

POS 3122: State Politics

Spring 2025

Tuesday 1:55 pm to 2:45 pm

Thursday 1:55 pm to 3:50 pm

Room: McCarty Hall 1142

Instructor: Cassidy Reller

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Office Hours: Tuesday 11:30 am to 1:30 pm and by appointment

Office: Anderson 001C

Course Overview

In this course, we will explore the intricate and dynamic role that state governments play within the broader framework of American democracy. While much attention is often given to federal politics, state governments are the true laboratories of democracy, where diverse policies, political cultures, and governance structures emerge. This course will examine the powers and responsibilities of state governments, the unique political actors who shape state-level decision-making, and the challenges states face in an increasingly interconnected and polarized political landscape. By studying the interaction between state and federal powers and the diversity among states in terms of political parties, ideologies, and policy outcomes, we will gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms that drive American politics.

Throughout the semester, we will also focus on key topics such as electoral systems, political parties, state legislatures, and gubernatorial politics, as well as how states address pressing issues like healthcare, education, criminal justice, and economic inequality. Through a comparative lens, students will learn how local contexts influence policy choices and political behavior by analyzing case studies from various states. Additionally, we will investigate the impact of state-level politics on national trends and consider how state actors contribute to broader political movements. Whether pursuing a career in public policy, law, or political science, this course will provide the tools to critically assess the complexities and significance of state politics in the United States.

Course Materials

There is one required textbook in this course. Students can purchase them in the UF Bookstore or online. All the other articles and book chapters can be found on the UF E-Learning (Canvas) at <http://elearning.ufl.edu/>.

Thad Kousser, Jamila Michener, and Caroline Tolbert *Politics in the American States (12th Edition)* 2024. CQ Press.
(referred to in the syllabus as KMT).

Evaluation of Grades

1) Class Participation (10%)

You are expected to attend all class meetings prepared for an in-depth discussion of the assigned course material. Please know that attendance is not equal to participation. Your grade will reflect not just whether you show up but your engagement in class discussions. I will be actively keeping a record of student participation in class.

2) Comparative Outcome Paper (25%)

Pick a policy or social outcome in two states that contrast from each other. Compare using class lectures and materials and outside resources, what features of the state lead to such contrasting outcomes and policy implementation, due on the last day of class, **April 22, 2025**.

- 3) Midterm Exam (25%)
 There will be an in-class midterm exam on **February 18, 2025**. It is worth 20% of your final grade. It will cover all class material up to that date.
- 4) Final Exam (40%)
 There will be a cumulative final exam on **May 2nd, 2025, from 7:30 am to 9:30 am**. It is worth 30% of your final grade.

Grading Scale

Percent	Grade
93.4-100	A
90.0-93.3	A-
86.7-89.9	B+
83.4-86.6	B
80.0-83.3	B-
76.7-79.9	C+
73.4-76.6	C
70.0-73.3	C-
66.7-69.9	D+
63.4-66.6	D
60.0-63.3	D-
0-59.9	E

Course Policies

Academic Integrity: The University of Florida is an institution of learning, research, and scholarship that is strengthened by the existence of an environment of integrity. It is essential that all members of the University practice academic integrity and accept individual responsibility for their work and actions. Students are responsible for doing their own work, and academic dishonesty of any kind will be subject to sanction and referral to the university's Academic Integrity Committee, which may impose additional sanctions.

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.”

The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [Click here to read the Conduct Code](#). If you have any questions or concerns, please consult me.

Expected Workload: You should be aware that our course requires a *significant* deal of outside work including reading, writing, analysis, and preparing comments. As a Carnegie I, research-intensive university, UF is required by federal law to assign at least 2 hours of work outside of class for every contact hour. Work done in these hours may include reading/viewing assigned material and doing explicitly assigned individual or group work, as well as reviewing notes from class, synthesizing information in advance of exams or papers, and other self-determined study tasks.

For our 3-credit class, this means you should expect to spend 6-9 hours per week outside of class. The amount of time spent on this course may vary by week. I strongly encourage you to speak to me during office hours if you encounter any struggles or difficulties.

Attendance: To successfully pass this course, your participation and engagement is necessary. Students must be prepared to discuss the readings and other materials listed for that day. However, if you are sick or have been in contact with someone who is sick please stay home and take care of yourself. Please let me know if you are not attending class because of illness. You will not be penalized for missing classes (within reason). If you are sick for more than a couple of

days, please get an excused absence so we can discuss options. If you miss class, you are encouraged to ask your classmates for their notes or come to office hours to talk about the class you missed.

