

POL 3111A: – Spring 2023
State and Local Politics and the Environment
Meeting Time: Tues/Thurs 10:00 am – 11:15 am
Classroom: Sullivan Hall, B4
Instructor: Dr. Kirstie Lynn Dobbs
Office: Cushing Hall 17b
Office Hours: M/W 11:00 am - 1:00 pm (zoom or in-person); also by appointment
Office Hours Sign Up [Link](#)
Office Hours Zoom Link
<https://merrimack.zoom.us/j/99900279201>
Email: dobbsk@merrimack.edu

Course Description

This course takes an in-depth look at political processes, governance, and participation at the local and state level of governmental actors, private entities, and community groups. Class discussion revolves around a central theme: the increased capacity and responsiveness of state and local government within an ecosystem of competing interests. In particular, we focus on how corporations, non-profit organizations, and citizen groups exercise their power in influencing local and state policy - especially environmental policy. The pedagogical method applied to this class is a mixture of a lecture-based and active model of teaching.

Students will engage in research throughout the semester in preparation for a town hall simulation where students are assigned either the role of a politician, a corporate entity, an environmental group, or a neighborhood association. As part of the simulation, students will explore the intersection between corporate, environmental, and community interests during the process of approving zoning and building permits at the local government level. In preparation for the simulation, students will engage in two field trips: a visit to the Lawrence State Park Heritage Museum and a hike in Den Rock Park in Lawrence, MA.

Attendance will be taken at the start of each class. If a student is more than 15 min late without notice, they will be counted as tardy. Be on time!

Required Textbook

Bowman, Ann O'M, Richard C. Kearney, Carmine P. F. Scavo. (2022). *State and Local Government*. Cengage Learning, Inc. ISBN: 978-36740-7

In addition to this book, there will be supplemental readings that will be available on Perusall. In particular, you will have weekly readings from Smith, Kevin. 2019. *State and Local Government*. Readings should be completed *before* coming to class to enhance and facilitate lectures and class discussion. You should anticipate approximately 60 - 100 pages of reading per week.

Access to Canvas

All course materials will be uploaded to Canvas. Grades will also be posted on this site. To access Canvas, go to [insert link here] and use your Merrimack login credentials to access the course site.

Email Correspondence

I am very flexible and more than happy to accommodate students based on their needs. Students may email me during any day of the week to ask for extensions or other accommodations. However, please give me at least 24 hours to respond. Also, I typically do not answer emails on the weekends. If you email me Friday night after 5:00 pm, please do not expect a response till Monday morning. If you email me after 5:00 pm during the week, please do not expect an email till the following day. I am not your mother, your doctor, or a policewoman, so I am sure nothing you have to contact me about constitutes an emergency :)

Participation and Engagement

Students are expected to attend the course synchronously each week. For excused absences, you have two weeks to make up any missing assignments, no exceptions. If your situation for missing class requires a longer leave of absence, please contact me or the college ASAP.

Missing Class

If you miss class, you are still expected to complete ALL asynchronous assignments in the module by SUNDAY at midnight of that module week. Accommodations can be made, but you need to alert me that you need an extension before the assigned due date! Weekly powerpoints will be posted to Blackboard. **If you do not reach out within two weeks of the missed class, accommodations will NOT be made for missing assignments.**

Learning Outcomes

After completing the course each student should:

- Have a solid understanding of how government works at the state and local system
- Be familiar with how different institutions impact local politics
- Articulate different theories and concepts associated with political science and apply them to local and environmental politics
- Understand the evidence surrounding the arguments related to whether public demands are effectively represented by policymakers, especially when it comes to the environment
- Think critically about one's personal locality and be able to engage in a healthy debate surrounding issues that affect your community
- Make an argument about democratic responsiveness at the local level
- Be better prepared to think critically about the relationship between local, state, and the federal government

Grading

- ~ Professionalization Score 10%
- ~ Perusall Reading Grade 15%
- ~ Semester Quizzes (10 quizzes total at 2 points each) 20%
- ~ City Council Simulation 35%
- ~ Final Exam 20%

Grading Scale

A 93-100	C 73-76
A- 90-92	C- 70-72
B+ 87-89	D+ 67-69
B 83-86	D 63-66
B- 80-82	D- 60-62
C+ 77-79	F 59 and below

Assignments

Professionalization Score 10%

Despite the pandemic, students are expected to engage with this course in a professional manner. By professional, I mean showing up to class on time, prepared, and ready to engage. To measure professionalization, attendance will be taken at the start of each class. Students who are absent who do not communicate with me regarding their absence will be marked unexcused, and their professionalization score will decline. The key to maintaining a high professionalization score is communication! So communicate often!

