

PSC 3192W: State and Local Politics

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Office Hours: TBD

Office: TBD

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Class Hours: TBD

Class Room: TBD

Course Description

Although the political news cycle largely focuses on the President, Congress, and Supreme Court, the vast majority of political decision making in the United States occurs in the fifty state governments and over 90,000 local government units across the United States. The actions that elected and unelected officials take have far-reaching consequences on our daily lives. For example, differences in state laws and policies determine the quality and cost of education, whether independents can vote in primary elections, whether guns are allowed on college campuses, and whether smoking marijuana is legal or a felony.

As states are frequently described as “laboratories of democracy,” a focus of the course is examining the similarities and differences between state and local governments across the country. In doing so, we will assess how variation across political institutions, and in citizens’ attitudes, affects the politics and policies of subnational governments. Particular attention will be given to events in the Washington D.C. Metropolitan Area, with each class session beginning with a brief discussion of relevant news to the study of state and local politics. As such, students are expected to come to class prepared to raise interesting stories or questions from the week’s news. Students are recommended to read a daily newspaper (e.g., *Washington Post*), listen to local podcasts (e.g., *Top News* from WTOP), or watch local television news. Attention to local developments will enhance the value of the course, although it is no substitute for careful reading, classroom discussion, and attendance.

Learning Objectives

As a result of completing this writing-in-the-disciplines (WID) course, students will be able to:

- Recall the historical development and institutional features of governing bodies at state and local level;
- Describe how subnational rules and institutions affect the activities of state and local governments;
- Evaluate the role of the public in shaping policy outcomes through elections, political parties, and interest groups; and
- Demonstrate critical and analytical thinking in writing through drafting and revising, as well as through peer review of classmates’ writing.

Average Amount of Direct Instruction or Guided Interaction with the Instructor and Average Minimum Amount of Independent (Out-of-Class) Learning Expected per Week

This a 3-credit, lecture-based course with 2.5 hours/week of direct instruction. Students are expected to spend a minimum of 5 hours/week of independent learning, totaling a minimum of 7.5 hours/week or 112.5 hours per semester.

Required Texts

Donovan, T., Smith, D. A, Osborn, T. L, & Mooney, C. Z. (2015). *State and Local Politics: Institutions and Reform*. Stamford, CT. Cengage Learning. [Donovan et al. on Course Calendar]

Gray, V., Hanson, R. L., & Kousser, T. (2018). *Politics in the American States: A Comparative Analysis*. 11th edition. Los Angeles, CA. Sage Publications. [Gray et al. on Course Calendar]

Additional readings in the Course Calendar will be posted on the course web page on Blackboard.

Assignments and Grades

Participation (5%): Students are expected to attend lectures and do all readings prior to class meetings. They are also expected to contribute regularly in class. This means answering questions, participating in discussions, and helping other students. This is the best way to maximize performance. In addition, there will be **six** pop writing opportunities over the course of the semester (each worth one percent of the final grade). Because there are six assignments, it is possible to receive one extra point towards your semester grade. Students must arrive to class on time in order to take the pop writing assignment.

Midterm Exam (20%): The midterm exam will include material covered in the assigned readings and in the lectures for all of the weeks up to the midterm. A study guide will be distributed to the class one week before the midterm exam.

Research Paper (50%): A core requirement of the course is to produce a research paper (roughly 12-15 pages) that analyzes a topic related to one of the subjects covered in the course readings and/or lectures. A detailed description of the paper assignment will be distributed early in the semester (as well as grading rubrics for each stage of the research paper). The research paper grade will be determined as follows:

- Proposal: (10%)
- Rough Draft: (10%)
- Peer Review Participation: (5%)
- Final Draft: (25%)

Final Exam (25%): The final exam will be cumulative across the entire semester, with a heavier emphasis on content presented after the midterm. A study guide will be distributed to the class one week before the final exam.

Final letter grades for the course will be assigned as follows:

92.50% and above = A	80.00% – 82.49% = B–	67.50% – 69.99% = D+
90.00% – 92.49% = A–	77.50% – 79.99% = C+	62.50% – 67.49% = D
87.50% – 89.99% = B+	72.50% – 77.49% = C	60.00% – 62.49% = D–
82.50% – 87.49% = B	70.00% – 72.49% = C–	59.99 and below = F

Important Dates

As a rule, there will be no deadline extensions given in this course. Exceptions will be made only with prior consent for planned events such as sponsored GWU activities, religious observances or under unusual circumstances such as a documented medical emergency.

The core assignments of the course are *tentatively* scheduled as follows. All written assignments are due hard-copy in class, except as noted. Any changes will be announced in class. Students are responsible for being aware of any changes.

Research Paper Proposal: Week 3

Research Paper Rough Draft: Week 9

Midterm Exam: Week 7

Research Paper Peer Review Workshop: Week 11

Research Paper Final Draft: Week 14

Final Exam: The final exam will be given during the final exam period and not the last week of the semester, in accordance with university policy. For details and complete policy, see: provost.gwu.edu/administration/final-examinations-during-examination-period.

University Policies and Resources for Students:

University Policy on Observance of Religious Holidays

In accordance with University policy, students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on the day(s) of religious observance. For details and policy, see: students.gwu.edu/accommodations-religious-holidays

Academic Integrity Code

Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information. For details and complete code, see: studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity.

Support for Students Outside the Classroom

Disability Support Services (DSS) 202-994-8250

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office in Rome Hall, 801 22nd Street, NW, Suite 102, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information see: disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/.

Counseling and Psychological Services 202-994-5300

GW's Colonial Health Center offers counseling and psychological services, supporting mental health and personal development by collaborating directly with students to overcome challenges and difficulties that may interfere with academic, emotional, and personal success. For additional information see: healthcenter.gwu.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services.