In-Class Recording: Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal, educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, *students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.*

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student

Lecture Slides: I will post redacted lecture slides on the course website at the conclusion of each class meeting. The slides are meant as a guide and are in no way a substitute for attending lectures. My hope is that by making the slides available, students will not feel that they must spend the entire class furiously taking notes and instead pay close attention to the lecture, ask questions, and participate deeply in class discussion.

Communication: Students should use Canvas to contact me. Although you may email me at my UF email account, the university strongly encourages we communicate via Canvas to avoid the potential of violations of student confidentiality protected by [FERPA](#). I encourage students to visit office hours to discuss any questions, comments, or concerns regarding the course.

Email/Messaging Hours: You may email or message me via Canvas at any time that is convenient to you. I will respond within two business days between the hours of 8 am and 4 pm. If you do not receive a reply from me after 48 hours, please resend your message. Although I may sometimes reply outside of these designated hours, responses cannot be guaranteed after 4 pm on weekdays, weekends, or holidays.. Please plan accordingly to have your questions answered in advance of the assignment and exam deadlines.

Exams: There are two exams. If you know, you will miss the exam for a UF-sponsored commitment (e.g., traveling with the debate team, softball team, orchestra, ROTC, etc.) *or* for some foreseeable personal commitment *that is not discretionary* (e.g., a scheduled medical procedure, like surgery) *or* because of an existential-level family emergency (e.g., death, medical emergency), you will be able to make up the exam. If the miss is because of a scheduled event, you must let me know at least a week in advance (email is perfectly acceptable and preferred). I will work with you to make accommodations, but it is your responsibility to arrange with me to take a makeup exam.

Grades and Appeals: You will be graded on your academic performance. This includes clarity of thought, knowledge of the material, composition, spelling, and grammar. Students can file an appeal when they believe that the assigned grade is inconsistent with student performance or incorrect due to computational error. Formal appeals will consist of a single typed page that identifies the grading error and explains why the assigned grade is incorrect.

Late Assignments: Make-up assignments are only offered under valid and documented circumstances. Typically, all make-up work must be submitted within 72 hours of the grade submission deadline. Any assignment submitted after the due date will be penalized a full letter grade (10%) each day it is late. For example, if you submitted an assignment two days late that receives a grade of 95% your grade would be deducted 20% (2 days late*10%), meaning your adjusted grade would be 75%.

Accessibility Services: If you have (or suspect you have) a learning or other disability that requires academic accommodations, you should contact the UF Disability Resource Center (DRC) as soon as possible (dso.ufl.edu/drc). Please be sure that necessary accommodations are properly documented by the UFDRC. To obtain a classroom accommodation, you must first pre-register with the DRC (352.392.8565) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to your instructors when requesting an accommodation. I am always happy to make whatever accommodations you may need to be successful in the course.

Technology Resources: The UF Computing Help Desk can assist you with any of your technical issues. You can access the Help Desk 24/7 at <https://helpdesk.ufl.edu/>, 352-392- HELP (4357), or [helpdesk.@ufl.edu](mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu). If you use email, write from your gatorlink@ufl.edu email address, or include your UFID and/or GatorLink username (NOT your password!) in the body of the email. Provide complete information regarding the course and content to which you are referring.

Academic Resources: There are many other campus, academic resources you should take advantage of throughout the semester. These include:

- E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.
- Library Support: <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask> Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392- 6420. General study skills and tutoring: <https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>
- Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> Now offering online consultation.
- On-Line Students Complaints: <https://distance.ufl.edu/getting-help/student-complaintprocess/>.
- Career Connections Center: <https://career.ufl.edu/> Career assistance and counseling.

Crisis Resources: If you or someone you know is struggling with any crisis including but not limited to gender, sexual, racial, or domestic violence, there are many community and University of Florida resources available. Some of these include:

- U Matter, We Care (umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, <https://umatter.ufl.edu>)
- RESPECT – UF Division of Student Affairs (<https://respect.ufsa.ufl.edu>)
- Counseling and Wellness Center – available 24/7 (352-392-1575, <https://counseling.ufl.edu>)
- Student Health Care Center (352-392-1161, <https://shcc.ufl.edu>)
- Multicultural & Diversity Affairs (352-392-1217, <https://multicultural.ufl.edu>)
- Hitchcock Field & Fork Pantry- Assisting members of our campus community who experience food insecurity - <https://pantry.fieldandfork.ufl.edu>
- UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center (352-733-0111)
- Gainesville Police Department (non-emergency #: 352-955-1818, <https://gainesvillepd.org>)

Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to States

January 14th

- Course overview and introduction

January 16th

- KMT – Chapter 1 “Racial, Economic, and Gender Inequity in the States”
- Acharya, Avidit, Matthew Blackwell, and Maya Sen. "The political legacy of American slavery." *The Journal of Politics* 78, no. 3 (2016): 621-641.

