POLS 371
State and Local Government
Tues. and Thurs. 2:00-3:15 PM
Instructor: Dr. Kevin Parsneau
Office: Morris Hall 204 B
Office Hours: Mon. and Fri. 4:00-6:00 PM
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Website: http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/parsnk

Course Description:
While the media, the interested public and even political scientists tend to focus their attention on the federal government, state government is the center of many important policies and innovations that affect citizens’ lives. In addition to the effect of state policies themselves, the trend toward returning control over federal programs to the state governments, has made decisions by state governments more important for even federal programs. Even as more crucial decisions are made by political actors at the state and local level, voters, ordinary activists and interest group have greater access to those same state and local officials, and greater ability to influence election outcomes, policy decisions and policy implementation. Understanding state politics offers a new perspective on national politics, because in the words of former House Speaker “Tip” O’Neil, “All politics is local.” Finally, studying state politics offers scholars leverage upon key issues in American politics, because states differ in many important ways, providing both political scientists and policy advocates “laboratories of democracy.”

This class assumes that students have a general knowledge of American politics, at least at the federal level, and introduces them to the study of politics at the state level. It asks how state cultures and institutions differ, how states relate to the federal government and other state governments, how state party and electoral differences affect political outcomes, and examines issues of particular interest to state-level politics, including citizens initiatives and term limits.

Text Books:


Other readings will be available via the course website or handed out in class.
Grades:
Your final grade will be based upon 2 in-class exams and a 5-7 page issue summary paper that will apply course readings to a chosen course issue or theme. Students will work on the paper over the course of the semester, some of the work will involve in-class group work and presentations, and thus a portion of the paper grade will be based on participation in class. Each will be weighted as follows:

- Mid-term Exam: 35%
- Final Exam: 35%
- Issue Summary Paper: 30%

Grade Scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Letters</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>93-100</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>73-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-93</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>70-73</td>
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<tr>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>67-69</td>
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<tr>
<td>83-86</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>63-66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-83</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>60-63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>below 60</td>
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Grades are not based upon a curve, but rather upon reasonable expectations for learning in an upper division political science class. As of the first day of class, I would happily give everyone in the class an A, provided each person earned one. That said, students should recognize that a C represents an average score that meets basic requirements. To receive an A, students must have achievement that is “outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.” Do not assume that you will get an A unless you are willing to put in the work necessary to reach that standard.

Class policies:
Students are expected to take the exams on the dates listed. If you cannot take an exam on the scheduled date, you must make arrangements with me at least a week in advance. Do not assume that you have made arrangements unless I have responded and agreed in person. I will not normally give make-up exams, and will make exceptions only in unusual circumstances, so it is up to you to notify me as soon as you know there may be a conflict.

Other assignments are due on the date scheduled at the beginning of class. Late papers will be penalized one letter grade per day that they are late. Except in unusual circumstances, I will not normally accept e-mailed assignments. Students are responsible for keeping all returned copies of their assignments in case errors happen, so that they can produce a graded copy of returned assignments.

Unless otherwise noted, all written assignments must be typed and double space in 12-point, *Times New Roman* font with 1” margins. Any paper that fails to meet this requirement will be graded down. This policy is not meant to be punitive, but rather to ease the task of grading. It becomes difficult to grade papers of the various fonts, font sizes and margins, and it feels insulting when people try to deceive me by changing spacing, fonts and margins. If this requirement presents a problem for you or your computer, talk to me.
I am highly skeptical of using computer problems as an excuse for late assignments, and will not accept this as a valid excuse. Students should take all reasonable precautions, make multiple backups of any notes or assignments, and print hard copies of work as a protection against computer malfunction. Furthermore, in general, e-mail has proven not to be a reliable form of communication, so please be sure to communicate any important information to me in person rather than sending it via e-mail and assuming that I have received it.

Readings are listed on the syllabus and you are expected to read the material prior to class so that you can participate in class discussions. Anything in the assigned readings is fair game for the tests, because I will not cover everything in course lectures.

Attendance is expected. Students are not specifically graded on class attendance, but there will be information presented in the class that is not available elsewhere and it will be on the exams. I am willing to discuss and clarify the contents of class lectures, but not as a substitute for class attendance. Furthermore, there will be some in-class activities designed to measure students’ understanding, and prepare students for tests. Students who find that they must miss class should arrange to get notes from another student.

