State and Local Politics  
RPOS 321/RPAD 321  
University at Albany, SUNY  
Political Science Department

Spring 2018  
Professor Timothy Weaver

Building & Room: BB B012  
Meeting day and time: Mon, Wed, Fri 12:25pm to 1:30pm

NOTE: This is a preliminary syllabus and is subject to change

Contact Details:  
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Office Hours: Wednesdays 9:30-11:30 or by appointment

Course Description

This course focuses on the role of state and local governments in the American federal system; the roles and responsibilities of governors, legislatures, and courts in policy-making and implementation; the organization, functions, and jurisdiction of local governments; and the interaction of political parties and interest groups with formal institutions and processes. Special attention will be paid to state-level variation in: mass incarceration, economic policy, and healthcare. We will also consider how cities and states can pursue alternatives to the path set by the federal government on environmental and social policy.

Course Objectives

- To enable students to develop a clear understanding of the distribution of power through the federal system.
- To familiarize students with the ways federalism works both to limit states’ powers and to enable states to experiment with policy and citizenship rights.
- To provide students with a wide variety of examples of state and local variation across a range of policy domains.
- To give students concrete case studies of urban-level effort to confront some of the most pressing challenges of our time—economic inequality, mass incarceration, and climate change.
To encourage students to develop their expertise in regarding specific political challenges in particular states and their presentational skills.

**Academic dishonesty**

The University at Albany takes academic dishonesty extremely seriously. Please familiarize yourself with the University’s policies in this regard. I recommend you watch this video on plagiarism that will help you avoid it: [http://library.albany.edu/infolit/plagiarism1](http://library.albany.edu/infolit/plagiarism1)

Often students leave themselves open to the charge of academic dishonesty because they fail to provide proper citations in their written work. Please be sure to always remember the following: if they are not your words, you must use quotation marks and citations; if it is not your idea, you must cite the source from which the idea came.

**Course requirements**

This course will combine lectures and in-class discussion. Therefore, it is essential that you participate meaningfully in class discussion. This means that you will come to class having read and thought carefully about the reading material assigned. You will be assessed according to the quality of your participation in class, in a presentation, in a mid-term exam, and in a final exam.

**Class presentation:** In the second week of classes, students will be assigned a state to monitor and a week in which they will make an in-class presentation relating for the theme of the week. The presentations are to be 10 minutes long and should draw on research from news sources or relevant magazines, such as [governing.com](http://governing.com). The goal is to connect the week’s theme with a recent state- (or city-) level development.

Your grade breakdown is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-term exam</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>45%</td>
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</tbody>
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In-class Friday March, 2
Take-home exam due May 15.

Questions for the final exam will be distributed on May 9.

Students will be expected to meet all deadlines. Extensions will only be granted in cases of medical or personal emergency.

**Grading**

The grading scale will be as follows:

If you feel you have been awarded an unfair grade, you may contest it. However, if you want to do so, it must be done *in writing* and no sooner than 48 hours after you have received the grade. In your written complaint you need to provide a specific account of what in particular you are concerned about.

**Accommodations**

Students with disabilities that may impair their ability to complete the assignments listed in this syllabus and/or who require special accommodations should contact the Disability Resource Center. If you do require accommodations please let me know during the first two weeks.

**Readings**

The following required books are available for purchase at university bookstore:


The other readings will be on Blackboard.

**Course schedule & reading assignments**

**Week 1: Introduction & National-State Relations**

Wednesday, January 24

Introduction to the course.

Friday, January 26—National-State Relations

Reading: Zimmerman, *Contemporary American Federalism*, Chapter 1

- What is federalism?
- What are its key advantages and disadvantages?
- Dual Federalism vs Cooperative Federalism
- How has federalism evolved?

**Week 2: The Historical Development of the Federal System**

Monday, January 29—The Articles of Confederation, the Constitutional Convention, & Ratification

Reading: Zimmerman, *Contemporary American Federalism*, Chapter 2
What were the parallels between the early US system and British political institutions?
What was new?
What were the limitations of the Articles of Confederation that the Constitutional Convention sought to remedy?
Who opposed the Constitution and why?

Wednesday, January 31— The Constitution
Reading: Zimmerman, *Contemporary American Federalism*, Chapter 3
- What powers does the U.S. constitution grant to the states?
- How has this shifted over time?
- Whose interests have been served/harmed by the expansion of federal authority?

