” unless you have been excused by the professor (the only valid excuses are medical emergencies and deaths in the family, both of which require documented evidence of the situation). If you know in advance that you absolutely have to miss an exam, consult with the professor at least one week in advance and you will be able to take the test *before* the scheduled test date.

*Papers:*

You will be required to write two papers for this course. Each must be 4-6 pages long (double-spaced). Both papers require research, although much of this will come from the Internet and current media sources, including state newspapers. (See a librarian for help using Nexis or some other media search engine if you are unfamiliar with this.) You will receive further guidance on grading standards and research resources at a later date. **Hard copies (not email attachments) of all papers must be submitted to me.**

*Memo 1 (20% of grade): Due Thurs, Oct 1.* Choose any two states. (Hint: Choose your states at the start of the semester and start following in-state media sources immediately.) Write a short paper including the following:

- Why did you choose these two states? Are they similar or different, and how so? Why would they make an interesting comparison? Justify your selections.
- General background: Describe the states’ institutions, demographics, and political culture. These are features that rarely change over time. For example, what are the two legislatures like? Governors? Interest groups? Parties? Who seems to have the most power? What are the regional dynamics that affect state government? How would you describe state residents in terms of racial composition, urbanity, education levels, age, immigrant status, wealth? The key here is to make explicit comparisons between the two states.
- Current situation: Describe the current political environment. Which party is currently in power in each state? Why? How have the electorates voted in national elections? Which political issues are particularly salient today?

*Memo 2 (20% of grade): Due Thurs, Dec 3.* Looking at the same states as memo 1, choose a specific policy issue that is currently being debated in one of the following areas: the economy, education, social welfare, or health care. Discuss the following:

- Background: Where does the policy currently stand in each state? Who can change policy? Why is it a hot button issue today?
- What are the main divisions on the issue in each state? What do the different sides want? How does the current situation differ from the historical layout?
- What do you recommend be done? How likely would this outcome be, given the different political forces involved? What would be the consequences if your idea became reality? How might the situation differ in each state because of different institutions, culture, etc.?

*Participation:*

The success of this class will depend partly on your willingness to participate in discussions. You are expected to contribute to these discussions, and will be graded accordingly. (If voluntary contributions are insufficient, I reserve the right to call on students randomly.) If you are uncomfortable speaking in a group setting, I will consider one-on-one discussions with me regarding course material as an appropriate substitute.

In our discussions, feel free to disagree with me, the readings, or with your classmates, but this must always be done in a manner appropriate for a classroom environment. Rude comments will not be tolerated. In addition, this is not an opportunity to get on an ideological soapbox. Opinions should be backed up by facts and justified intellectually.

In all units, we will draw many examples from contemporary state politics and policy. I expect that all students will follow news about the states closely and make connections between our academic reading/discussions and news reports about actual events. In particular, I would like for all of us to draw connections between our class discussions and readings and what is happening in Illinois. For this reason, we will start most classes with a short discussion about what has happened in state politics since our last class meeting. **These discussions are fair game on exams.**

You are adults, and once I know your names I may not take formal attendance at every class meeting (although I will decide to see who is there on random class days). I trust, however, that enough important information will be conveyed during class time that repeated absences will be reflected in your exam and paper grades. Also note that actually being present in class is necessary for a good participation grade.

This course assumes a certain amount of background knowledge on the American political system. It is your responsibility to fill in the gaps of your knowledge. If you don't understand something, LOOK IT UP. (Hint: Wikipedia may be a *terrible* resource for research papers, but it can be the quickest and easiest way to get up to speed on a particular term or concept.) You can also always come to me for help.

**Academic Honesty:**

Cheating and plagiarism (a form of cheating) will not be tolerated. You must write your own papers and your own exams. Any student caught cheating will receive a failing grade in the class and be referred to the administration for disciplinary actions. Keep in mind that the technology that allows students to retrieve papers from the Internet also allows instructors to find those papers.

It would be a good idea to familiarize yourself with university policies on this.

**Special Needs:**

If you need any special accommodations for this course must be registered with the Office of Disability Services (ODS). You can contact them at 312.413.2183. Please also let me know in person or by email at the start of the semester so that appropriate accommodations may be made.

## Required Readings:

- Donovan, Todd, Christopher Z. Mooney, and Daniel A. Smith (DMS). 2009. State and Local Politics: Institutions and Reform. Centage Press. (*Available at bookstore.*)
- Pensoneau, Taylor. 2006. Powerhouse: Arrington from Illinois. Baltimore: American Literary Press. (*Provided by department – no need to purchase.*)
- Course readings (available online, either through direct web links or through Blackboard)

## Schedule:

*Required readings appear beside the bullet points and must be read by the corresponding date.*

Week 1: Why study the states? How do we study the states?

