



**POLS 212:
State Politics, Spring 2009**

Professor: Randall D. Smith
Email: rsmith14@uic.edu
Website: geocities.com/randall_d_smith/

Office: 1122-B BSB
Office Phone: (312) 996-5156
Office Hours: 11:00-12:00 TR or by appt.

Description:

This course seeks to provide an understanding of the organization and powers of state governments in the U.S. It will introduce students to methods for studying state constitutions comparatively. Within this context it will also address the problems of revision of these constitutions. This approach will provide a fuller understanding of the major institutions of state governments and their interrelationships. This approach also permits a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in inter-state relationships under a federal governmental structure.

After establishing a method for the comparative study of state governments, this course will examine the variety of state constitutions and place them within the context of federalism. From this perspective the common institutions of state governments are explored with an eye to the differences within structures that might lead to differences in policy outcomes. At this point several different key policy areas are discussed in a comparative context. Once the comparative groundwork is established, the course then focuses directly on the peculiarities of Illinois politics. We will assess the Chicago/Downstate Divide, the assertion that Illinois is the “corruption capital of the United States” and other intriguing aspects unique to Illinois politics. The course will culminate in the study of workings of the Illinois General Assembly and permit students to suggest how to best influence the GA in a manner that would benefit their own wants/wishes/desires.

Texts:

Dye, Thomas R. and Susan A. Macmanus. 2009. [Politics in States and Communities, 13/E.](#)
Upper Saddle River, NJ. Prentice Hall. ISBN: [978-0136025351.](#)

Texts (continued):

Mooney, Christopher Z. and Barbara Van Dyke-Brown. 2003. Lobbying Illinois: How You Can Make a Difference in Public Policy. Springfield, IL. Institute for Legislative Studies. ISBN: [978-0938943228](#).

Pensoneau, Taylor. 2006. Powerhouse: Arrington from Illinois. Baltimore. American Literary Press. ISBN: [978-1561679553](#). (*No Need to Purchase - Provided by the Department*)

Various additional items may be required reading as the course progresses. These will be referenced on the course's [Blackboard](#) site. They will either be made available as Adobe Acrobat documents (.pdf) or accessible via the web at JSTOR (available free through the Daley Library).

Course Methodology:

This course uses several different teaching techniques to explain the substantive material:

1. Lecture and Discussion – The professor shares his knowledge, thoughts, and ideas with you on the various topics, books, and articles. He welcomes your input on this material. This also provides students a chance to voice their opinion about the study of politics in a free and open manner, which comprises the participation portion of the students' grades.
2. Audio-Visual Aids – The instructor uses items such as the overhead projector, maps, films, videotapes, computers, musical recordings and other items where appropriate.

Examinations and Grading:

Your performance determines your course grade in the following manner:

100 points possible = Test I
100 points possible = Test II
100 points possible = Legislative Briefing
100 points possible = Legislative Evaluation
100 points possible = Participation
500 points possible = Total

Test Grades:

This course involves two non-cumulative examinations. These exams cover the textbook readings, the classroom lectures, and class discussions. The exams are closed book, closed note.

Papers:

This class requires two papers. These papers contribute to the final project for this course. The final project requires students to select a piece of legislation currently before the Illinois General Assembly and track its toils and tribulations through the process. The piece of legislation chosen is up to you, but it will likely be easier to track the policy if it is a more

prominent piece of legislation. This assignment will necessitate the use of primarily on-line resources, such as those listed below under the “Participation Grade:” sub-heading.

