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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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Book Review</td>
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<td>Policy Report</td>
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<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
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<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 prepared for every class. 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. Participation comprises a relatively large portion of your grade (15% total) and will be determined by three equally weighted components:

- **Class Activities:** Several times during the semester I will divide the class into small groups to complete an assigned task. These assignments involve discussing a particular issue or topic and then completing a brief writing assignment. A grade will be assigned to members of your group based upon your group’s performance in the assigned class activity.

- **Self-Reported Class Participation:** During each class period I will ask questions about the day’s readings and will expect to receive answers from you. If you have questions about the readings or comments about the substantive topics in the course, please ask them. I will track your participation based upon your self-reported participation. If you have participated in the day’s class either in asking questions, answering questions, or providing comment, you may hand in a piece of paper at the end of class indicating what your contribution was for that day (briefly restating your question, answer, or comment).

- **Homework and Attendance:** Occasionally during the semester I will ask that you complete a brief homework assignment that is due at the beginning of the next class. If you miss a class, make certain to check Moodle where any homework assignments will be posted there by the end of the day (listed prominently at the top of the page). Also, attendance will be checked regularly with a sign-in sheet. Please make certain that you come to class on time so that you will not miss signing in.

Book Review and Policy Report

Students are required to write a review of *The Best Job in Politics* by answering a series of questions that will be provided at least one week prior to the review’s due date (Thursday, February 13). There is also a policy report that requires you to identify and write about policies recently adopted in an assigned state. Students will make brief presentations to the class on their states beginning in early April and the final report is due on Thursday, April 24. Further details on both the book review and policy report will be provided in separate handouts.

Exams

There are three exams (dates are listed on the syllabus). These tests will consist of objective-style questions (multiple-choice, short-answer, and/or brief essay questions). Note that a makeup exam is only administered when a student can produce a valid written excuse. Note also that makeup exams are all-essay exams. 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](http://www.lsu.edu/judicialaffairs)). Examples of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to: cheating on exams, plagiarizing, buying or selling assignments, altering grades, 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.

**Classroom Etiquette**

Please be kind to those around you who are trying to listen, take notes, and participate. Please make every effort to be on time to class. Be seated and ready to begin at 10:30 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, Photography 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. Photography of any kind is forbidden. This rule is strictly enforced during exams and during review of exam materials. All violations of this policy are turned over to the Dean of Students. You are free to use laptop...
computers and other electronic devices for class purposes (e.g., taking notes, looking up relevant information, etc.). But please do not simply play on the internet, check e-mail, or use social networking sites.

**Late Assignments and Missed Work**

Make every effort to take scheduled exams and hand in work on time. However, I recognize there are legitimate reasons for missing a deadline or an exam. The following reasons are some, but probably not all, of the excuses that are considered acceptable: a documented illness, a family emergency, some severe mechanical failure (related to transportation, computing, etc.), or a scientifically documented anomaly in the space-time continuum. Please note that most job-related issues are not considered acceptable excuses (although see university regulations concerning military duties, official events, etc.). For late assignments, penalties are assessed based upon the circumstances, but will generally involve a substantial loss of points. Recognize 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. Excuse forms are available on this course's Moodle site where they must be submitted along with any other accompanying documentation (a doctor's note, etc.).

**Graded Work**

I do not make grades available on Moodle and I will not e-mail grades. I return major assignments and will allow time in class for you to view exams. You are also free to come by during my office hours to look at your tests. During office hours I am happy to review grades with you and talk with you about ways to improve your performance.

**Graduate Credit or Honors Credit**

For students taking this course for graduate credit or for those who wish to receive special Honors credit, it is the student's responsibility to contact me to make appropriate arrangements.

**Special Needs**

For students who have special needs or require accommodations through Disability Services, please advise me of your situation so arrangements can be made.

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**Course Schedule**

**The Contexts of State Politics**

**January 15**  Introduction to the Course

**January 21**  Why Study State Politics

- Gray, Hanson, and Kousser Chapter 1.

**January 23**  Methods and Approaches Used in Studying State Politics

- **Reading #8**: “Appendix: A Brief Introduction to Regression.”
January 28

**Political Cultures and Public Opinions**

- Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, re-read part of Chapter 1 (20-25).

January 30

**Federalism: National and State Government Relations**

- Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 2.

February 4

**State Constitutions**


February 6

**Institutions of Governing in State Politics**

**Executive Branch**

- Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 7.

February 11

**Governors and Legislatures**


February 13

**Governors as Policy Leaders**


**** Book Review Due at the Beginning of Class ****

February 18

**Characteristics of Legislative Institutions**

- Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 6.

February 20

**State Legislators: Who They Are and How They Get There**

- Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Re-read part of Chapter 6 (173-183).

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February 25  What Legislators Do

February 27  Representation in the Legislature
- Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Re-read part of Chapter 6 (183-185).

March 4  Mardi Gras Holiday

March 6  Term Limits

March 11  Legislative Decision Making

March 13  Midterm Exam

March 18  State Courts
- Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 8.

Linking Institutions and Citizens

March 20  Political Parties and Elections
- Gray, Hanson, and Kousser Chapter 3.

March 25  Interest Groups
- Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 4.
March 27  
**Interest Group Influence**

April 1  
**News Media in State Politics**

April 3  
**Direct Democracy**
- Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 5.

Making and Evaluating Public Policies

April 8  
**Elements of the Public Policy Process**
- Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 14 and 15.

April 10  
**Social Regulation**
- Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 9.

April 15  
**Spring Break**

April 17  
**Spring Break**

April 22  
**Education and Fiscal Policies**
- Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapters 10, 12, and 13.

April 24  
**Economic Development Policies**
- Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 16.

*****Policy Report Due at the Beginning of Class*****

April 29  
**Policy Outcomes: Health and Welfare Programs**
- Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 11.

May 1  
**Summation and Review**

May 9  
**FINAL EXAM** in this classroom on Tuesday, May 6 from 7:30 – 9:30 a.m.