PLSC 565: Local Governments and Politics  
Winter 2016  
(CRN 26552)

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Focus of the Course

The primary goal of this course is to understand the context – political, historical, demographic, spatial, and economic – within which local governments operate. PLSC 565 also functions as a gateway for those taking the local government concentration in the MPA program. It will be more “academic” than most of the other courses in the sequence. PLSC 625, for instance, will concentrate on management practices and problems at the local level; PLSC 580 will examine development policies and strategies as they relate to the local economy, quality of life, and sustainability; PLSC 645 examines the relationships among governments at all levels and between governments and nonprofits; and PLSC 655 looks at planning and politics at the local level. There are also related courses in Geography, and Urban & Regional Planning, and the College of Business.

Some of you will have completed several core MPA courses by now. Others might be in PLSC 540 or 578 this semester; both courses are good complements to our work. Comparable background in planning, geography, sociology, or economics can also serve you well.

Assignments & Evaluation

Your grade includes critical essays (4 @ 10%), a policy brief (40%) with accompanying synopsis and presentation (5%), and discussion (15%, weighted toward weeks as discussion leader). Grading is done on a 0-100 scale with the following thresholds: A = 93, A- = 90, B+ = 87, B = 84, B- = 80, and letter grades below 80(almost never needed in graduate classes) having cutoffs with comparable second digits.

Written work must conform to The Chicago Manual of Style, whose author-date format is used for assigned readings in this syllabus. You can also use Chicago style for numbered endnotes. Poor writing may be penalized up to one letter grade; late work will be penalized one letter grade per 24 hours and prorated for fractions thereof.

Reading. We will use a mix of books, book chapters, journal articles, and material from research organizations and professional associations. Each week includes both required reading followed by supplementary reading, which can be helpful for learning more about a topic and doing your essays.

There are two required books:


Journal articles should be accessed from the Halle Library web site using the “Journals by Title” search tab. Material from outside organizations is available at their web sites or on CANVAS; book chapters will be posted to CANVAS. Reading assignments might be changed during the semester.

Discussion. Think of our weekly seminar like a staff meeting in terms of your preparation and participation. With the exception of a few weeks, we will build the first 15-20 minutes of each class
around significant trends or events that local managers should know about. It would be especially helpful if the readings matched the topic for the week. Anyone can bring up items, but two people will be leaders for each week on a rotating basis. The reading(s) should have appeared the previous week in a professional outlet (a few suggestions are at the end of the syllabus). To get discussion started, anyone can (leaders must) post a short reading or link by 4:00 PM the Sunday before our class. Leaders should suggest questions related to the reading and help to guide the discussion during class. We will focus on both the contents of the reading and its implications for local governments.

There will be limited class time devoted to lectures. You are expected to come prepared and to participate so that we can best understand each week’s reading. I will give you an overview to each section of the course, as well as questions each week to guide the following week’s class. Repeating what you have read is minimally acceptable graduate work. Identifying strengths and weaknesses in a study, presenting competing alternatives or evidence, and laying out the study’s implications for policy, governing, or management are the skills that differentiate excellent from ordinary discussion.

**Essays.** You will write one essay for each of the four sections of the course. Each essay is worth 10 percent of your grade and is due by 6:00 PM on the Monday before we discuss them. Due dates are Jan. 18, Feb. 8, March 21, and April 4. Guidelines are in CANVAS with deadlines, which are also below.

**Policy Brief.** This report is an analysis of a local service/process or some federal or state urban program. It must cover both an overview of the service, process, or program and its status in a specific jurisdiction (municipality, township, or county). Detailed guidelines are posted to CANVAS. Deadlines for the brief’s three preliminary steps are listed there and in the schedule below.

**Important EMU Policies.** Disability accommodations must be arranged through the Disability Resource Center: [https://www.emich.edu/drc/](https://www.emich.edu/drc/). Policies on academic honesty are administered by the Student Conduct Office: [http://www.emich.edu/studentconduct/index.php](http://www.emich.edu/studentconduct/index.php). Especially because this is a seminar in a graduate program, plagiarism will result in a grade of zero on the assignment in question.

