

POLS 212: State Government

Fall 2010

Tues/Thurs 12:30-1:45pm BSB367

Professor: Dr. Nicole Kazee

Office: 1108D, BSB

Email: nkazee@uic.edu

Office phone: 312.413.2186

Office hours: Tues 2:00-3:30pm, or by appointment

Course Description

You probably don't know very much about how your state government works. Let me guess – you probably don't care very much, either.

If this describes you – and it describes most Americans – there are two big reasons why you should make a point to get to know your state government. First, state governments play a huge role in your day to day life. Want to know why your pack of cigarettes costs more than the same pack in North Dakota? Why someone on a teacher's salary can get Medicaid (government health care) for her kids in Minnesota, but not in Indiana? Why college tuition for public universities is so much higher in Florida than in Pennsylvania? Why a big corporation can write a huge check to support a candidate in Illinois, but not in Wisconsin? Ask your state legislators. In fact, state governments in the U.S. often have more influence on the things we care about than the national government. This makes this country unique in the world.

The second reason is that state governments are far closer to the people than national government. This means there are substantial opportunities to have an effect on your state government. Your state representatives often live pretty close to you, and they're not constantly running off to D.C. You can schedule face-to-face meetings with them. You can get jobs working for them. If you plan a boycott or a protest, they're pretty likely to hear about it, and they're pretty likely to care.

This course will provide an overview of the operation of America's federal system and of the politics, institutions, and policies of state governments. Although there are a lot of parallels between state governments and the national government, there are a lot of differences that have big consequences. And the truth is that states can be downright weird in the way they work. These are things we should understand.

This is not a course about Illinois government. However, over the course of the semester we'll constantly be asking ourselves this question: how does IL compare with other states? We can't really understand our own state without knowing how it's different. You'll be surprised at some of the things you'll learn – and amazed that you never knew these things were happening in your back yard all along.

Course Requirements

Grading:

25% - Paper

25% - Final exam

25% - Midterm exam

10% - Spotlight discussion

15% - Participation

Exams (25% each):

The midterm will be in-class on **Thursday, October 14**. 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.

Paper (25%):

You will be required to write a 5-6 page paper (double-spaced) for this course. The paper will require research, although much of this will come from the Internet and current media sources, including state newspapers. 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.**

Due Thurs, Dec 2 (the last day of class). Topic: Choose a specific policy issue that is currently being debated in one of the following areas: the economy, education, social welfare, morality, or health care. Then choose any two states. (*Hint: Choose your topic and your states at the start of the semester and start following in-state media sources immediately.*) Write a short paper including the following:

- Where does the policy currently stand in each state? What is the history (i.e., when were there important changes in the policy)?
- What are the main divisions on the issue in each state? What do the different sides want? Has this changed over time?
- Why do you think these two states differ on the issue? Is it because their institutions are different? Their cultures? Think about anything that might matter here: immigrant population, education levels, average state income, partisanship, ideology, particular charismatic leaders, etc.
- 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?

Spotlight Discussions (10%):

Throughout the semester, there will be three “spotlight discussions.” These are times when the class will discuss an issue and students will take turns being in the “spotlight.” This means that you must

choose your topic (you'll sign up ahead of time on blackboard for a particular topic), do a bit of background research, explain it to the class, and talk about why it's important.

In these discussions, I will first ask for volunteers who wish to talk about their topics. Then, if there are no more volunteers, I will call on students randomly. This means you will need to be prepared for all of the spotlight discussions, even though you will only need to participate once over the course of the semester.

You will be graded when you are in the spotlight. Your grade will depend on your ability to explain your issue clearly, identify why it's important in light of what we've already talked about in class, and give and defend an opinion on some aspect of it.

Participation (15%):

The success of this class will depend on class attendance and your willingness to participate actively in discussions. I will be taking attendance every week. It's not enough to come to class regularly – you must also contribute to the discussions sometimes. Also, if you miss class (even if your absence is excused) you are still responsible for finding out what was covered. Remember, all lectures are fair game on the exams.

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 and will reduce your participation grade. In addition, this is not an opportunity to get on an ideological soapbox. Opinions should be backed up by facts and justified intellectually.

This class is very tied to current events, and for that reason I expect you all to follow state news closely. We will start most classes with a short discussion about what has happened in state government since our last class meeting. **These discussions are also fair game on the exams.**

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.

Just so we're clear: plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas and calling them your own) is cheating.

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 you 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.

Email Policy:

You are encouraged to email me at any time. However, there is a protocol for this. Be careful that you use proper salutation. In the case of this course and most university courses, that is as simple as “Hello Professor _____” or “Hi Dr. _____.”