Perusall Reading Grade 15%

Each week you are assigned a set of readings to complete by Sunday at 11:59 pm. The readings that are outside of the assigned books for this class will be located on Perusall. Perusall is an annotating software system where you can access the weekly readings and annotate them as you read to help deepen your comprehension of the text. At the end of the semester, you will receive an overall grade on your engagement with these reading assignments. In class, we will do one of the first readings assigned in the first week together, so that you get an understanding of how to achieve a high grade on these assignments. To access Perusall go to www.perusall.com and create an account. After you have created the account, enter the access code for this course DOBBS-VTNQR.

Semester Quizzes (20%)

Students will take 12 quizzes throughout the semester via blackboard. Each quiz is located in the learning module for that week and is due Sunday night by 11:59 PM. The quizzes are pulled directly from your textbook State and Local Governments.

City Council Simulation 35%

This class is going to place a heavy emphasis on experiential learning. One such activity is the City Council Simulation. The intent of this simulation is for students to gain an understanding of policy formulation at the local level. Students will each take a specific role (mayor, alderman, business interests, neighborhood organization, and local interest groups). Throughout the semester, each student will prep for their role during the simulation, which will occur during the middle of the semester and the last week of class. Students will be graded on their ability to stay in character during the simulation, and on various check-point assignments throughout the semester. Students will also be required to attend a town hall meeting, either virtually or in person early on in the semester.

Final Exam (20%)

This exam is composed of 5 essay questions. Each question should be answered fully 250 words or more with 2-3 sources from class cited in each question. You will take the final via blackboard.

Suggested News Sources

- The Boston Globe
- Masslive.com
- Northandoverma.gov
- [The Eagle Tribune](#)

Credit Justification Statement

In this course, students will be expected to do the following amount of work:

- Classroom hours: 1.5 per week
- Reading per week: 4-5 hours per week (on average)
- Prep work for class-based discussion: 2-3 per week (on average)
- Research and writing: 2-3 per week (on average)
- City Council Simulation: 1-2 per week (on average)
- Exam preparation: 1 hour per week (on average)
- Total: 11.5-15.5 hours per week

Due Dates and Late Policy:

All assignments must be turned in on their due date through Blackboard. Students must be present for exams and group presentations. Only unforeseen emergencies with valid documentation will permit students to remake exams and their group presentations. Any assignments turned in late will receive a 5 percent deduction for each day (24 hours) that the assignment is tardy. Assignments two weeks late will no longer be accepted, and you will receive a zero on the assignment.

Please anticipate all possible contingencies (computer failure, printer issues, etc.), and please contact me before or as soon as possible if a problem arises. If a student contacts me about an issue after the assignment is due, I can no longer make accommodations for that assignment.

Missed classes/Late Assignments: Severe illnesses and family emergencies are the only justifiable reasons for missing a class or exam or handing in an assignment late. In either case, you must use both 1) notify me of your situation promptly and 2) provide appropriate documentation. Assignments handed in late without documentation will be penalized by 5% for each date they are late.

Statement of Community Standards

The following statement is taken from Merrimack College's Student Handbook under Community Standards.

Before all else, the students, faculty, staff, and administration of Merrimack College form an Augustinian community that supports and challenges its members in the pursuit of truth. We declare and celebrate our common purpose and commit ourselves:

- to serious study, generous service, and courageous leadership
- to academic integrity and personal growth
- to civilized discourse in the exchange of ideas
- to friendship, diversity, and mutual respect
- to the primacy of conscience and the spiritual life
- to responsibility for the common good, and
- to pride in our school and ourselves

Students have the right to express their views so long as there is neither use nor threat of force nor interference with the rights of others to express their views (Faculty Handbook 2016, 50).

Academic Integrity Policy

For undergraduate courses:

All work for this class must be your original work. Presenting material from other sources, either print or electronic, as one's own work constitutes plagiarism. Please review [Merrimack College's Academic Integrity Code](#) and consult the [library's web site](#) for a discussion on academic integrity.

Academic Accommodations from the Accessibility Services Office

Merrimack College provides reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities through the Accessibility Services Office. Students who have, or think they may have, a disability are invited to contact the Accessibility Services Office via the online request form found on the Accessibility Services Office [website](#), [email](#) or by visiting their office on the third floor of McQuade Library.

