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 to assess the political contexts, governmental institutions, and policies of the various states. 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.

Required Reading Materials

Bookstore: Two books are available for purchase:


Library Electronic Resource: Available for free download


Moodle Readings: Available for free download

- Readings listed on the syllabus are saved as files that are accessible through the Moodle course page.

Note that the syllabus lists each day’s readings. It is assumed that student have thoroughly read these materials prior to the class meeting for which it is assigned.

Course Requirements

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

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<thead>
<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>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Report and Presentation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
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**TOTAL** 100%

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:

- **Self-Reported Class Participation**: During each class period I will ask questions about the day’s readings and will expect to receive answers. 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 comments, please hand in a sheet of paper at the end of class indicating what your contribution was for that day (briefly restating your question, answer, or comment). It is expected that you will participate on **6 different days** during the course of the semester. If you provide substantive comments or ask questions (that a reasonable person would say enlightened the discussion) on 6 separate days, you will receive 100% for this portion of your participation grade (if you participate 5 times your score will be 83%, 4 times 67%, and so on).

- **Class Activities**: Several times during the semester I will ask you to provide written comments about a topic, answer a brief question, take a quiz, or take part in a class activity. Your performance on these activities will be counted as a component of your overall participation grade. There will be many of these opportunitites throughout the semester and your grade is determined by your successful completion of each. If you complete all of them, you will receive 100% for this component of your participation, complete 90% and your grade is 90, 80% is a grade of 80, etc.

- **Attendance**: Attending class is important and your presence will be checked regularly with a sign-in sheet or by other mechanisms. Please make certain that you come to class on time so that you will be counted as present for the day. As with the other forms of participation, if you attend 100% of the time when I have checked attendance, your grade is 100, attend 90% of the time and it is 90, etc.

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 12). 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 (on March 24 or 26) and the final report is due on Thursday, April 2. Further details on both the book review and policy report will be provided in separate handouts.

Exams

There is a mid-term exam and a final exam (dates listed on the syllabus). These tests will consist of objective-style question (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). Examples of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to: cheating on exams, plagiarizing, buying or selling assignments, altering grades, intentional deception, 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 Rules

Please be respectful to those around you who are trying to listen, take notes, and participate in the class. 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.

Absolutely no audio or video recording devices are allowed to be used unless special permission is granted. Please do not take photographs of the overheads. Photography or videography of any kind is forbidden. This rule is strictly enforced during exams and during review of exam materials. All violators of this policy will be asked to leave the classroom immediately and the incident will be reported to the Dean of Students. These restrictions are in place to ensure the integrity of testing materials and to protect student privacy.

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 university-sponsored events, etc.). For late assignments, penalties are assessed based upon the circumstances, but will generally involve a substantial loss of points per day. 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 your mid-term exam. Coming to class on a regular basis makes it very easy to keep track of your grades, including your participation grade. You are also free to come by during my office hours to look at your last exam. 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 who wish to take this course for graduate credit or would like to receive special Honors credit, it is the student’s responsibility to contact me at the beginning of the semester 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.

Course Schedule

The Contexts of State Politics

January 15

Introduction to the Course

January 20

Why Study State Politics

- Text: Gray, Hanson, and Kousser Chapter 1.
January 22  Methods and Approaches Used in Studying State Politics
  • Reading #5: Chapters from *Everything is Obvious Once You Know the Answers: How Common Sense Fails Us* by Duncan J. Watts, 2011, New York: Crown Publishing (Preface, Chapters 1 & 2).
  • Reading #7: “Appendix: A Brief Introduction to Regression.”
  • Reading #8: “Important Definitions”

January 27  Political Cultures and Public Opinions
  • Text: Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, re-read part of Chapter 1 (20-25).

January 29  Federalism: National and State Government Relations
  • Text: Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 2.

February 3  Federalism and State Constitutions

Institutions of Governing in State Politics

February 5  Executive Branch
  • Text: Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 7.

February 10  Governors and Legislatures

February 12  Governors as Policy Leaders

***** Book Review Due at the Beginning of Class on February 12 *****

February 17  Mardi Gras Holiday
February 19  Characteristics of Legislative Institutions
- **Text**: Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 6.

February 24  State Legislators: Who They Are and How They Got There
- **Text**: Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Re-read part of Chapter 6 (173-183).

February 26  Representation in the Legislature
- **Text**: Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Re-read part of Chapter 6 (183-185).

March 3  MIDTERM EXAM

March 5  Legislative Decision Making

March 10  Term Limits

March 12  State Courts
- **Text**: Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 8.

Linking Institutions and Citizens

March 17  Political Parties and Elections
- **Text**: Gray, Hanson, and Kousser Chapter 3.

March 19  Interest Groups
- **Text**: Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 4.
March 24  
**Interest Group Influence**

*** Policy Presentations: Set #1 ***

March 26  
**News Media in State Politics**

*** Policy Presentations: Set #2 ***

March 31  
**Direct Democracy**
- **Text**: Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 5.

*Making and Evaluating Public Policies*

April 2  
**Elements of the Public Policy Process**
- **Text**: Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 14 and 15.

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

April 7  
Spring Break

April 9  
Spring Break

April 14  
**Social Regulation**
- **Text**: Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 9.

April 16  
**Crime and Punishment**

April 21  
**Fiscal Policies**
- **Text**: Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapters 10.

April 23  
**Education Policies**
- **Text**: Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapters 12 and 13.

April 28  
**Economic Development Policies**
- **Text**: Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 16.

April 30  
**Policy Outcomes: Health and Welfare Programs**
- **Text**: Gray, Hanson, and Kousser, Chapter 11.

May 6  
**FINAL EXAM in this classroom on Wednesday, May 6 from 3:00- 5:00 p.m.**