The proper form of address for university instructors, unless otherwise specified, is Professor or Dr. (the latter is best for those of us holding doctoral degrees, which is most of us). Please do not send me email addressed to Ms., Mrs., or Miss Kazez. In some contexts that’s perfectly polite, but not in a university setting. (And anyway, those make me think of my mom, and while she would be happy to share embarrassing stories about me, she does not teach this class.)

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. Schedule is subject to change.

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

- Tuesday, Aug 24: Course intro
- Thurs: Aug 26: Explaining and exploring state variation
 - DMS (textbook), Chapter 1

Week 2: Federalism

- Tues, Aug 31 – Origins
 - DMS, Chapter 2
 - Comparison of Articles of Confederation and Constitution:
<http://www.usconstitution.net/constconart.html>
 - Federalist Papers 9, 46: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/fed.asp.
- Thurs, Sept 2 – Contemporary debates about federalism: still appropriate?
 - SPOTLIGHT DISCUSSION #1: Contemporary controversies of federalism.
Review the Current Events blog from the Tenth Amendment Center

<http://www.tenthamentcenter.com/category/current-events/>). Come to class prepared to discuss one issue of federalism brought up on the blog.

Week 3: Elections and Representation

- Tues, Sept 7: Elections
 - DMS, Chapter 3
 - Something about IL elections or midterms in general (reading TBD)
- Thurs, Sept 9: Direct Democracy
 - DMS, Chapter 4

Week 4: Redistricting and Political Parties

- Tues, Sept 14: Redistricting
 - Case study on League of Women Voters attempt to get redistricting reform on IL ballot (readings TBA)
 - “With 2012 in Mind, Parties Focus on Governorships,” NY Times:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/10/us/politics/10govs.html?hp>
- Thurs, Sept 16: Parties
 - DMS, Chapter 5

Week 5: Parties (cont.) and Interest Groups

- Tues, Sept 21: Divided Government and 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.
- Thurs, Sept 23: Interest Groups
 - DMS, Chapter 6

Week 6: Structure of state governments: legislatures

- Tues, Sept 28
 - DMS, Chapter 7
- Thurs, Sept 30: GUEST SPEAKER: REP. ELAINE NEKRITZ

Week 7: Structure of state governments: governors

- Tues, Oct 5:
 - DMS, Chapter 8
- Thurs, Oct 7: 2010 Governor’s Races
 - SPOTLIGHT DISCUSSION #2: Come prepared to talk about one governor’s election (other than the one in Illinois)

Week 8: Structure of state governments: the courts

- Tues, Oct 12
 - DMS, Chapter 9
- Thurs, Oct 14 – **MIDTERM EXAM**

Week 9: Illinois state politics

- Tues, Oct 19
 - Pensoneau, Foreward, Chs 6,7,10,12,13
- Thurs, Oct 21
 - Pensoneau, Chs 15,16

Week 10: Illinois politics (continued)

- Tues, Oct 26
 - Pensoneau, Chs 17, 18, 20
- Thurs, Oct 28
 - Pensoneau, Chs 21-24
 - Election preview

Week 11: Election results, Illinois corruption

- Tues, Nov 2: Is Illinois really more corrupt than other states?
 - Read a section of book on IL corruption
- Thurs, Nov 4: Election outcomes
 - SPOTLIGHT DISCUSSION #3: Come prepared to talk about one race that you think was interesting or important for some reason and what the outcome is likely to mean

Week 12: Fiscal and morality policy

- Tues, Nov 9 – Fiscal policy
 - DMS, Chapter 10
- Thurs, Nov 11 – Morality policy
 - DMS, Chapter 13

Week 13: Education policy

- Tues, Nov 16: Education policy
 - DMS, Chapter 15
- Thurs, Nov 18: Higher education policy
 - 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

Week 14: Social welfare policy

- Tues, Nov 23
 - DMS, Chapter 14 (to page 467)
- Thurs, Nov 25 (*no classes*)

Week 15: Health care policy

- Tues, Nov 30
 - DMS, Chapter 14 (467-477)
 - Kazez, “Health Reform: What Next for State Governments,” 2010. Available at http://igpa.uillinois.edu/system/files/documents/PF224_final.pdf
 - Article about states rejecting federal reform (TBA)
- Thurs, Dec 2 – Health care policy cont. **(DEADLINE FOR MEMO)**

FINAL EXAM AT DATE/TIME ASSIGNED BY THE UNIVERSITY