

Political Science 202: State and Local Government

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General Education Rationale

Political Science 202 meets the Social Science requirement under Knowledge of the Disciplines because it provides students critical exposure to the methods used by social scientists in creating knowledge. It provides a thorough grounding in sub-national governments in the American federal governmental system. It also provides a strong introduction to the discipline of political science. In this course, students gain exposure to how knowledge is generated in the social sciences through the lens of one content area, that of state and local government. Through material covered in the course, students gain practice in asking important questions about politics and government and answering them using the methods practiced in this social science discipline.

Overview of the Class

From the “Reagan revolution” through Clinton’s “New Democrats” to Bush’s “Compassionate Conservatism” and now Obama's "Hope and Change", power and attention has been devolving back to the states, and, through them, to the local governments. As suspicion and distrust of Washington, D.C. and its politicians has increased since the VietNam War and Watergate, liberals, conservatives, and those of other ideologies have shifted greater amounts of their attention to states and localities to attempt to solve the problems that each sees as most troubling our country. This is not new. The Founders envisaged a nation of states, where much of the important day-to-day activities of government were conducted at the state and local, not the national, level.

In this context, we will begin our study of state and local government. Despite the newly increased attention and added focus on state and local law-making, policy-making, and taxing, these levels arguably remain the most obscure and poorly understood by the average American citizen. Perhaps this is because media, both national and local focus first on national level government activity and only secondarily, if at all, on state and local activity, and then only for those activities seen by the media as “important.” Not the everyday functioning of state and local government. Despite the impact of state and local government on the lives of average citizens, the fact remains that knowledge of representatives, voting participation, and general levels of interest of the average citizen is much higher at the national than the state and local level.

Currently, some states are challenging the Programs known as "ObamaCare" and border states like Arizona and Texas are attempting to impose stronger efforts to curb "illegal immigration." Just how much power do states have, and how should they use it? These are the sorts of questions that always occur in a federalist system.

Local governments are concurrently facing “fiscal stress” related to the “mortgage meltdown”, the Great Recession, widespread budget structural imbalance problems, and underfunded pension funds. All of these have made it harder for local governments to continue to provide the services that they traditionally have. Locally we can observe the Detroit bankruptcy firsthand. It will likely not be the last city in the US to go bankrupt.

This course will introduce students to the foundations, structures, functions, processes, and behaviors of our 50 state governments and their nearly 100,000 local governments. Throughout, the approach will focus on the role of citizens in state government and their rights and responsibilities as citizens. We will examine the states as “laboratories of democracy” with varying innovative approaches to governmental problem solving through policy making functions. The course will rely on lectures, textbook readings, and the student’s own research. Students will have two short writing assignments, three exams on chapters, and one final that is mildly comprehensive.

COURSE TEXTBOOK

Required:

Ann O'M. Bowman and Richard C. Kearney: *State and Local Government: The Essentials* 5th Ed. Wadsworth Publishing. New York. ISBN-13: 9781111341497

Each student is to find, copy, and read **Federalist 10**, by James Madison.

Students who do not wish to keep the book may find it cheaper to rent the ebook for 6 months. Also, a used 4th edition might [or might not] suffice for studying purposes. Cheaptextbooks.com is a good source, too.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of this course is to enable the students to become more effective citizens at the state and local level, including:

- Developing your own ideas about the proper role, function, size, and scope of state/local governments in the U.S.
- Understanding the capabilities and limitations of political involvement in state and local government
- Becoming informed about the means of influencing government and political decisions at the state/local level.
- Developing an understanding of the structures and functions of American state government and the reasons why political actors at the state and local behave as they do.

The course has three general sections, with the following particular objectives, which will be reflected in the readings, lectures, exams, and course assignments.

I. UNDERSTANDING THE POLITICAL REALITIES OF POLITICS AT THE STATE LEVEL, AND HOW IT DIFFERS FROM POLITICS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:

- Political, economic, social, and demographic diversity among the 50 states;
- States and their place in the federal structure;
- Foundations and structural differences between state constitutions and the American Constitution;
- The nature of citizen involvement at the state and local level.

II. LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF STATE GOVERNMENTS:

- Governors and the basis of their political power;
- The role and function of state legislatures;
- Differences among the structures of state bureaucracies;
- The role and policy-making function of state courts.

III. DEVELOPING A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT:

- Differences among local government structures;
- How power is exercised among communities;
- How local governments interact with state government;
- Fiscal problems and political realities among the states and localities.

SHORT WRITINGS

Two short writings will be required, are an integral part of the course, and, quite probably, are essential to both your understanding of local government and your ability to participate as a citizen in local government activities. You are **required** to attend at least two (2) sessions, **at least three (3) weeks apart**, of one of the listed examples of state and local government in action. Following your first session, hand in a minimum 4-page report of your experience (what you saw, your impression of what was happening, how you felt about what you saw and was happening, whether or not you were surprised by what you saw and why, and how what you saw contributed to your understanding of state/local government). This paper is ***due at the beginning of class*** during the last class period of week 5!!! The second paper will be at least four (4) pages in length, and

should describe in more detail and with much explanation of why what you observed happened. This is an observation a second time of **the exactly the same governmental unit and activity.** You should now demonstrate an understanding of what you observe (i.e. what part structure, function, and behavior play in what you observe). Don't just describe it this time, explain it! Again, you must attend the same activity both times (e.g. city council meeting of Ypsilanti). The governmental activities you may choose from include:

- City Council, County Board, or Township Board. (Should be a taxing body.)
- County court, city court, traffic court, or other court session (1 hour minimum attendance 1st meeting, 2 hour minimum attendance 2nd session, must observe something worth writing about). (Hint, if you want to go to a particular court, call in advance to the clerk and ask for an interesting day to attend.)
- Visit any elected official or any top-level appointed official for observation purposes. See how they function in their official capacities. (Call and arrange two meetings, explain what you're doing and why. You may give them my phone number so they can check if they want.)
- Other activity that is cleared with me.

Please do not attempt to attend meetings of non-elected, non-taxing bodies, like Park Boards or Zoning Commissions. Those are not acceptable. If you have doubts about your choice talk to me.

More about the content of the paper will be posted in a file on the course homepage. Also you are expected to read and follow the rules for writing in my classes. Those will be found in a file named 'Paper Rules' on the course homepage. Failure to follow these rules will quite likely lead to a grade reduction for the paper. In addition, there will be more specific instructions about the content of the paper. In brief, I **do not want** a newspaper style report of "this happened, then that happened, and then another thing happened." I want to know what you saw/heard not what the body did.

This is an introductory course in political science and presumes no previous college level course work in government. Students who have had the American Government course will have a point of reference and comparison for much of the class discussion. As the course title suggests, however, the focus here is on state and local governmental units in our federal system. Given the number and diversity of such units, we will be emphasizing general patterns and common characteristics. Equally important, we will look to our own state and local units as examples, becoming more familiar with Michigan along the way.

The course is structured to enable students to achieve several learning objectives:

- Understand the role of state and local government institutions in American society;
- Understand the nature, function and consequences of federal arrangements in governmental systems;
- Understand how political scientists systematically study politics and governmental institutions and processes;
- Distinguish between national, state and local political systems, employing a comparative perspective of both formal authority and power among key actors;
- Understand the function of and patterns in state constitutions and local charters and explore the societal forces that shaped such documents over time;
- Describe the role of parties and interest groups in state and local political systems;
- Identify nomination and election procedures in the various states and consider the impact or consequences of the alternatives;
- Explain the role and powers of state and local executives and consider the consequences of varying authority and influence on decision-making;
- Describe the structure, functions, and procedures of state and local legislative bodies;
- Outline a typical state judicial system and examine the impact of differing means for selection of judges;

- Distinguish between the various types and forms of local governments in the several states and consider the consequences of such differences;
- Develop an appreciation for different ways of viewing contentious political issues and the use of social science evidence in developing your own individual views of such issues.

