Poli 101: State and Local Politics
Monday through Friday: 1:15 - 2:45 PM
Murphey 112
Summer session II, 2012

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Course Description

This course is designed to provide students with an introduction to politics and sub-national government in the U.S., focusing nearly exclusively on the 50 states. While it is not possible to adequately cover all important topics in a single survey course, this course will offer a broad overview of how the political system functions in the U.S. states. This is not a course about politics in North Carolina or any other single state; we will instead focus on the similarities and differences between and among states. Furthermore, the purpose of this course is not to learn descriptive facts about the states and the way they operate. We will instead focus on theories of politics and how they may be applied to the states, thus allowing us to learn about politics more generally.

Keep in mind that this is a political science class, not a course on civics. Because of this, we will move beyond simple description of how the government operates and will attempt to learn why it functions the way it does. Theories are by definition abstract because they reduce explanations to fundamental principles. We will not spend time debating ideologically driven issues regarding what is “right” and what is “wrong.” We will focus on what states do and why they do it, but normative arguments are beyond the scope of this course.

The most important goals of this class are to provide students with (1) a foundation that will allow them to continue to study politics scientifically and (2) the analytical skills to think critically about various political and social phenomena. The readings, lectures, and assignments are designed to help students achieve these goals.

Required Textbooks

The required reading materials are as follows and are available at the university bookstore. Both books are also available in electronic format.


I will refer to the Donovan, Mooney, and Smith book as *Text* and the Stinebrickner book as *Reader* throughout the rest of the syllabus.
Grading

Your grade in this course will be determined by each of the following components:

1. 30% – First midterm exam
2. 30% – Final exam
3. 20% – Three short analytical essays (3 to 3.5 pages long each)
4. 20% – Participation

Below is a description of UNC’s grading system.

A Mastery of course content at the highest level of attainment that can reasonably be expected of students at a given stage of development. The A grade states clearly that the student has shown such outstanding promise in the aspect of the discipline under study that he/she may be strongly encouraged to continue.

B Strong performance demonstrating a high level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The B grade states that the student has shown solid promise in the aspect of the discipline under study.

C A totally acceptable performance demonstrating an adequate level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The C grade states that while not yet showing any unusual promise, the student may continue to study in the discipline with reasonable hope of intellectual development.

D A marginal performance in the required exercises demonstrating a minimal passing level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The D grade states that the student has given no evidence of prospective growth in the discipline; an accumulation of D grades should be taken to mean that the student would be well advised not to continue in the academic field.

F For whatever reasons, an unacceptable performance. The F grade indicates that the students performance in the required exercises has revealed almost no understanding of the course content. A grade of F should warrant questioning whether the student may suitably register for further study in the discipline before remedial work is undertaken.

The table below describes this course’s grading scale. I will round grades to the nearest percentage point. Grades will be posted on Sakai. I will return tests, essays, and quizzes to you as quickly as possible.

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Paper Topics

Paper 1: Federalism in Theory and Practice (due 6/29)

Using the articles in sections 1 - 3 and 6 - 9 of the Reader, assess the relationship between the federal government and the governments of the states. How is this relationship supposed to work? How does it work in practice? Which level of government seems to wield more power/influence over the direction of public policy? What are the advantages and disadvantages of federal control? Of state control? Which level of government do you think should have more control over policy? Why?

Paper 2: Elections and Direct Democracy (due 7/13)

Elections allow individuals to contribute indirectly to the political decision-making process by electing officials who then make policy. However, the offices that citizens are allowed to vote candidates into are not the same across states. Why might states want to limit who their citizens can vote for? Who is advantaged and/or disadvantaged by these limitations? States with the initiative, referendum, and recall give individuals direct access to policy making. Which arguments do you find more compelling – those in favor of greater citizen involvement in the political decision-making process or those opposed? Why? Use the assigned readings to support your argument concerning the proper role of the citizen in a democratic society.

Use articles 10 - 15 and 22 from the Reader for this essay.

Paper 3: Citizens, the News Media, and Politics (due 7/24)

The news media plays an important role in American politics by calling attention to important political phenomena and by helping to shape political discourse. In this essay, you should discuss two broad topics: the decline of local news coverage (both print and radio) and the rise of the “new media.” First, what are the political consequences of the declining number of local newspapers, the steady decrease in circulation, and the consolidation of and monopoly ownership of local radio news stations? Who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged by these phenomena? Second, what are the political implications of the rise of bloggers and other members of the new media? What role do they play in explicating political news, and what role should they play? Last, how might important local political issues attain adequate journalistic coverage when the local media is greatly constrained in what it is able to do?

Use articles 16 - 20 from the Reader for this essay.

Expectations and Procedures

Attendance

Class attendance is required. You will be allowed two unexcused absences over the course of the semester. After that, each additional unexcused absence will lower your course grade by ten percent (one letter grade). Summer semesters fly by pretty quickly, so it is imperative that you miss as few classes as possible. If you know you will be missing class, please let me know as soon as possible. If you are more than ten minutes late to
class, I reserve the right to mark you absent. If you come to class after a quiz has been administered (if we have any), you will receive a zero on it, so don’t be late.

Discussions and the participation grade

The in-class discussions we will have are designed to explore a topic in greater depth than in the lecture. I expect everyone to be well-prepared and respectful to one another during these discussions. Your participation grade will be based on both the quantity and the quality of your contributions to our discussions. It is incumbent upon students to finish the daily reading before class begins so that we may have fruitful discussions.