Students are encouraged to contact the office as soon as possible to ensure adequate time to meet and create a plan. Students already registered with the Accessibility Services Office are encouraged each semester to request their letters to be emailed, and students are responsible to

then email the letter to their instructors personally. While it is understood that some students will not use all accommodations in all courses, accommodations can not be made retroactively.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week of 1/17 Introduction to the Course

- Week 0 (in-class)
 - Syllabus and course expectations
 - Discussion about a field trip to Lawrence Heritage State Park
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY JANUARY 23
 - Sign up for Perusall
 - Get textbook
 - Read [Welch, S. & Peters, J.G., \(1980\). State Political Culture and the Attitudes of State Senators toward Social, Economic, Welfare, and Corruption Issues. *Plubius*, 10:2, 59-67.](#)

Week of 1/24 State and Local Governments

- Week 1 (in-class)
 - State and Local Government
 - Smith p. 69-70 [Perusall]
- Asynchronous DUE SUNDAY JANUARY 30
 - Marston, Sallie A. "Neighborhood and politics: Irish ethnicity in nineteenth-century Lowell, Massachusetts." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 78, no. 3 (1988): 414-432. [Perusall]
 - State and Local Gov. Ch. 1 Quiz

Week of 1/31 Federalism and the States

- Week 2 (in-class)
 - Discussion on Immigration
 - Federalism and the States
 - Field trip to Lawrence Heritage State Park (Feb 3)
- Asynchronous DUE SUNDAY FEBRUARY 6
 - State and Local Gov. Ch. 2 quiz
 - Smith: pp. 19-21; 26-29; 147-149 [Perusall]
 - Reflection on Lawrence Heritage State Park

Week of 2/7 Citizen Participation and Elections

- Week 3
 - Lecture-Discussion
- Asynchronous DUE SUNDAY FEBRUARY 13
 - Citizen Participation and Elections Ch. 4 Quiz
 - Smith pp. 105-111 [Perusall]

Week of 2/14 Local Government Types and Functions

- Week 4

- Lecture and Discussion
- Watch Scenes from *The Florida Project*
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY FEBRUARY 20
 - Local Government Ch. 10 Quiz

Week of 2/21 Local Leadership and Governance: Continuity and Change

- Week 5
 - Lecture and Discussion
 - Watch Scenes from *Bad Education*
- Asynchronous Work DUE FEBRUARY 27
 - Local Leadership and Governance Ch. 11 Quiz

Week of 3/21 State-Local Relations: Fifty Different Systems

- Week 6
 - Lecture and Discussion
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY MARCH 27
 - State-Local Relations: Fifty Different Systems Ch. 12 Quiz
 - Smith pp. 127-137

Week of 3/28 Environmental Policy: Regulation and Innovation

- Week 7
 - Lecture and Discussion
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY APRIL 3
 - Environmental Policy: Regulation and Innovation Ch.18 Quiz
 - Kauffman and Martin (2021) [Perusall]

Week of 3/7 Environmental Politics

- Week 8
 - Lecture and Discussion
 - Prep for Town Hall Simulation 1
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY MARCH 13
 - Smith p. 93-94; 102-103
 - Reflection on Local Town Hall Meeting

Week of 4/4 Education Policy: Reading, Writing, and Reform

- Week 9
 - Prep for Simulation
 - Lecture and Discussion
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY APRIL 10
 - Ch. 15 Quiz

Week of 4/4 Education Policy: Reading, Writing, and Reform

- Week 10
 - Prep for Simulation
 - Lecture and Discussion
 - Ethics Bowl “All Eyes on You”

- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY APRIL 10
 - Culture, Society, and Economic Progress Assignment

Week of 4/11 Economic Development: Competing For Growth

- Week 11
 - Lecture and Discussion
- Asynchronous Work DUE MONDAY APRIL 18
 - Economic Development: Competing for Growth Ch. 14 Quiz
 - Smith p. 112-120

Week of 4/18 Social Welfare and Health Care Policy: Addressing Poverty and Sickness

- Week 12
 - Lecture and Discussion
 - Play “Spent”
 - Prep for simulation
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY APRIL 24
 - Smith p. 91-92; 139-146
 - Ch. 17 Quiz

Week of 4/25 Simulation Prep Week

- Week 13
 - Nature Hike at Den Rock Park
 - Prep for Simulation
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY MAY 1
 - Prep Materials for Simulation

Week of 5/2 City Council Simulation

- Week 14
 - Simulation
- Asynchronous Work
 - Prep for Final

FINAL EXAM TBD: DUE MAY 15th