No cheating or plagiarism will be tolerated, and such acts of academic misconduct will be punished according to established university rules. If you have any questions regarding cheating or plagiarism, please discuss them with me or consult university rules. All other relevant university policies apply to this course.

Questions about Grading:
I do not use surprises on tests to measure students’ knowledge of the course materials. I make the contents of the tests and the requirements for papers as clear as possible. If students have attended each class and done the assigned readings, they should do well on the test. If you have any questions about expectations, please ask as soon as possible.

Because I am clear about the contents of tests, my test questions are straightforward and requirements for papers are clearly stated, I am confident in the fairness of my exams and assigned grades.

However, if you feel that you have been graded unfairly, I will personally re-grade your test or paper. To provide the best environment for all students to be treated equally, I have two requirements prior to reconsidering a grade. First, there is a 24-hour waiting period, so that the student can also reconsider their work rather than reacting out of anxiety or frustration. Second, students must provide a written explanation of why their work fully meets the question or requirements. In addition to being unfair to fellow students, simply explaining why you want a better grade is not sufficient reason to change a grade.

Finally, whenever I re-grade, I reserve the right to raise or lower the grade if I feel it has received an unwarranted grade. Remember, the most important result of any class at is the knowledge gained from the class and not the grade received. Even if you are disappointed in a
grade, it is most important to learn the material and understand the subject of the course for your development as a student, citizen and scholar.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:**
I encourage and appreciate the contribution of students with disabilities in my courses. Whenever necessary, I will provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or meet course requirements.

I encourage you to take advantage of support from the university. Minnesota State University provides students with disabilities reasonable accommodation to participate in educational programs, activities or services. Students with disabilities requiring accommodation to participate in class activities or meet course requirements should first register with the Office of Disability Services, (Memorial Library 132, telephone 289-2825, TDD 711) to establish an accommodation plan and then contact me as soon as possible.

**Week 1 (January 11-15) Who Governs?**

Magleby et al. *State and Local Politics: Government by the People*, Ch. 1.


**Week 2: (January 19-22) Political Culture**

Magleby et al. *State and Local Politics: Government by the People*, Ch. 2.

Gray and Hanson. *Politics and the American States*, p. 1-29


**Week 3: (January 25-29) Federalism and Intergovernmental Relations**

Magleby et al. *State and Local Politics: Government by the People*, p. 15-42

Gray and Hanson. *Politics and the American States*, p. 30-60


**Week 4: (February 1-5) State Constitutions**

Magleby et al. *State and Local Politics: Government by the People*, Ch. 3.

**Week 5: (February 8-12) Parties and Elections in the States**

Magleby et al. *State and Local Politics: Government by the People*, Ch. 4.

Gray and Hanson. *Politics and the American States*, p. 61-98


**Week 6: (February 15-19) Parties and Elections (cont.)**


**Week 7: (February 22-26) Public Opinion and Policy in the States**


**Midterm: Tuesday. March 2.**
**Week 8: (March 4) State Legislatures**

Magleby et al. *State and Local Politics: Government by the People*, Ch. 5.

Gray and Hanson. *Politics and the American States*, p. 154-191


**Spring Break**

**Weeks 9: (March 15-19) Term Limits**


**Week 10: (March 22-26) Governors and State Executives**

Magleby et al. State and Local Politics: Government by the People, Ch. 6.
Gray and Hanson. Politics and the American States, p. 192-228

**Week 11: (March 29- April 2) State Judiciaries**

Magleby et al. State and Local Politics: Government by the People, Ch. 7.
Gray and Hanson. Politics and the American States, p. 229-255

**Week 12: (April 5-9) Initiatives, Direct Democracy and Grassroots in the States**

Gray and Hanson. Politics and the American States, p. 127-153

**Week 13: (April 12-16) Interests and Lobbying in the States**

Gray and Hanson. Politics and the American States, p. 98-126

**Week 14: (April 19-23) Local and City Government**

Magleby et al. State and Local Politics: Government by the People, Ch. 8.

Midwest Political Science Association Meeting April 22-25.

**Week 15: (April 26-30) To Be Announced**

Final Exam: Thursday, May 6, 12:30-2:30 PM.

I reserve the right to change this syllabus as needed.