Papers

You will write three short papers for this course, each of which should be approximately three to three and a half pages in length, not counting headers and footers. The text should be double spaced and in 12 point Times New Roman font. Please justify your text; justified text is easier for me to read. You should use margins of either 1 or 1.25 inches. I expect you to use parenthetical citations each time you cite material from a reading. If you only use readings that I have assigned to you, there is no need for you to include a works cited page in the paper you give me. If you choose to use other sources, you will need to submit a properly formatted works cited page. Do not include direct quotes from the readings in your papers.

Make sure you answer all of the questions posed to you in the prompts. Be sure to tell me why you think that the arguments you make are correct. It is not sufficient merely to answer a question by saying yes or no. Do not summarize the articles you are writing about.

Do not include the authors’ full names in the paper. You should also avoid including the title of the articles. Format your citations as follows:

This is the first example of a proper citation (Smith 1996).

Smith (1996) argued that this is an additional example of a proper citation.

Your grade for each paper will be determined by (1) the completeness of your arguments and answers, (2) the strength of your analysis, and (3) the strength of your writing. Hard copies of your papers are due in class on that day that they appear on the syllabus. I will not accept late papers. I will do my best to return your reaction papers to you by the next class period.

Exams

There will be two exams in this class: a midterm and a (somewhat) cumulative final. Approximately half of the points in each test will come from the readings while the remainder will come from my lectures and our discussions.

Technology

Silence your phone’s ringer or turn it off entirely. I know what it looks like when students attempt to text during class, so do not bother trying to hide it. If I see you texting during class, your participation grade will suffer. You will be able to access my
slides on Sakai. You are free to bring your laptops, but be aware that I will not allow them if they become a distraction to either me or to your classmates.

Disabilities

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should (1) contact the office of Learning Disabilities at UNC (http://www.unc.edu/depts/lds/index.html) and (2) bring a letter to the instructor (me) indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first few days of class.

Honor Code

You may not give or receive any assistance while taking any examinations or completing any of the class assignments. Sentences, ideas, etc. cannot come directly from the Internet or any other reference material unless they are properly cited. For further details, please refer to the University Honor Code at [http://honor.unc.edu/](http://honor.unc.edu/)

Communication

I make every effort to communicate to you my expectations, your responsibilities, and the substantive information covered in this course. I will send e-mails to the entire class. I maintain a Sakai site for the class, and I will make announcements and issue some reminders in class. Note that I will only send e-mail out to your UNC e-mail accounts as listed on the course roster in Sakai. I will not keep track of any other e-mail addresses that you might use. I am also very easy to reach if you need to communicate with me. Come to my office hours or even better, send me an email. It is important for you to stay in touch, particularly if any problems arise.

I don’t like to change exam schedules. If a situation arises where I need to give a make-up exam, I reserve the right to give it during the final week of the semester. I reserve the right to give a make-up exam that differs substantially from the normal exam in order to protect the integrity of the exam process. I or any instructor will be much more understanding if you just communicate with us early and up front.

Course Outline

Introduction

- **6/21:** Introduction. What is politics?
  - Begin *Text* chapter 1

- **6/22:** Collective action
  - Finish *Text* chapter 1
  - *Reader* sections 1 and 2

- **6/25:** Federalism 1
- Start *Text* chapter 2
- *Reader* sections 3 and 6

• **6/26:** Federalism 2
  - Finish *Text* chapter 2
  - *Reader* sections 7 and 8

• **6/27:** Public opinion
  - Start *Text* chapter 3
  - *Reader* sections 9 and 10

• **6/28:** Elections 1
  - Finish *Text* chapter 3
  - *Reader* sections 11 and 12
  - **Paper 1 due in class.**

• **6/29:** Elections 2
  - Start *Text* chapter 5
  - *Reader* sections 13 and 14

• **7/2:** Watch *Last Man Standing: Politics Texas Style*
  - Finish *Text* chapter 5

• **7/3:** Political parties and interest groups
  - Start *Text* chapter 6
  - *Reader* sections 15 and 22

• **7/4:** No class (Fourth of July)

• **7/5:** Catch up and review for the midterm exam
  - Finish *Text* chapter 6

• **7/6:** Midterm exam

• **7/9:** State legislatures
  - *Text* chapter 7
  - *Reader* sections 21 and 23

• **7/10:** Governors
  - Start *Text* chapter 8
  - *Reader* sections 27 and 28

• **7/11:** Bureaucracies
- Finish *Text* chapter 8
- *Reader* sections 30 and 31

- **7/12:** The courts
  - Start *Text* chapter 9
  - *Reader* sections 32 and 33

- **7/13:** Institutional interaction
  - Finish *Text* chapter 9
  - *Reader* sections 39 and 40
  - **Paper 2 due in class.**

- **7/16:** Public opinion and policy diffusion
  - Start *Text* chapter 10
  - *Reader* sections 45 and 46

- **7/17:** Tax policy
  - Finish *Text* chapter 10
  - *Reader* sections 44 and 47

- **7/18:** Morality policy
  - *Text* chapter 13
  - *Reader* sections 16 and 49

- **7/19:** Social welfare and health policy
  - *Text* chapter 14
  - *Reader* sections 17 and 18

- **7/20:** Education policy
  - *Text* chapter 15
  - *Reader* sections 19 and 20

- **7/23:** Catch up

- **7/24:** Review for the final exam
  - **Paper 3 due in class.**

- **7/27:** Final exam - 11:30 AM to 2:30 PM