COURSE SYLLABUS

POLS 226: STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Spring Semester, 2015

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Office hours: Fridays 2-4 p.m. Since on-campus meetings or off-campus obligations may occasionally prevent my being in my office during office hours, making an appointment in advance, even during office hours, is a good idea. But I do expect to be regularly in my office during office hours, unless otherwise announced. I am also available for appointments at other times.

I. OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE

This course will provide an overview of sub-national (i.e., state and local) government(s) in the USA, a vast and diverse topic. In one semester we shall not be able to cover all the interesting and important phenomena and issues to which sub-national governance in the American political system gives rise. That having been said, we shall attempt to lay a good groundwork for an overall understanding of American sub-national governments.

The course will begin with theoretical, conceptual, and historical matters, some of which can anchor our understanding of sub-national government(s) in political systems in general and some of which apply to American sub-national government(s) in particular. This part of the course will address topics such as the functions that sub-national governments can perform and the values that they can foster in a national political system, the origins of state and local governments in the United States, federalism and other structural relationships among different governments in a single political system, and implications of the size of sub-national government units for the practice of democracy.

The second part of the course will address state politics, and the third part will treat local politics. There are, of course, significant connections between these two levels of sub-national governments in the United States and those connections will, as appropriate, be reflected in our treatment of these two levels of sub-national government in the United States. In addressing state governments, we shall focus on the three traditional branches of government and the “direct democracy” phenomena of referenda, initiatives, and recalls (and the related phenomenon of “retention elections”). In treating local governments, we shall address their enormous diversity and consider their noteworthy roles and
peculiarities, although we shall probably directly address in any detail no more than a half-dozen local government specimens, and perhaps fewer than that.

Students enrolled in POLS 226 will be expected to approach the workings of American sub-national governments as political scientists. As such, they will need to complete two projects as part of their responsibilities in the course. More details about these two projects will be forthcoming, but they will include (i) systematically observing and reporting on two local government public meetings and (ii) one or more of the following: class presentations, research papers, reflective essays, and/or debates presented in class on relevant topics.

The Indiana General Assembly (i.e., Indiana state legislature) has been meeting since early January, 2015, in its biennial “long session” (also sometimes called its “budget session”), which will likely last into April, and some interesting measures have been and are being considered. POLS 226 students are encouraged to pay attention to Indiana state government and Greencastle and Putnam County local governments as one way to put some flesh-and-blood on POLS 226’s academic treatment of sub-national government(s).

II. OUTLINE OF TOPICS TO BE TREATED IN THE COURSE

Part 1 Introduction: theoretical, conceptual, and historical matters

Part 2 State politics: variations among the states, the three branches of state governments, “direct democracy,” and related matters

Part 3 Local politics: general-purpose and special-purpose local governments (“special districts”) and what they do

Part 4 Policies, issues, and problems in sub-national government(s) in the American political system

Part 5 Concluding reflections on American sub-national governments

III. READINGS

Two books have been ordered through Eli’s Books for POLS 226. Both are more expensive than I would like them to be, but we shall be using each of them to a considerable extent throughout the semester.


Readings for each part of the course will be provided in a separate set of course materials. Information about which readings are required and which are recommended, and when particular reading and writing assignments are due, will be provided in class and/or electronically.

Besides the two books listed above, course readings will appear in other sources, likely including some of the following:

Governing, published monthly by Congressional Quarterly. Unbound issues starting with July 2014 are held on reserve in R.O.W. Library.


State Legislatures, published monthly by the National Conference of State Legislatures. Unbound issues starting with July 2014 are held on reserve in R.O.W. Library.

Stinebrickner, Bruce, editor, State and Local Government, 1st through 16th editions (1984-2014). One or two copies of most editions are on reserve in R.O.W.

IV. STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES; GRADING

Students will be expected to come to class having completed assigned readings, thought about them, and prepared to discuss and analyze them. In this context, please read or reread the six points, especially #3, under “Academic Expectations for DePauw Students” in the “Academic Life” part of the Student Handbook that is available on the DePauw website. Most classes will consist partly of lectures and partly of discussion, and class discussion will usually relate to assigned readings.
Students are responsible for being familiar with and abiding by DePauw's "Academic Integrity Policy," which appears in the "Academic Life" part of the Student Handbook.

DePauw University is committed to providing equal access to academic programs and university administered activities with reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Amendments (ADAAA). Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability or learning challenge is strongly encouraged to contact Pamela Roberts, Director of Student Disability Services and ADA Coordinator, for further information on how to receive accommodations and support. Student Disability Services is located in Suite 200 in the Memorial Student Union Building. Phone number is 765-658-6267.

Unless there is a specific announcement to the contrary, the use of laptops and other similar electronic devices in POLS 226 classes is prohibited. Cell phones should, of course, be turned off.

What appears below is a general indication of how much different components will count, but this "general indication" is subject to (almost surely minor) modifications that will, of course, be announced to the class and posted on Moodle.

A. Contributions to class discussions, including attendance, evidence of preparation for class, 'tidbits,' etc. about 20%

B. One test, one final exam* about 42.5%

C. Medium-length essay/paper/project about 20%

D. Public meeting attendance and report about 17.5%

*The final exam will be given in the time period specified in the University's final exam schedule. Please CAREFULLY bear this in mind when making plans to leave campus at the end of the semester. The POLS 226 final exam is scheduled for Tuesday, 12 May 2015, 1-4 p.m.

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