

Department of Political Science
Political Science 84-310
Urban Government- 3.0 Credits

Fall Semester, 2017
University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh
Sage 4215, Monday 6:00-9:00 pm
Office Hours: M, W 1:30-3:00 pm

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This course will examine the way in which government structures, social processes, organized interests and public issues shape the politics of American cities. We will ask who governs our cities, how this is done, who benefits, and what impact these policies have on peoples lives. The first section of the course will provide a historical overview of the development of U.S. cities within a liberal-capitalist framework. The second examines the competition between the various urban political actors to determine the policies of municipal governments and the context in which this struggle takes place. The third investigate the impact of the public policies that are produced by the political process on the quality of urban life. The final section looks at the competing solutions to our urban problems and the prospects for significant social change.

Course Objectives:

From the specific course perspective, these are the elements that I expect you to master:

- Understand and be able to explain the major political and governing institutions of the US cities, suburbs and towns.
- Know the major political actors, structures, social conditions, and processes that shape the policies and performance of urban governments.
- Understand the major urban conflicts and policy problems and the merits of the alternatives that have been proposed to deal with these problems.
- Analyze different alternatives and projections for metropolitan regions and explain how we might address urban policy problems in the future.

Signature Question: How do people understand and engage in community life?

Required Readings:

Espejo, Urban America: Opposing Viewpoints.
Vogel & Harrigan, Political Change in the Metropolis.

Course Outline:

Topics- Weeks	Readings-	
	Espejo	Vogel
I. Evolution of City Politics		
1) Urban Governance	Intro	1
2) Metropolitan Growth	1: 1-2	2
3) Race and Ethnicity	1: 3-4	3
II. Urban Political Process		
4) Bosses, Machines and Reform	1: 5-6	4
5) Conditions and Opportunities	2: 1-2	5
6) Urban Political Economy	2: 3-4	6
7) Mid-Term Examination	Review readings.	
III. Dilemmas of Urban Policy		
8) Leadership. Power, Participation	3: 1-2	7
9) Suburbs against Cities	3: 3-4	8
10) Metropolitan Government	3: 5-6	9
IV. Prospects and Projections		
11) Conflict and Social Change	4: 1-2	10
12) National-Urban Linkage	4: 3-4	11
13) The Future of the City		12
14) Final Examination	Review readings.	

Roughly one week will be devoted to each of the topics and readings but changes in course assignments may be necessary.

Course Requirements:

- 1) Two Examinations (50%) – Exams may include multiple-choice questions, identification, short answers and an essay. Exam dates will be announced in class.
- 2) Class Participation (20%) - Participation in class discussions on controversies over policy alternatives. Students will be asked to be the primary participants in at least two policy debates during the semester.
- 3) Term Paper Project (30%) – Projects may examine any topic covering a public policy issue related to community sustainability and must use one of the following ten listed techniques. Topics should be cleared with the instructor and utilize a standard form of research methodology and stylistic format. Final papers should be 13 to 15 pages in length with an outline, references, and endnotes.

Paper Project Choices

- 1) Explore a single local government department and demonstrate how local interests influence this particular agency's functions.
- 2) Study the opposing positions and viewpoints of competing groups in a local debate over a major municipal policy controversy.
- 3) Explain how federal or state programs, spending, laws, and mandates shape the way a city responds to a specific urban social issue.
- 4) Follow a local election campaign and interpret the results with a retrospective analysis of the significance and implications of the vote.
- 5) Examine one individual city neighborhood, interview the residents, and develop a plan for dealing this particular community's problems.
- 6) Explore the structure and personnel of a city and prepare a detailed plan for major reform or remodeling of the city's government.
- 7) Become a participant observer at public hearings, boards and commissions in order to determine if any powerful interests are dominant.
- 8) Interview the mayor, council members or other major political actors and show how their personality, priorities and beliefs shape policy.

9) Review the historical developments that created the city as it now exists and project the most likely urban future for this municipality.

10) Become active in a local group or neighborhood organization in order to determine how effective it is in promoting its policy agenda.

11) Review a major programmatic enactment or tax and explain which individuals or groups benefit most from this particular program.

12) Explore a significant conflict between the city and a suburb, town or the county and show how this dispute might be best resolved.

General Education Objectives

- To contribute to a liberal education of students by clarifying the manifold ways in which government and politics influences the quality of their lives and shapes their opportunities for personal success and self-actualization.
- To prepare students for active citizenship by providing them with essential knowledge about the political process as well as useful participatory skills.
- To provide a rigorous intellectual environment in which students are given analytical tools, learn research methods and develop the capacity to clearly articulate their arguments, ideas and values.

The University Studies Program in General Education includes the following broad definitions, drawn from our university's Essential Learning Outcomes. To build intellectual curiosity among students, these broad themes have in turn been phrased as Signature Questions, which provide the foundational structure of the UWO USP:

1) Knowledge of Sustainability and Its Applications is the ability to understand local and global earth systems; the qualities of ecological integrity and the means to restore and preserve it; and the interconnection of ecological integrity, social justice, and economic wellbeing.

Signature Question: How do people understand and create a more sustainable world?

2) Civic Knowledge and Engagement entails understanding political and nonpolitical processes that influence a local, state, national, or global community and applying skills and strategies that can affect the life of a community in positive ways.

Signature Question: How do people understand and engage in community life?

3) Intercultural Knowledge and Competence is the understanding of one's own culture as well as cultures beyond one's own; the recognition of the cultural values and history, language, traditions, arts, and social institutions of a group of people; the ability to negotiate and bridge cultural differences in ways that allow for broader perspectives to emerge; and the skill to investigate a wide range of worldviews, beliefs, practices, and values.

Political Science Majors should take Political Methodology (245) in either their sophomore or first semester of their junior year. PS245 is a prerequisite for the senior capstone, Political Analysis (401), and cannot be taken concurrently.