Week 2: Diffusion and Elections

January 21st

- KMT – Chapter 2 “Policy Diffusion and Innovation”

January 23rd

- KMT – Chapter 3 “Parties and Elections in the American States ”

Week 3: Elections and Interest Groups

January 28th

- KMT – Chapter 3 “Parties and Elections in the American States ” cont.
- Morse, Michael, Michael C. Herron, Marc Meredith, Daniel A. Smith, and Michael D. Martinez. "Election administration harms and ballot design: A study of Florida's 2018 United States Senate race." *American Journal of Political Science* (2024).

January 30th

- KMT – Chapter 4 “Interest Groups in the States”

Week 4: Representation

February 4th

- KMT – Chapter 5 “Public Opinion, Representation, and America’s Culture Wars

February 6th

- KMT – Chapter 5 “Public Opinion, Representation, and America’s Culture Wars cont.
- Broockman, David E., and Christopher Skovron. "Bias in perceptions of public opinion among political elites." *American Political Science Review* 112, no. 3 (2018): 542-563.

Week 5: Direct Democracy

February 11th

- KMT – Chapter 6 “Direct Democracy”

February 13th

- KMT – Chapter 6 “Direct Democracy” cont.
- Gerber, Elisabeth R. "Legislative response to the threat of popular initiatives." *American Journal of Political Science* (1996): 99-128.

Week 6: Midterm

February 18th

- In Class Midterm I

February 20th

- NO CLASS

Week 7: Legislatures

February 25th

- KMT – Chapter 7 “Legislative Politics in the States”

February 27th

- KMT – Chapter 7 “Legislative Politics in the States” cont.
- Rogers, Steven. "Electoral accountability for state legislative roll calls and ideological representation." *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 3 (2017): 555-571.

Week 8: Executive State Politics

March 4th

- KMT – Chapter 8 “Governors and the Executive Branch”

March 6th

- KMT – Chapter 8 “Governors and the Executive Branch” cont.
- Kousser, Thad, and Justin H. Phillips. "Who blinks first? legislative patience and bargaining with governors." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2009): 55-86.

Week 9: Carceral State

March 11th

- KMT – Chapter 9 “Politics and Judicial Process”

March 13th

- KMT – Chapter 9 “Politics and Judicial Process” cont.
- KMT – Chapter 10 “Criminal Justice in State and Nation”

Spring Break (March 18th and 20th)

Week 10: Fiscal Policy

March 25th

- KMT – Chapter 11 “Fiscal Policies: Taxes and Spending in the States”

March 27th

- KMT – Chapter 11 “Criminal Justice in State and Nation cont.
- Gamm, Gerald, and Thad Kousser. "Life, literacy, and the pursuit of prosperity: party competition and policy outcomes in 50 states." *American Political Science Review* 115, no. 4 (2021): 1442-1463.

Week 11: Environment and Education

April 1st

- KMT – Chapter 15 “Environmental Policy”

April 3rd

- KMT – Chapter 13 “Politics of Education”
- Hannah, A. Lee, and Danielle Christine Rhubarb. "Teacher perceptions of state standards and climate change pedagogy: opportunities and barriers for implementing consensus-informed instruction on climate change." *Climatic Change* 158, no. 3 (2020): 377-392.

Week 12: Housing and Welfare

April 8th

- KMT – Chapter 16 “Housing Policy”

April 10th

- KMT – Chapter 12 “State Health and Welfare Programs”
- Montez, Jennifer Karas, Jason Beckfield, Julene Kemp Cooney, Jacob M. Grumbach, Mark D. Hayward, Huseyin Zeyd Koysak, Steven H. Woolf, and Anna Zajacova. "US state policies, politics, and life expectancy." *The Milbank Quarterly* 98, no. 3 (2020): 668-699.

Week 13: Race Relations and Inequality I

April 15th

- KMT – Chapter 17 “Race and Politics in the American States”

April 17th

- KMT – Chapter 17 “Race and Politics in the American States” cont.
- Gunderson, Anna. "Who punishes more? Partisanship, punitive policies, and the puzzle of democratic governors." *Political Research Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (2022): 3-19.
- KMT – Chapter 18 “Economic and Political Inequality”

Week 14: Race Relations and Inequality II

April 22nd

- KMT – Chapter 18 “Economic and Political Inequality” cont.
- Wager, Emily. "People Like Us? How Mass Preferences Are Shaped by Economic Inequality and Racial Diversity." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (2024): 167-206
- **Comparative Outcome Paper Due at 11:59 pm**