

Roger Austin
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Office Hours: before/after class; TBD and by appointment

Tuesday 7th period; 1:55-2:45
Thursday 7th-8th periods; 1:55-3:50
Mat 16
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State & Local Politics

POS 2112; Spring 2026 (Final; 1.8.26)

“Thinking is the hardest work known to man. This would account for why so few engage in it.” Henry Ford

Goals of the Course

Why do we have state and local governments? What functions do they perform and in which areas do they have primary responsibility for policy formation and execution? The American federal system of government is complex and gaining an appreciation and understanding of this is the chief goal of this course. Consequently, we will study federalism and then the various institutions, organizations and policy processes that most affect our everyday lives – those in the state and local governments. We will take a somewhat comparative approach, but with our vantage point, we’ll spend more time on Gainesville and Florida than elsewhere.

Since you’ll have read the material before class, coverage of topics will combine lecture and class discussion, plus academic and non-academic readings, and other hands-on materials as appropriate to our topics. We will also have occasional guest speakers. By the end of the semester, students will have been introduced to all aspects of state and local politics from the academic and practical sides. With any luck, you’ll be armed and dangerous and ready to intelligently make whatever decisions you decide to make in the years to come.

Reading Materials

Required:

- Donovan, Smith, Olson and Mooney, *State and Local Politics: Institutions and Reforms*, 4th Edition, Cengage Learning/Wadsworth, 2015. I encourage you to rent this or buy used editions when available. **(DSOM)**
- *Federalist Papers* – 10, 17, 45, 47-48 & 51 – free online. **(FP)**
- There will be other various assigned articles as well.
- Florida Constitution – free online at MyFlorida.com
- US Constitution – free online
- SayfieReview.com and/or FloridaPolitics.com and/or fortreport.com – these free sites provide complete coverage of all things Florida, including links to every newspaper in Florida, news, editorial, political cartoons, plus government websites and much, much more. There’s a good chance your hometown newspaper is there. And all for free. You can (i.e., should) even sign up for a free daily reminder email.

Recommended:

To facilitate our weekly class discussions, I’d like to suggest and to encourage you to find a daily newspaper with good coverage of state and local politics. Please note that as a UF student, you get free online access to both the NY Times and Wall Street Journal. Additionally, try listening to/watching local radio and TV news and public affairs programming; much of this can be done online. Finally, try to track Internet sites, Podcasts and/or blogs on state and local issues: Politico.com, RealClearPolitics.com, fivethirtyeight.com, NYTimes.com, Pollster.com, Pew,

Brennan Center, et al. If you find something really interesting, please send it to me and I may share it with the entire class.

Policies and Grading

Food and drinks in class are fine. You are expected to clean up after yourselves. Attendance will not be taken, but you will be conspicuous by your absence and, of course, there's no telling what fun you'll miss. Your grade will reflect your performance in the following areas:

- **10% Class Participation**
- **20% Reflection Paper** – due on Canvas by 11:59 pm on Tuesday, February 3 based on the prompt given; hint, very likely to be on Federalist 10
- **25% Midterm** – in class on Thursday, March 12
- **25% Comparative Policy Paper from Policy Working Group** - due on Canvas by 11:59 pm on Thursday, April 2 based on the prompt given. More on this in class
- **20% Final Exam** – Friday, May 1 @ 10 am; format TBD

Questions on exams will be drawn about equally from the readings, from lectures and class discussions. Papers should be approximately 5-6 pages, double-spaced, 1 inch margins, 12-point type, plus References if needed. Logic, facts and evidence are welcome as is good grammar, and I grade on all of the above.

Grading Scale:

90-100	A; 90-91 = A-
80-89	B; 80-81= B-; 88-89=B+
70-79	C; 70-71=C-; 78-79=C+
60-69	D
0-59	E

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

I take academic dishonesty very, very, very, very seriously. If I find evidence of cheating or plagiarism or other academic dishonesty, I will personally initiate disciplinary action.

Students with Special Needs

It is the responsibility of students needing special accommodation for this course to make an appointment to see me at the beginning of the semester. I will make every effort to meet your needs in accordance with UF Guidelines.

Office Hours

Feel free to come to my office hours for any reason, academic or otherwise. If my office hours are not convenient for you, we'll find a time that is. I am also easy to reach by email and typically respond quite quickly; this is the best way to reach me.

Course Schedule

Section I - Federalism – 3 weeks

<u>Week/Dates</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings</u>	<u>Notes/Other</u>
1 – Jan 13 & 15	Intro	DSOM, Preface, Ch 1	Choose Policy Group
2 – Jan 20 & 22	Federalism & Elections	DSOM, Ch 2; FP	
3 – Jan 27 & 29	Federalism & Elections	DSOM, Ch 2-3; FP;	

Section II – Campaigns & Elections – 3 Weeks

<u>Week/Dates</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Notes/Other</u>
4 – Feb 3 & 5	Participation & Elections	DSOM, Ch 3-4	Reflection Paper Due
5 – Feb 10 & 12	Direct Democracy	DSOM, Ch 4-5	
6 – Feb 17 & 19	Parties & Interest Groups	DSOM, Ch 5-6	

Section III - Institutions – 4 Weeks

<u>Week/Dates</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Notes/Other</u>
7 – Feb 24 & 26	State Legislatures	DSOM, Ch 7	Midterm March 12
8 – Mar 3 & 5	Governors & Bureaucracy	DSOM, Ch 8	
9 – Mar 10 & 12	State Courts	DSOM, Ch 9	
10 – Mar 17 & 19	Spring Break		

Section III - Policy & Special Topics – 6 Weeks

<u>Week/Dates</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Notes/Other</u>
11 – Mar 24 & 26	Fiscal Policy & Str. Local Govt	DSOM, Ch 10-11	Policy Paper Due 4/2
12 – Mar 31 & Apr 2	Land Use Planning	DSOM, Ch 12	
13 – April 7 & 9	Education Policy	DSOM, Ch 15	
15 – April 14 & 16	Welfare & Health Care Policy	DSOM, Ch 14	
16 – April 21	Morality Policy	DSOM, Ch 13	
17 – May 1	Exam time is 10 am-12:00 pm on Friday, May 1		