Course Requirements, Assignments, Grading, and Other Issues

EXAMINATIONS

Examinations may include short answer, multiple-choice, definition, and true/false questions. Exams will be given on the date indicated. Pop-quizzes may be implemented, if, in the estimation of the instructor, students are failing to properly prepare for class. Pop-quiz grades will be added to the total points available and grading will be adjusted accordingly. Pop-quizzes will in no instance be allowed to be made up.

Make up exams will be given only upon presentation of adequate documentation sufficient to convince the instructor that a true emergency occurred. This is relatively unlikely to happen. Traffic tickets don't count, sick dogs or cousins don't count, minor illnesses treatable on an outpatient basis don't count, etc. Verifiable death of immediate family does count, as do accidents or illness requiring immediate hospital or emergency room treatment that prevent the student from attending class on the day of the exam. All excuses are accepted at the sole discretion of the instructor. Make-up exams will not be the same as the missed exam!! The instructor must be notified either prior to or immediately after the missed exam. No make-up exam will be given other than under the criteria listed.

GRADING

Examination 1	50 points
Examination 2	50 points
Examination 3	50 points
Final examination	50 points
Short paper 1	50 points
Short paper 2	<u>50 points</u>
Total	300 points

Letter grades are based on the total points accumulated during the semester.

270+ points	A
240-269 points	B
210-239 points	C
180-209 points	D
179 and fewer	F

No individual extra credit will be available under any circumstances. Should the occasion arise, extra points will be available to the entire class. Since these opportunities will usually take place in a very short time frame, it is essential to attend class every day if one wishes to get any extra credit that may be available. The instructor reserves the right to award up to 10 points (equal to 1/3 of a letter grade) for exceptional class participation. This emphatically does not mean just attending every class or generalized chattering. It requires cogent remarks, thoughtful questions, or shared insights that further the understanding of the entire class.

Expectations: The course will follow a lecture-discussion format generally reflecting the outline of topics and readings below. Readings should be completed prior to class discussion, and regular attendance is expected. Based on past experience, attendance is highly correlated with success in the course. Reading topics and assignments listed are subject to change.

Note: the following items are included at the request of the administration to head-off problems. In almost two decades of teaching I have only confronted conduct problems on one or two occasions.

Academic Integrity: Academic dishonesty, including all forms of cheating and/or plagiarism, will not be tolerated in this class. Penalties for an act of academic dishonesty may range from receiving a failing grade for a particular assignment to receiving a failing grade for the entire course. In addition, you may be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Services for discipline that can result in either a suspension or permanent dismissal. The *Student Conduct Code* contains detailed definitions of what constitutes academic dishonesty, and it can be accessed online at www.emich.edu/sjs

Classroom Management Issues: Students are expected to abide by the *Student Conduct Code* and assist in creating an environment that is conducive to learning and protects the rights of all members of the University community. Lack of civility and disruptive behavior will not be tolerated and may result in a request to leave class and referral to the *Office of Student Services (SJS)* for discipline. Examples of inappropriate classroom conduct include repeatedly arriving late to class, using a cellular phone, or talking while others are speaking.

Students With Disabilities: If you wish to be accommodated for your disability, EMU Board of Regents policy #8.3 requires that you first register with the Access Services Office (ASO) in room 203 King Hall. You may contact ASO by telephone at (734) 487-2470. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with ASO promptly as you will only be accommodated from the date you register with them forward. No retroactive accommodations are possible.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Weeks 1-3	Introduction to course, syllabus, Ch. 1, Bowman and Kearney (B&K), Ch. 2, (B&K), Ch. 3 (B&K), review
Week 4	Exam 1, begin Ch. 4, (B&K)
Weeks 5-7	Ch. 4, (B&K), Ch. 5, (B&K), Ch. 6 (B&K) review Exam 2 on Wed of week 7
Weeks 8-11	Ch. 7 (B&K), Ch. 8, (B&K), Ch. 9, (B&K), Exam 3 (Week 11)
Weeks 12-14	Ch. 10 (B&K), Ch.11 (B&K), Ch. 12 (B&K) review

FINAL EXAM

The two papers will have announced due dates, but you should plan on making your first visit before week 4 and the second at least three weeks after that but before Week 11. Check schedules early, as your chosen venue may not meet when you think.