

San José State University
Department of Political Science
Local Government and Politics
POLS 103-1 (27276) URBP 103-1 (29172)
Spring 2021, 4 Units

Course and Contact Information

Instructor: Kenneth Yeager, Ph.D
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Office Hours: Wednesdays at noon via zoom

Course Description



This course offers a theoretical and practical study of local politics and government. The structure, role, and functions of city and county governments are examined. Students gain knowledge of the resources and skills required for effective citizenship in their communities.

In the 40 years that I have been observing and participating in local government—beginning when I first took this very same PS103 course as a junior—I don't think there is a more exciting and challenging time to study this topic. It is breathtaking what is happening. COVID-19 is affecting all of our lives—who is getting sick and why, measures to stop the spread, businesses closures, inequities in education, etc. There is Black Lives Matter and demands to reform police departments, all while the council is in search of new police chief.

Due to the economic downturn, there is the need for more services for families out of work and don't have money for food or rent. Where will the money come from? The state? The feds? New tax measures? How much worse will the pandemic get? Who's get the vaccine? Are hard hit neighborhoods on the East Side with multi-generational households a priority? Who is Dr. Sara Cody anyway? Has the balance of power shifted at City Hall after the recent city council elections? How long can VTA afford to keep its buses running? What about rent control? An extended moratorium on evictions? Gentrification? Homelessness? Who are the people we've elected that are making all these decisions? Do they know what they're doing?

In an attempt to shed light on these issues and concerns, the emphasis of the class will be on how local government works, who the players are, whose interests are being represented, and how in the world do ordinary citizens begin to make an impact. This class will be different from how I've taught it in the past, not only because it is on-line but because I want to have the flexibility to continuously exam new issues as they arise.

Course Format

This course will be conducted fully online in an asynchronous format. There will be no designated class meeting time. However, in second week of class, I will offer two OPTIONAL Zoom meeting strictly as a way informally meet each other and say hello. No class material will be covered so you will not miss anything if you aren't free or chose not to participate. Since we don't meet in person, I thought it would be nice to at least see the faces of the students in the class. If you want to join without having your video on, that's fine, too. I would like to record it only for the purpose of remembering what people look like over the course of the semester. I will also do an OPTIONAL zoom meeting before the midterm and final to answer any questions students will have. If students have any concerns about Zoom meetings, please contact me.

Faculty Web Page and MYSJSU Messaging

Course materials such as syllabus, handouts, notes, assignment instructions, etc. can be found the [Canvas Learning Management System course login website](http://sjsu.instructure.com) at <http://sjsu.instructure.com>. You are responsible for regularly checking our Canvas course page to learn of any updates to the course syllabus.

Email Communication

The easiest way to contact me is via email. Please be aware though that I will not (unless in unusual circumstances) respond to email after normal working hours (Monday through Friday 8am-5pm). During busy times of the semester I receive a high volume of emails so please give me at least 24 hours to respond (not counting weekends for reasons just described) before sending me a follow up.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. **CLO 1:** Learn and apply social science theories of government and politics to explain the behavior, decisions, and outcomes of real-life local governments.
2. **CLO 2:** Acquire knowledge and practical skills necessary to be an active participant in local government and political affairs.
3. **CLO 3:** Learn to think critically about the role and function of local governments in the broader American federalist system.
4. **CLO 4:** Develop a deeper understanding of the politics, issues, institutions, and governing processes of San Jose and/or other Bay Area cities and counties.

Political Science Program Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the Political Science major program, students should be able to demonstrate the following learning outcomes:

1. **PLO1. Breadth:** Students should possess a broad knowledge of the theory and methods of the various branches of the discipline.
2. **PLO2. Application and Disciplinary Methods:** Students should be able to formulate research questions, engage in systematic literature searches using primary and secondary sources, evaluate

research studies, and critically analyze and interpret influential political text. Students should be able to apply these techniques to identify, understand, and analyze domestic and international political issues and organizations.

3. **PLO3. Communication Skills:** Students should master basic competencies in oral and written communication skills and be able to apply these skills in the context of political science. This means communicating effectively about politics and/or public administration, public policy, and law.
4. **PLO4. Citizenship:** Students should acquire an understanding of the role of the citizen in local, state, national, and global contexts and appreciate the importance of lifelong participation in political processes.

Mapping POLS/URBP 103 Course Learning Outcomes to Political Science PLOs	Program Learning Outcomes	Assessment
CLO 1: Learn and apply social science theories of government and politics to explain the behavior, decisions, and outcomes of real life local governments.	PLO 1, PLO 3	Quizzes, Exams, Term Paper
CLO 2: Acquire knowledge and practical skills necessary to be an active participant in local government and political affairs.	PLO 2, PLO 4,	Quizzes, Exams, Local Government in Action, Student Observation
CLO 3: Learn to think critically about the role and function of local governments in the broader American federalist system.	PLO 2, PLO 3	Quizzes, Term Paper
CLO 4: Develop a deeper understanding of the politics, issues, institutions, and governing processes of San Jose and/or other Bay Area cities and counties.	PLO 4	Quizzes, Local Government in Action, Student Observation

Required Texts/Readings

Textbook

Understanding Urban Politics: Institutions, Representation, and Policies (2020), by Timothy B. Krebs and Arnold Fleishmann. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. ISBN: **9781538105238**

**This textbook is required for the course. It is crucial that you obtain a copy, as I will be assigning various chapters of the book as required readings throughout the semester.*

*The textbook is available for purchase from the SJSU Bookstore or on Amazon as a paperback, hardcopy, or as an eBook. You can also view a copy for several hours at a time from the SJSU Martin Luther King Jr. library. Feel free to purchase a used copy if you are able to find one.