Friday, February 2 — Presentations: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas

**Week 3: Positive Rights and Congressional Preemption**

Monday, February—States’ Positive Rights

Wednesday, February 7—Congressional Preemption
Reading: Zimmerman, *Contemporary American Federalism*, Chapter 4
- What is “Congressional preemption”?
- How has the incidence of preemption changed in the last few decades?
- So what?

Friday, February 9—Presentations: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware

**Week 4: The Judiciary & Intergovernmental Fiscal Relations**

Monday, February 12—Federalism and the Judiciary
Reading: Zimmerman, *Contemporary American Federalism*, Chapter 5
- What is dual federalism? And what is its history?
- How did the “Warren Court’s” transformation in constitutional interpretation affect the states? How did states respond?
- What effect did the Voting Rights Act have on the states?
Wednesday, February 14—Intergovernmental Fiscal Relations

Reading: Zimmerman, *Contemporary American Federalism*, Chapter 6

- What is the federal grants-in-aid system?
- Why has it proved controversial?
- In what sense does the federal government use fiscal policy to “coerce” the states?

Friday, February 16—Presentations: Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho

**Week 5: Interstate Relations & the Centralization of Power**

Monday, February 19—Interstate Relations

Reading: Zimmerman, *Contemporary American Federalism*, Chapter 7

- What are the key controversies that have emerged among the states?
- What compacts have states forged?
- What is the history of interstate rendition?

Wednesday, February 21—Power Centralization

Reading: Zimmerman, *Contemporary American Federalism*, Chapter 9

- What are the advantage and disadvantages of the American federal system?
- What is Zimmerman’s theory of US federalism?

Friday, February 23: NO CLASS

**Week 6: State-Local Government Basics**

Monday, February 26—Institutional Design

Reading: Zimmerman, *State-Local Governmental Interactions*, Chapters 1 & 2

- How is power distributed to the local level?
- What is Dillon’s rule?
- What is the extent of the powers that localities enjoy? How does this vary across the states?

Wednesday, February 28—Revenue and Expenditure

Reading: Zimmerman, *State-Local Governmental Interactions*, Chapters 3 & 4
• How do local governments raise tax?
• What are the implications of the new budget for localities finances?
• How have states responded to urban financial distress?
• What do states mandate local governments to spend money on?

Friday, March 2: ****MID-TERM EXAM****

Week 7: State and Federal Urban Policy

Monday, March 5—State Responses to Local Problems

Reading: Zimmerman, State-Local Governmental Interactions, Chapter 5

• How do states provide financial assistance to localities?
• What public authorities have been establish to address local problems in New York State and elsewhere?

Wednesday, March 7—Federal Urban Policy


• In what ways has federal urban policy changed over time?
• How have these shifts reflected ideological developments at the national level?

Reading: Zimmerman, State-Local Governmental Interactions, Chapter 6

• How did federal, state, and local policy shape air quality policy in New York City?

Friday, March 9—Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas

*****SPRING BREAK*****

Week 8: Pot Politics

Monday, March 19—Legalization in the states


Wednesday, March 21—Backlash under Trump


Friday, March 23—Presentations: Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland

**Week 9: City Bound I**

Monday, March 26—City Structures


Wednesday, March 28—Seven Cities


Friday, March 30—Presentations: Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri

**Week 10: City Bound II**

Monday, April 2—Seven Cities


Wednesday, April 4—City Futures


Friday, April 6—NO CLASS

**Week 11: Enterprise Zones & Empowerment Zones**

Monday, April 9—Presentations: Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire

Wednesday, April 11—Enterprise Zones and Empowerment Zones

Friday, April 13—Presentations: New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina

**Week 12: The minimum wage**

Monday, April 16—Experiments and Challenges


Wednesday, April 18—Social Movements


Friday, April 20—Presentations: North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania

**Week 13: Mass incarceration**

Monday, April 23—The Transformation of American’s Penal Order


Wednesday, April 25—Devolution, Privatization, and Juvenile Justice Reform Texas Style


Friday, April 27—Presentations: Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee

**Week 14: Environmental policy**

Monday, April 30—Environmental Policy in the States

Wednesday, May 2—Reducing Emissions in Cities


Friday, May 4—Presentations: Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington

Week 15: Trump and the cities

Monday, May 7


Wednesday, May 9—Presentations: West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming