Despite all the media attention that is devoted to the battles in the nation’s capitol, not all the important political decisions in America are made in Washington, D.C. Education, law enforcement, environmental protection, zoning, welfare, taxation, transportation, public behavior are among the types of public policy issues that most often touch our lives on a day-to-day basis. They are also the issues that are routinely governed by state and local governments.

Even though states, cities, and counties have considerable influence on our lives, most Americans remain unfamiliar with how these governments work. This course looks at the role of state and local government within the American political system. It focuses considerable attention on the changing relationship between the states and the federal government. It explains in detail how state governments work, and to a lesser extent the structure of local governments. And it explores many of the important trends affecting all three levels of government, from the rise of professional politicians to the difficulties of balancing a budget.

Learning Objectives

This course is designed to provide students with an understanding of the political science literature on state and local government and politics. It is not a course on Oregon politics, though we may discuss state-related issues from time to time. These are the primarily learning objectives for the course:

1. To provide students with an understanding of the general structure of state and local government, the nature of state and local politics, and the position of state and local governments within the nation’s political system;

2. To familiarize students with some of the key concerns and concepts in the state and local government literature;

3. To help students become better able to analyze government and politics generally, and to think critically.

Additional objectives for graduate students:

This course is designed to provide graduate students with a broad overview of key concerns and concepts in the state and local government literature. The course is also intended to provide graduate students with a strong grasp of the literature in some particular substantive areas. After leaving the course, the graduate students should be able to provide an informed discussion on:

* How and why states provide a valuable focus for scholarly research
* The different explanations as to why states differ in their political behavior
* The resurgence of state government
The changing relationship between the states and the federal government
Key characteristics of state elections
The power of different political actors in state politics, including governors, legislators, the courts, and interest groups

Course Grades

PS 431 (undergraduate students): Grades will be based on a mid-term, a final, and a research paper. Each is worth one-third of your final grade. The exams are a combination of essay and short answer. The paper is due by March 5, which is the Thursday on the 9th week of the quarter. Points will be docked for late papers. An explanation of the paper is attached. The final exam will be on the Thursday of the 10th week of the quarter, rather than during finals week.

PS 531 (graduate students): Grades will be based on two related papers. The first paper is a literature review on one of the major topics covered in the class. While the review should provide a strong overview of what the discipline knows about the topic, it should do so by focusing on who said what. In other words, the paper needs to emphasize the literature rather than the substance of the topic. With the second paper, the students are asked to conduct original research based around the topic covered in the first paper. In essence, the first paper should provide a foundation for the second. The first paper is due on January 29. The second paper is due on March 12. Graduate students are required to attend class. If you miss, it will be reflected in your grade.

Required Texts

The undergraduates in this class are assigned readings from two books, both of which are available from the PSU bookstore. The graduate students are assigned three additional books. These books are available from Amazon.com, Powells.com, and other book retailers. I will also be handing out an additional list of readings for the graduate students.


Richard A. Clucas, Readings and Cases in State and Local Politics

Additional texts for graduate students:

Tim Conlan, From New Federalism to Devolution: Twenty-Five Years of Intergovernmental Reform

David M. Hedge, Governance and the Changing American States

Alan Rosenthal, The Decline of Representative Democracy

Course Outline and Readings

I. Understanding Differences across the States (Jan. 6-8)

B&K, chap. 1
Clucas, chap. 2
Graduate students only:


II. Federalism and Intergovernmental Relations (Jan. 13-20)

B&K, chap. 2
Clucas, chap. 1, 3, and 16

Graduate Students Only:

Conlan, read all

III. State Constitutions (Jan. 22)

B&K, chap. 3
Clucas, chap. 4

IV. Political Participation, Political Awareness, and Civic Capacity (Jan. 27-29)

B&K, chap. 4
Clucas, chap. 5

Graduate students only:

Clucas, chap. 15
Hedge, chap. 2

V. Political Parties and Elections (Feb. 3)

B&K, chap. 5 (skip section on interest groups)
Clucas, chap. 6

Graduate Students Only:


Hedge, chap. 3
Rosenthal, chap. 5
VI. Interest Groups and Legislatures (Feb. 10-12)

B&K, chap. 5 (interest group section only), 6, and 12
Clucas, chap. 7, 8, and 14

*Graduate Students Only:*

Hedge, chap. 6
Alan Rosenthal, *The Decline of Representative Democracy*, chpts. 2-4, 6-7

VII. The Executive Branch (Feb. 17-19)

B&K, chap. 7-8
Clucas, chap. 9-10

*Graduate Students Only:*

Hedge, chap. 5
Rosenthal, chap. 8

VIII. The Judiciary (Feb. 24-26)

B&K, chap. 9
Clucas, chap. 11

*Graduate Students Only:*

Hedge, chap. 6, 7

IX. Local Governments (March 3-10)

B&K, chap. 10-11
Clucas, chap. 12-13

* *** FINAL: THURSDAY MARCH 12, 10:00 A.M. *** *
Everyone in the class is expected to write a research paper focusing on state or local politics. I have included a list of general topics below. If you decide to go with any of these, you would be wise to narrow your focus. If you feel strongly about an alternative topic, talk to me. I am willing to consider other topics as well, as long as they are relevant to the course. If you have questions, I intend to take time in class to discuss my expectations and to give advice on how to write a good paper, including the proper use and form of citations.

HOW TO GET A GOOD GRADE: When you write your paper, I don't just want a listing of facts or a compilation of anecdotes. You need to write an essay. Have a thesis or a theme. Tell me what this thesis is in the first few paragraphs, and then use the body of your text to argue your point. Finish with a conclusion. I do not require a set number of references, but I do expect you to rely on scholarly work and to do a reasonable amount of research from sources other than your textbooks. By scholarly works, I mean academic books and journal articles. Relying solely on magazines, newspapers, and on-line sources is unacceptable. Absolutely DO NOT USE Wikipedia or any other non-academic on-line resource! Wikipedia and on-line sources are fine for day-to-day use, but not for writing a research paper! Unless I give you a specific exception, the only on-line resources I accept are electronic versions of academic journals, including such publications as Legislative Studies Quarterly, State Politics and Policy, Political Research Quarterly, and the American Political Science Review.

PAPER SPECIFICATIONS: The paper should be 8 to 10 pages long (excluding citations) with reasonable margins and point size. In writing the paper, you should try to follow elementary rules of style. At minimum, this means that the paper must be double-spaced and it must include proper citations. If you borrow words or ideas from others, you must cite your sources. If you get permission to use an online source, you need to provide the exact URL so that I can check the source. For help on style rules and citations, see Kate Turabian's A Manual for Writers or similar works. I am picky about proper citations, so make sure you know what you are doing.

DUE DATE: A hard copy of the paper is due at 5 p.m. on March 5. I do not accept electronic versions.

SOME POSSIBLE PAPER TOPICS:

The effect of the 2008 election on states
Political reform in the states
State ethics rules
How states handle fiscal crises
Portland’s Metro Government
Commission form of city government
Property rights issues
The media in state politics
No Child Left Behind Act
School politics
Initiative process

Alternative forms of elections
Interest group power
Tribal governments
Influence of states in national or international politics
Federalism under the Bush administration