**Seminar Schedule**

**Week 1: January 6**

**Overview of the Course and Some Urban “Basics”**

**Part 1: The Local Government Setting**

**The Status of American Local Governments**
- The local government landscape (from the *Census of Governments*). Go the Census Bureau’s page “Lists and Structure of Governments” and then to the box for the “Number of Governments” menu. Start with Table 2 and the compare it to Tables 1 and 4.
Week 2: January 13
Lecture: A Brief History of Urban America

A Changing Urban Landscape?
• Oliver: chap. 1.

Supplementary Reading:

January 18: Essay #1 due by 6:00 PM.

Week 3: January 20
Conditions in Michigan

Discussion: Essay #1

Supplementary Reading:
Part 2: Local Institutions & Political Participation

Week 4: January 27

Government Structure

Supplementary Reading:

February 1: Policy Brief proposal due by 6:00 PM.

Week 5: February 3

Local Elections: Who Runs and Who Votes?
- Oliver: chaps. 2 & 3.

Discussion: Policy Briefs

Supplementary Reading:

February 8: Essay #2 due by 6:00 PM.

Week 6: February 10

Local Elections: Campaigns and Outcomes
• Oliver: chaps. 4, 5, & 6.

Discussion: Essay #2

Supplementary Reading:

Part 3: The Policy Process

Week 7: February 17

Local Policy Making
Supplementary Reading:
• Svara, James H. 1985. “Dichotomy and Duality: Reconceptualizing the Relationship Between Policy and Administration in Council-Manager Cities.” *Public Administration Review* 45:1 (January/February): 221-232. [This is one of the “classic” works on government structure and the politics-administration dichotomy.]

February 29: Policy Brief synopsis due to the class by 6:00 PM.

Week 8: March 2
Policy Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts

Discussion: Policy Briefs

Supplementary Reading

**Week 9: March 9**

**Providing Local Services**


**Supplementary Reading:**


**Week 10: March 16**

**Intergovernmental Cooperation and Regionalism**


**Supplementary Reading:**


**March 21: Essay #3 due by 6:00 PM.**

**Week 11: March 23**

**Dealing with the States and the Feds**


• Sapotichne, Joshua, Erika Rosebrook, Eric A. Scorsone, Danielle Kaminski, Mary Doidge, and Traci Taylor. 2015. “Beyond State Takeovers: Reconsidering the Role of State Government in

Discussion: Essay #3

Supplementary Reading:

Week 12: March 30
Policy Brief Presentations

**Part 4: The Future of Urban Michigan**

April 4: Essay #4 due by 4:00 PM.

Week 13: April 6
**Working Against the Tide in Detroit (Discussion: Essay #4)**

• Gallagher: all.
• Bomey, Nathan, and John Gallagher. 2013. “How Detroit Went Broke.” *Detroit Free Press* (September 15) [archived article require scrolling a bit before getting to the body of the story].
• Bomey, Nathan, John Gallagher, and Mark Stryker. 2014. “How Detroit Was Reborn: The Inside Story of Detroit’s Historic Bankruptcy Case.” *Detroit Free Press* (November 9) [some of the chapters will be more useful than others].

Week 14: April 13
**What’s Down the Road?**


Supplementary Reading:

April 22: Policy Brief due by 7:30 PM (hard and electronic copy)
HELPFUL WEB SITES

Selected News Feeds for Local Update Discussions

_Governing_ (free subscription and daily news feed)  [http://www.governing.com/](http://www.governing.com/)

Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program
(research and bi-weekly newsletter)  [http://www.brookings.edu/about/programs/metro](http://www.brookings.edu/about/programs/metro)


Center for Michigan (_The Bridge_)  [http://bridgemi.com/](http://bridgemi.com/)

Professional Organizations


Michigan Municipal League  [http://www.mml.org/home.html](http://www.mml.org/home.html)


Government Agencies


U.S. Census Bureau  [http://www.census.gov/](http://www.census.gov/)


Research Sites


U-M Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy  [http://closup.umich.edu/](http://closup.umich.edu/)