The Legislative Briefing: For this briefing you must choose piece of legislation currently before Illinois General Assembly. Then, submit to me, vital information about the bill in question. This paper should be approximately 4-5 pages in length. First, this briefing should open with a short detail of the piece of legislation you have chosen. What is its purpose? How long has it been before the GA? Where is it currently at in the legislative calendar? (Of course information such as its name as well as its number will be very important.) Second, present a brief biography of the top two sponsors of the bill. This biography should discuss general background characteristics of the sponsoring members of the Illinois General Assembly, their districts, their political affiliation and ideology (i.e. how liberal or conservative they are), as well as their campaign contributors. Sources such as www.vote-smart.org, www.opensecrets.org, and major newspapers published in the MCs’ district will likely provide important information for this portion of the assignment. Finally, describe current media coverage of the bill. Has it run into any stumbling blocks? Who are its major opponents? What sort of media coverage is the bill receiving, and is the coverage different statewide versus in the sponsors’ district?

The Legislative Evaluation: Once you know the background of the bill, you can theorize about the legislative process that the bill undertook (or is undertaking). This provides the topic for the second paper for this course. It should also be approximately 4-5 pages in length. This assignment asks you to examine your selected piece of legislation’s progress from the standpoint of a lobbyist. What lobbyists have been involved with this bill? How active have they been? What have they done? And, most importantly, what have they failed to do. How could you better achieve getting your “pet Bill” through the Illinois General Assembly? This paper will require students to draw general conclusions about the theoretical conceptions of lobbying in Illinois by integrating their new-found understanding of lobbying the statehouse. Essentially, this paper should look to answer the question, “What explains the current form (or situation) of your chosen piece of legislation?” This paper will be due at the end of the scheduled final exam time (Wednesday, May 6th, 2009 at 12:30). All papers must be turned in as a “hard copy” to my office no later than this time. **NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

Participation Grade:

The determination of the participation portion of your grade involves your active contribution to class discussions. Class participation provides the opportunity of receiving an “A” in this course. Therefore, I establish some guidelines for discussion. Concern your comments with the topics of state politics. An open manner conducts this discussion. Feel free to disagree with me, the readings, the institutions and other topics discussed, and with your classmates. However, this discussion reflects the collegiate atmosphere in that it unfolds in an intelligent manner and you must support your opinion with facts (that may mean research). Interruption, use of slurs and making fun of other students encounters **strict prohibition**.

Participation also requires students to keep informed of current events. Students are also expected to remain informed regarding news in the State Capitol. While reputable newspapers (such as the New York Times, Chicago Tribune, and the St. Louis Post Dispatch) remain

important sources of such information, they may need to be supplemented by sources such as the [Illinois General Assembly](#) website.

The final aspect of the participation portion of your grade involves the [Blackboard](#) presence for this course. Students will be expected to interact with the course's Blackboard presence on a regular basis. Blackboard will serve as: the course's web presence, a blog and discussion forum, as well as access to E-reserves and other pertinent course information.

Technology:

All personal communications devices (i.e. cell phones, Blackberries, etc.) are to be turned off prior to entering the classroom. Using these devices during regular class time will result in a reduction on your final course grade, and during test periods will be treated as cheating. I do not mind use of laptops for note-taking or in conjunction with internet resources I may discuss in class. However, abuse of this policy (i.e. checking E-mail, IM-ing, etc.) will necessitate revision of this policy (which may include banning laptops all together). Technology should aid in our academic endeavor, not hinder it.

All work requires standard grammatical English and prompt attention to due dates. We cannot grade what we cannot read. If we cannot read an assignment we will ask you once to rewrite it, and after that first warning you either receive a reduced grade or no credit. Cheating and plagiarism also encounter strict prohibition and require that I deal with them according to UIC policy and procedure.

Course and Topic Outline:

Tuesday, 1/13/09 Introduction

Thursday, 1/15/09 No Class – Prof. Out of State

*Tuesday, 1/20/09 A Comparative Approach
Read: Dye & Macmanus, Chapter 1.*

*Thursday, 1/22/09 A Variety of Constitutions
Read: Dye & Macmanus, Chapter 2.*

*Tuesday, 1/27/09 Federalism Strikes Back
Read: Dye & Macmanus, Chapter 3.*

*Thursday, 1/29/09 A Far Cry From True Democracy
Read: Dye & Macmanus, Chapter 4.*

