

POL 498 Comparative State Politics

Senior Capstone Seminar

SSB 241 Wednesdays 9:30 - 12:20

Instructor: Dr. Daniel Bowen
Department: Political Science
Office Hours: MoTh: 9:00–9:55a;
2:00–3:00p or by appointment

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1 Course Description and Purpose

The American states are unique political institutions. State governments have great constitutional authority in our federal system for enacting public policy and remain the primary providers of public services in the U.S. Since policies are often first experimented on in the states before enacting on the federal level, as evidenced by the major changes in welfare, education, and health care policies in the last 15 years, the states are often referred to as “laboratories of democracy.” Additionally, the American states boast great variation on social, economic, and political characteristics of interest to political scientists. Yet the states are deeply similar due to common historical development and participation in the U.S. political and legal systems, creating a situation ideal for comparative research. This seminar will focus on how differences in the political and social context of the states influence political outputs like turnout, campaigns and elections, representation, and governance. As a capstone seminar, students will conduct a major research project using empirical data from the states and illustrating the appropriate use of research methods. Students should have senior status and have taken POL 390 (Tutorial).

2 Course Goals

The course is designed to be a culmination of the political science program, with the central component being an individual research project. Specifically, the course meets the following learning goals set out by the Department of Political Science:

- (2) To lead students to examine the workings of fundamental political processes and institutions at the local, national, and international level while offering them the opportunity to explore a field of political science in more depth.
- (4) To mentor students in developing advanced skills in critical thinking so that they may read analytically, understand complex relationships and concepts, identify underlying assumptions, and dissect a scholarly text.
- (5) To teach students to conduct original research, independently and in teams, using scholarly sources and empirical research tools characteristic of the discipline.
- (6) To refine the communications skills of students so that they can present oral and written arguments that are cogent, compelling, and well-substantiated.

3 Course Required Materials

State politics is a surprisingly broad field, with a wide range of studied topics, concepts, and phenomenon. In order to provide an opportunity to study many different issues in the field, as well as to expose students to real and current state politics research, journal articles will be the primary required readings. Occasionally supplemental book chapters will also be assigned. Journal articles will be available for FREE pdf download at the library's website (use Google Scholar): <http://www.tcnj.edu/~library/research/index.html>. Other readings will be posted on the course's SOCS site.

4 Research Project in State Politics

The central component of the class is the successful completion of research project on some aspect of state politics. Students will write a research paper based on the findings of their empirical study and will also give a formal presentation of their study to the seminar at the end of the semester. The basic details of the research project are as follows (with more information to be given at a later date):

Data and methodology: Students will collect data on the states and analyze them using appropriate statistical methods. Projects can be large-N comparative studies (using statistical methods) or in-depth comparative case studies of a few well-chosen states or institutions. In both cases, projects are expected to be methodologically rigorous and incorporate data on state politics, with attention given to evaluating empirical claims and the generalizability of the findings.

Major components: The project should include (but is not limited to) a well-defined research question, developed theory, at least one testable hypothesis drawn from the theory, descriptions of the data and methods used, and a discussion of the results of the study.

Paper length: The paper should be 6000 - 7000 words long, which is approximately 20-25 pages of double-spaced, 12pt font text. In addition, the paper should included tables, graphs, and/or figures when appropriate.

Scholarly literature: An important component of any research paper is to examine what other scholars have published on the issue to situate the new work in the context of the field's knowledge and to provide support for claims not tested in the study. Each research paper should engage with the previous literature and cite appropriately.

Schedule: The research project includes six steps: three short paper ideas, a research proposal presentation and written summary, a polished draft of the paper to be circulated to the class, a formal presentation of the finished research, the final draft, and disseminating the paper or presentation to some outlet for publication.

Paper ideas: three 1-2 page paper ideas are due during in the first six weeks of class (see schedule). Each paper idea should include the topic or research question driving the research, a specific, testable hypothesis, and some comment on the possible methodologies and data sources.

Research proposal: Students will present their polished research proposal to the class and receive feedback on their proposal. A written, 4 page research proposal is due at 5:00pm on the Friday following the presentation and should incorporate comments and suggestions from the presentation. Research proposals should include the research question, outline of the theory, one or more testable hypotheses drawn from the theory, a brief comment on how the project would fill a gap or correct a problem with the existing scholarly literature on the topic, and a discussion of the methodology and data sources to be used.

Draft: A polished draft of the research paper is due by the end of the day on November 8. The draft should be posted to SOCS for circulation to the rest of the class. Each student is expected to read and comment on every other research paper. During the final presentations, the written comments will be given to the presenter and the course instructor.

Presentation: The final two weeks of class are devoted to presentations. Each student will have approximately 20 minutes to present their original research and answer questions from the class.

Final Paper: The final paper is due on Dec. 15 at noon (through SOCS) and should incorporate comments and suggestions received after the presentation as well as any needed additional research and editing.

Dissemination: Either the final paper or the presentation should be submitted for publication by 12/15. Some possible outlets include TCNJ Journal of Student Scholarship, the Celebration of Student Achievement, or an undergraduate academic journal. Please talk to me about an appropriate publication outlet for the work.

5 Grading

The following tables denotes the weight of each course component toward the final grade and grade ranges used.

Assignment	% of Final Grade
Participation / discussion	10
Paper ideas	5
Research proposal (presentation and written)	10
Draft	25
Comments on drafts	10
Presentation	10
Final paper	25
Dissemination of paper	5

Table 1: Grading Weights

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
100–93	93–90	90–87	87–83	83–80	80–77	77–73	73–70	70–67	67–63	63–60	60–0

Table 2: Grading Scale

6 Class Schedule, Topics, and Readings

References

- Alvarez-Diaz, Angel, Lucas Gonzalez and Benjamin Radcliff. 2010. “The Politics of Happiness: On the Political Determinants of Quality of Life in the American States.” *Journal of Politics* 72(3):894–905.
- Berry, Frances Stokes and William D. Berry. 1992. “Tax Innovation in the States: Capitalizing on Political Opportunity.” *American Journal of Political Science* 36(3):715–742.
- Brace, Paul and Aubrey Jewett. 1995. “The state of state politics research.” *Political Research Quarterly* 48(3):643–681.
- Brown, Adam R. 2010. “Are Governors Responsible for the State Economy? Partisanship, Blame, and Divided Federalism.” *The Journal of Politics* 72(3):605–615.
- Carey, John M., Richard G. Niemi and Lynda W. Powell. 1998. “The Effects of Term Limits on State Legislatures.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 23(2):271–300.

Date	Topic(s)	Readings	Deadlines
9\1	Introduction and Comparative Analysis		
9\8	Do the States Matter? Public Policy and Outputs	Brace and Jewett 1995 Alvarez-Diaz et al. 2010 Meier and Holbrook 1992 Mooney and Lee 1995 Berry and Berry 1992	
9\15	Institutions I Governor & Legislature	Dometrius 1987 Squire and Fastnow 1994 Brown 2010 Squire 1992 Maestas 2000	
9\22	Institutions II Legislature & Direct Democracy	Carey, Niemi and Powell 1998 Hogan 2004 Donovan and Bowler 1998 Gerber 1996 Tolbert, Grummel and Smith 2001	Project idea #1
9\29	Public Opinion and Representation	Wright, Erikson and McIver 1987 Norrande 2000 Rosenthal 1998 (Ch. 1) Reingold 1992 Niemi, Hill and Grofman 1985	Project idea #2
10\6	Race, Culture and Social Capital	Elazar 1972 (Ch. 4) Putnam 1995 Sullivan 1973 Hero and Tolbert 1996 Hill and Leighley 1999	Project idea #3
10\13	Research Proposals		Presentation & written proposal
10\20	Research Proposals (Cont.)		
10\27	Meetings with instructor		
11\3	Meetings with instructor		
11\10	Commenting on drafts		Draft Due: 11\8 by 11:59pm
11\17	Commenting on drafts		
11\24	-Thanksgiving Break-		
12\1	Paper Presentations		Comments Due
12\8	Paper Presentations		Comments Due
12\15			Research Paper Due by noon Paper Dissemination

Table 3: Class Schedule

Dometrius, Nelson C. 1987. "Changing Gubernatorial Power: The Measure vs. Reality." *The Western Political Quarterly* 40(2):319–328.

Donovan, Todd and Shaun Bowler. 1998. An Overview of Direct Democracy in the American States. In *Citizens as Legislators: Direct Democracy in the United States*, ed. Shaun Bowler, Todd Donovan and Caroline Tolbert. Ohio State University Press chapter 1, pp. 1–21.

Elazar, Daniel Judah. 1972. *American Federalism: A View From the States*. Crowell.

Gerber, Elisabeth R. 1996. "Legislative response to the threat of popular initiatives." *American Journal of Political Science* 40(1):99–128.

Hero, Rodney E. and Caroline J. Tolbert. 1996. "A Racial/Ethnic Diversity Interpretation of Politics and Policy in the States of the U.S." *American Journal of Political Science* 40(3):851–871.

Hill, Kim Quaile and Jan E. Leighley. 1999. "Racial Diversity, Voter Turnout, and Mobilizing Institutions in the United States." *American Politics Research* 27(3):275–295.

- Hogan, Robert E. 2004. "Challenger Emergence, Incumbent Success, and Electoral Accountability in State Legislative Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 66(4):1283–1303.
- Maestas, Cherie. 2000. "Professional Legislatures and Ambitious Politicians: Policy Responsiveness of State Institutions." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 25(4):663–690.
- Meier, Kenneth J. and Thomas M. Holbrook. 1992. "'I Seen My Opportunities and I Took 'Em: Political Corruption in the American States.'" *The Journal of Politics* 54(1):135–155.
- Mooney, Christopher Z. and Mei-Hsien Lee. 1995. "Legislative Morality in the American States: The Case of Pre-Roe Abortion Regulation Reform." *American Journal of Political Science* 39(3):599–627.
- Niemi, Richard G., Jeffrey S. Hill and Bernard Grofman. 1985. "The impact of multimember districts on party representation in US state legislatures." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 10(4):441–455.
- Norrander, Barbara. 2000. "The multi-layered impact of public opinion on capital punishment implementation in the American states." *Political Research Quarterly* 53(4):771–793.
- Putnam, Robert D. 1995. "Tuning in, tuning out: the strange disappearance of social capital in America." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 28(4):664–683.
- Reingold, Beth. 1992. "Concepts of representation among female and male state legislators." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 17(4):509–537.
- Rosenthal, Alan. 1998. *The Decline of Representative Democracy*. CQ Press.
- Squire, Peverill. 1992. "Legislative Professionalization and Membership Diversity in State Legislatures." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 17(1):69–79.
- Squire, Peverill and Christina Fastnow. 1994. "Comparing Gubernatorial and Senatorial Elections." *Political Research Quarterly* 47(3):705–720.
- Sullivan, John L. 1973. "Political Correlates of Social, Economic, and Religious Diversity in the American States." *The Journal of Politics* 35(01):70–84.
- Tolbert, Caroline J., John A. Grummel and Daniel A. Smith. 2001. "The effects of ballot initiatives on voter turnout in the American states." *American Politics Research* 29(6):625–648.
- Wright, Gerald C., Robert S. Erikson and John P. McIver. 1987. "Public opinion and policy liberalism in the American states." *American Journal of Political Science* 31(4):980–1001.

7 Course Policies

7.1 Attendance

This course will adhere to TCNJ's attendance policy [<http://www.tcnj.edu/~academic/policy/attendance.html>]. Participation in discussion is an important component to the course.

7.2 Absences

No make-up quizzes or extensions on assignments due to an absence will be given unless you speak to me *before* you miss class or you miss class due to an illness or family emergency. If the latter is the case, I need appropriate documentation.

7.3 Academic Integrity

This course will adhere to TCNJ's academic integrity policy [<http://www.tcnj.edu/~academic/policy/integrity.html>]. Cheating is bad; don't do it. The work you hand in should be your own.

7.4 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

This course will also adhere to TCNJ's Americans with Disabilities Act policy [<http://www.tcnj.edu/~affirm/ada.html>]. If you need accommodations due to a disability, please see the instructor as soon as possible.

7.5 Disclaimer

The instructor reserves the right to make changes to this syllabus.