- Tuesday, Aug 25: Course intro
- Thurs: Aug 27: Explaining and exploring state variation
  - DMS, Chapter 1

Week 2: Federalism

- Tues, Sept 1 – Origins
  - DMS, Chapter 2
  - Comparison of Articles of Confederation and Constitution:  
<http://www.usconstitution.net/constconart.html>
  - Federalist Papers 9, 46
- Thurs, Sept 3—Contemporary debates about federalism: still appropriate? **(MAP QUIZ)**
  - “Dog-Whistling Dixie,” David Greenberg (<http://www.slate.com/id/2178379/>)
  - Review the Current Events blog from the Tenth Amendment Center (<http://www.tenthamendmentcenter.com/category/current-events/>). Come to class prepared to discuss two specific issues brought up on the blog.

Week 3: Elections and Representation

- Tues, Sept 8: Elections
  - DMS, Chapter 3
  - Demos, “Democracy Denied” <http://archive.demos.org/pubs/FD - Brief.pdf>
- Thurs, Sept 10: Direct Democracy
  - DMS, Chapter 4
  - “Californians and the Initiative Process,”  
[http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/jtf/JTF\\_InitiativeJTF.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/jtf/JTF_InitiativeJTF.pdf)

Week 4: Political Parties

- Tues, Sept 15: Parties and Divided Govt
  - DMS, Chapter 5
- Thurs, Sept 17: Third Parties

- Gold, Howard J. 2005. "Explaining third-party success in gubernatorial elections: The cases of Alaska, Connecticut, Maine and Minnesota." *The Social Science Journal*, Volume 42, Issue 4. Pages 523-540.
- James Rogers. 2005. "The Impact of Divided Government on Legislative Production." *Public Choice* Vol 123, No 1-2 (April): 217-233.

Week 5: Interest Groups

- Tues, Sept 22
  - DMS, Chapter 6
- Thurs, Sept 24
  - Examination of web sites of prominent state interest groups (specifics TBD)

Week 6: Structure of state governments: governors

- Tues, Sept 29
  - DMS, Chapter 8
- Thurs, Oct 1: Case study on Blago (**DEADLINE FOR MEMO #1**)
  - "Governor Gone Wild: The Blagojevich Scandal," Michael Scherer (<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1865781,00.html>)
  - *Guest speaker Tom Alexander*

Week 7: Structure of state governments: legislatures

- Tues, Oct 6:
  - DMS, Chapter 7
- Thurs, Oct 8: Term limits
  - Kousser (2008), "Term Limits and State Legislatures," in Democracy in the States: Experiments in Election Reform, edited by Tolbert, Donovan, and Cain.

Week 8: Structure of state governments: the courts

- Tues, Oct 13
  - DMS, Chapter 9
- Thurs, Oct 15 – **MIDTERM EXAM**

Week 9: Illinois state politics

- Tues, Oct 20
  - Pensoneau, Foreward, Chs 6,7,10,12,13
- Thurs, Oct 22
  - Pensoneau, Chs 15,16

Week 10: Illinois politics (continued)

- Tues, Oct 27
  - Pensoneau, Chs 17, 18, 20
- Thurs, Oct 29:

- Pensoneau, Chs 21-24

Week 11: Local and city politics

- Tues, Nov 3
  - DMS, Chapter 11
- Thurs, Nov 5: Chicago
  - Dick Simpson, *Rogues, Rebels, and Rubberstamps*, pp. 247-290 (on reserve)

Week 12: Fiscal and morality policy

- Tues, Nov 10 – Fiscal policy
  - DMS, Chapter 10
- Thurs, Nov 12 – Morality policy
  - DMS, Chapter 13

Week 13: Education policy

- Tues, Nov 17: Education policy
  - DMS, Chapter 15
- Thurs, Nov 19: Education policy cont.
  - Paul Fain, “At Public Universities: Less for More,” *NY Times* October 26, 2009:  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/01/education/edlife/01public-t.html?\\_r=2&ref=education&pagewanted=print](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/01/education/edlife/01public-t.html?_r=2&ref=education&pagewanted=print)

Week 14: Social welfare policy

- Tues, Nov 24
  - DMS, Chapter 14 (to page 467)
- Thurs, Nov 26 (*no classes*)

Week 15: Health care policy

- Tues, Dec 1
  - DMS, Chapter 14 (467-477)
  - Alan Weil, “There’s Something About Medicaid,” *Health Affairs*, Volume 22, Number 1 (Jan/Feb 2003): 13-30.
  - “State Coverage Models No Help for Uneasy Insurance Industry”  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/07/health/policy/07plan.html?hpw>
- Thurs, Dec 3 – GOVERNER EDGAR (**DEADLINE FOR MEMO #2**)

**FINAL EXAM**