University Writing Center

Given PSC 3192W's writing emphasis, students are encouraged to consult GW's University Writing Center for assistance at any stage of the writing process. For additional information see: writingcenter.gwu.edu or to schedule an appointment see: gwu.mywconline.com.

Safety and Security

- **In an Emergency:** call GYPD 202-994-6111 or 911
- **For Situation-Specific Actions:** Review the Emergency Response Handbook: safety.gwu.edu/emergency-response-handbook
- **In an Active Violence Situation:** Get Out, Hide Out, or Take Out: go.gwu.edu/shooterprep
- **Stay Informed:** safety.gwu.edu/stay-informed

Course Calendar

The Course Calendar outlines the topics covered in class and the reading assignments for each topic. I will at times get ahead or behind the printed schedule. Thus, students may want to adjust their reading pace accordingly. I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus as the semester progresses. Students are responsible for any changes to the assigned readings. All of the readings on the syllabus (except for the required books) are available online via [Blackboard](#). Once logged onto the course on Blackboard, follow the links to the relevant week on the syllabus, and there will be separate links for each of the readings. If there is trouble accessing the online pieces, please let me know as soon as possible.

Section 1: Introduction to State and Local Government

Week 1: Introduction

Readings: Donovan et al., Chapter 1

Gray et al., Chapter 1

Green, A. (2013). [“How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps”](#)

Texas A&M. [“Clear & Concise Writing”](#).

Week 2: The Constitution and the History of Federalism

Readings: Donovan et al., Chapter 2

Gray et al., Chapter 2 (Pages 28-31)

Federalist Nos. 17, 39, 45 (available on Blackboard and [here](#)).

Week 3: States in a Federal System and Washington D.C. Politics

Readings: Continue Donovan et al., Chapter 2

Gray et al., Chapter 2 (Pages 32-56)

Due: Paper Proposal for Research Paper

Section 2: Political Institutions

Week 4: State Legislatures

Readings: Donovan et al., Chapter 7

Gray et al., Chapter 7

Feidt, A., Whitney, E. (2015, May 12). National Public Radio. [“State Legislatures Quarrel Over Whether To Expand Medicaid”](#)

Week 5: Governors

Readings: Donovan et al., Chapter 8

Gray et al., Chapter 8

Kousser, T., & Phillips, J. H. (2012). [The Power of American Governors: Winning on Budgets and Losing on Policy](#). Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1

Week 6: State Courts

Readings: Donovan et al., Chapter 9

Gray et al., Chapter 9

Caldarone, R. P., Canes-Wrone, B., & Clark, T. S. (2009). [Partisan Labels and Democratic Accountability: An Analysis of State Supreme Court Abortion Decisions](#). *The Journal of Politics*, 71(2), 560-573.

Note: A study guide for the midterm will be distributed upon the conclusion of the State Courts section.

Week 7: Midterm and Film

Readings: N/A.

Film: *Anytown, USA*

Section 3: Political Behavior

Week 8: Participation and Elections

Readings: Donovan et al., Chapter 3 (Pages 74-96)

Hajnal, Z. L. (2018, October 22). New York Times. [“Why Does No One Vote in Local Elections?”](#)

Kim, Y. (2020, February 18). The New Yorker. [“How Milwaukee Could Decide The Next President”](#)

Severns, M. (2020, January 15). Politico. [“Democrats plan \\$50M campaign to flip state legislatures before redistricting”](#)

Week 9: Representation

Readings: Donovan et al., Chapter 3 (Pages 97-104)

Gray et al., Chapter 18

Asch, C. M., & Musgrove, G. D. (2017). *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital*. UNC Press Books. Chapter 14 and Epilogue (on Blackboard).

Due: Rough Draft of Research Paper

Week 10: Direct Democracy

Readings: Donovan et al., Chapter 4

Gray et al., Chapter 6

New York Times. (2016, October 16). [“Proposition 13: Mad as Hell”](#).

Week 11: Political Parties and Peer Review

Readings: Donovan et al., Chapter 5

Gray et al., Chapter 3

Due: The in-class Peer Review session will be on the second day of Week 11.

Week 12: Interest Groups and Campaign Finance

Readings: Donovan et al., Chapter 6

Gray et al., Chapter 4

New York Times. (2019, November 7). [“Don’t Let Party Hacks Hijack Election Reform”](#)

Section 4: State and Local Policymaking and Public Policy

Week 13: Local Government and Land Use Politics

Readings: Donovan et al., Chapters 11 and 12

Foglesong, R. E. (2001). *Married to the Mouse: Walt Disney World and Orlando*. Yale University Press. Chapter 4 (on Blackboard).

Week 14: Fiscal Policy and Health Policy

Readings: Donovan et al., Chapters 10 and 14

Gray et al., Chapter 11 and 12

Bartels, L. M. (2005). [Homer gets a Tax Cut: Inequality and Public Policy in the American Mind](#). *Perspectives on Politics*, 3(1), 15-31.

Belluz, J. (2016). [“How one of America’s least healthy counties got so sick”](#)

Due: Final Draft of Research Paper

Note: A study guide for the final exam will be distributed upon the conclusion of the Health Policy section.

Week 15: Morality and Education Policy

Readings: Donovan et al., Chapters 13 and 15

Gray et al., Chapter 13 and 14

Lind, D. (2015). Vox. [“The death penalty in America: expensive, racially skewed, and still popular”](#)

Spies, M. (2018). The New Yorker. [“The N.R.A. Lobbyist Behind Florida’s Pro-Gun Policies”](#)