Course Description

This course introduces students to governmental institutions, political behavior, and policy issues at the state level. Our goal is to understand how different institutions and political conditions interact and play a role in the public policy process. A comparative approach is used whereby the political contexts and policies of the various states are compared and contrasted. While Louisiana will be used as a prominent example in our study, this is not a course on Louisiana politics.

The topics to be covered are divided into four broad sections. The first part of the course focuses on various political contexts in which state governments operate. The second part explores the institutions in which policy is created and implemented (legislative, executive, and judicial). A third section gives attention to differences across states in political party structures, interest group activities, media coverage, and election practices. The fourth section of the course focuses on different policy areas. We will spend time covering problems or conditions that policies are intended to alter, the specific actions governments take in response to these conditions, and whether or not such efforts have their intended effects.

In addition to our focus on the substantive aspects of state politics, we will also spend time examining the methods used by scholars to answer questions on these topics. Part of our goal is to assess the evidence obtained by scholars and to consider alternative approaches. While this is not a course on political science methodology, issues involving research design and analysis will play prominently in our class discussions.

Reading Materials

The following books are available for purchase in the bookstore:


In addition, other required readings listed on the syllabus are accessible through the LSU Moodle system.

Course Requirements

The grade for the course is determined by a student’s performance in the following areas:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Project</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exam #1</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exam #2</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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Letter grades will be determined as follows: A = 90 – 100 percent, B = 80 – 89 percent, C = 70 – 79 percent, D = 60 – 69 percent, and F = Below 60 percent.
Participation

Classes are generally conducted in a lecture-discussion format so it is important to keep up with the readings and to come to class prepared. Students are strongly encouraged to take part in class discussions. In order to do this, it is necessary to complete the readings in advance and to spend time thinking about them in a critical manner. Also, please keep up with current political developments at the state level since these will often be used as examples in our discussions. I will occasionally ask you to provide a brief paragraph concerning the day’s assigned readings. I may also give you brief quizzes if I suspect that you are not keeping up with the readings. These assignments along with informed commentary and questions you provide in class throughout the semester will be assessed in calculating your participation grade.

Policy Project

A policy project is required that counts for 20 percent of the course grade. In this assignment students identify and write a brief report on a policy innovation or change recently adopted at the state level. Further details on this assignment will be provided in a separate handout. The project is due on Thursday, April 26 at the beginning of class.

Exams

There are three exams (dates are listed on the syllabus). These tests will consist of short-answer/essay style questions. Note that a makeup exam is only administered when a student can produce a valid written excuse. If you anticipate a problem, please let me know as soon as possible. Also, for anyone who has special needs or who requires accommodations through Disability Services, please advise me of your situation in advance of the exams so arrangements can be made.

General Policies

Academic Honesty

Students are required to abide by the academic conduct policies outlined in the LSU Code of Student Conduct (http://www.lsu.edu/judicialaffairs). Examples of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to: cheating on exams, plagiarizing, buying or selling assignments, and collaborating with others without permission. I reserve the right to investigate when I suspect a violation of any of these policies. All violations of the university’s academic conduct policies are turned over to the Dean of Students for adjudication.

Classroom Etiquette

Please be considerate to those around you who are trying to listen, take notes, and participate in class discussions. Please make every effort to be on time to class. Be seated and ready to begin at 9:10 and leave early only for emergencies. Turn cell phones and pagers to silent. Most importantly, do not talk during class. Disruptive students will be asked to leave immediately.

Recording Devices and Computers

No audio or video recording devices are allowed unless special permission is granted by the instructor. Please do not take photographs of the overheads. You are free to use laptop computers for class purposes (e.g., taking notes, looking up relevant information on the internet, etc.). But please do not simply play on the internet, check e-mail, or use social networking sites.

Late Assignments and Missed Work

All written assignments are due at the beginning of class. Penalties will be assessed based upon the circumstances, but will generally involve a substantial loss of points. In others words, be certain that I receive your written work at the beginning of class. Please note that for reasons of fairness to other students in the class, credit cannot be given at the end of the semester for missed exams or papers not handed in. In other words, when you experience a significant problem that prevents you from meeting a deadline or taking a test, it is your responsibility to let me know about it in a timely manner and to make arrangements to make up the missed work. Excuses must be provided within one week of your return, NOT at the end of the semester.
Course Schedule

The Contexts of State Politics

January 17  Introduction to the Course

January 19  Why and How to Study State Politics
- Gray and Hanson, Chapter 1.
- Reading #4: “Appendix: A Brief Introduction to Regression.”

January 24  Culture, Constitutions, and Public Opinion
- Gray and Hanson, re-read part of Chapter 1 (20-24).

January 26  Federalism: National and State Government Relations
- Gray and Hanson, Chapter 2.

January 31  Federalism in Practice

Institutions of Governing in State Politics

February 2  Characteristics of Legislative Institutions
- Gray and Hanson, Chapter 6.
- Squire and Moncrief, Chapter 1 and part of Chapter 3 (74-94)
February 7  
State Legislators: Who They Are and How They Got There  
- Gray and Hanson, Re-read part of Chapter 6 (154-171).  
- Squire and Moncrief, Chapter 2.  

February 9  
What Legislators Do  
- Squire and Moncrief, part of Chapter 3 (94-121) and Chapter 4.  

February 14  
Midterm Exam #1

February 16  
Legislative Process  
- Gray and Hanson, Re-read part of Chapter 6 (173-191).  
- Squire and Moncrief Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

February 21  
Mardi Gras

February 23  
Representation in the Legislature  
- Squire and Moncrief Chapter 7.  
- Gray and Hanson, Re-read part of Chapter 6 (171-173).  

February 28  
Term Limits  
- Reading #24: Valentine, David C. 2011. “The Impact and Implications of Term Limits in Missouri” Missouri Legislative Academy, Institute of Public Policy.

March 1  
Legislative Decision Making  

March 6  
Executive Branch  
- Gray and Hanson, Chapter 7.  
March 8  *Governors and Legislatures*

March 13  *State Courts*
- Gray and Hanson, Chapter 8.

March 15  *State Court Decision Making*

March 20  **Midterm Exam #2**

**Linking Institutions and Citizens**

March 22  *Interest Groups*
- Gray and Hanson, Chapter 4.

March 27  *Interest Group Influence*

March 29  *Political Parties*
- Gray and Hanson Chapter 3.

April 3  *News Media in State Politics*

April 5  *Direct Democracy*
- Gray and Hanson, Chapter 5.

April 10  **Spring Break**

April 12  **Spring Break**
Making and Evaluating Public Policies

April 17  
*Elements of the Public Policy Process*
- Gray and Hanson, Chapter 9 and 12.

April 19  
*Economic and Social Regulation*
- Gray and Hanson, Chapter 13

April 24  
*Fiscal Policies*
- Gray and Hanson, Chapter 10.

April 26  
*Economic Development Policies*
- Gray and Hanson, Chapter 14.

*****Policy Project Due at the beginning of Class*****

May 1  
*Policy Outcomes: Health and Welfare Programs*
- Gray and Hanson, Chapter 11.

May 3  
*Summation and Review*

May 7  
**FINAL EXAM** in this classroom on Monday, May 7 from 10:00 – Noon.