Other Readings

San Jose Mercury News (Mercurynews.com)

San Francisco Chronicle (SFGate.com)

San Jose Metro (SanJoseInside.com)

San Jose Spotlight (SanJoseSpotlight.com)

San Jose Community NETWORK (SanJoseCommunity.com) Silicon Valley Business Journal (Bizjournals.com)

There will be more substantial articles assigned weekly to complement the readings, many of which students will write short essays for points.

**All assigned readings on class schedule can be found on our class Canvas page.*

Other technology requirements / equipment / material

Since this course will be fully conducted online, success in the course requires students to have long-term access to a device that will allow them to connect to the internet to access course material and complete assignments. If you do not have access to such a device, please consult the **Student Computing Services** department of the King Library for equipment rentals at this link: <https://library.sjsu.edu/student-computing-services/student-computing-services>

Library Liaison

The library liaison for Political Science is available to answer questions and provide one-on-one help learning using the library for research.

His name and contact info is:

Paul Kauppila
Librarian (Political Science Liaison)
(408) 808-2042
Paul.kauppila@sjsu.edu

Course Requirements and Assignments

1. Course Readings: All assigned readings are required. It is expected that students will complete the assigned readings before the indicated deadline each week. Students may find it necessary to read all or portions of the assigned readings more than once to comprehend complex material. Students who feel they need additional help with effective reading comprehension strategies should consult with the professor during a scheduled appointment.
2. Exams: Two on-line exams—a midterm and final—are required. They will be created and completed on Canvas. Exams will consist of multiple choice, true false, and short-answer questions covering the assigned readings and lecture/discussion material.
3. Quizzes: A total of **five** quizzes will be required. They will be created and completed on Canvas. Quiz questions will consist of multiple choice and true/false questions. Please refer to the course schedule for appropriate dates.
4. Newspaper Article: Students (generally in alphabetical order) will be told when they will be posting on Canvas a brief written report on a news story dealing with a city, county, or local agency. Students will summarize the story, then write a commentary using what we've discussed in class. Students must upload a one-page paper on their assigned day. This assignment was easy to do with in-person classes because students would go to the front of the class and present. I'm hoping this will just as effective.

5. Discussion Posts. As a way to generate discussion among students, five times throughout the semester students will write a short essay on questions based on that week's assignment. They will also need to respond to one of the essays written by a fellow student. Students will be graded on the completeness of their answers.
6. Local Government in Action: Student Observation: Several experiential learning projects are tied to this course. Students will be required to observe components of local government in action. You can choose among the following options: observe a San Jose (or other Bay Area) City Council meeting; a Board of Supervisors meeting; observe another government agency meeting like Valley Transportation Agency. You must observe TWO meetings. They can be of the same agency or different ones. If you watch different ones, be sure to make comparisons between them.

Students will be required to write a 6-page double-spaced reflection paper describing what you observed and experienced. You can get information about the San Jose Council meetings at sanjoseca.gov or the Board of Supervisors at sccgov.org. Other governmental bodies will have a website containing information on when they meet and copies of their agendas.

The San Jose City Council meets virtually every Tuesday, starting at 1:30. They often go late into the afternoon or into the evening. The Board of Supervisors also meets on Tuesdays (every other Tuesday, though) starting at 9:30 and often go late into the afternoon as well. As a result of the shelter-in-place orders issued earlier this year, both the San Jose City Council and Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors now stream their meetings live on their respective YouTube channels. Watching meetings on-line doesn't give you the flavor of the meetings, but they give you an idea of the challenges involved in receiving public input. One advantage of watching a taped version of the meetings is it is easy to skip over portions you are not interested in and go directly to the ones you are.

Your essay should NOT be a factual summary of the meetings. Rather you should attempt to assess, evaluate and analyze what you observed. If you watch a city council or Board of Supervisors meeting, make a special effort to understand the roles played by the various council members and any additional parties that are present or discussed, including administrators (manager, staff, bureaucracy) and citizens (audience, speakers, groups). Pay close attention to the relationships between and within each of these groups. Who seems to dominate, if anyone, and why? Be sure to include what major policy issues were discussed, such as COVID, homelessness, economic development, transportation, environmental issues, etc. Lastly, what surprised you, if anything, about the experience. What did you learn that we haven't discussed in class?

Be sure to use at least 4 references from our textbook, but certainly it is alright to include other references as well. Use endnotes or footnotes to cite your sources. Please turn in on Canvas.

7. Term Paper: The term paper (10 pages, not including abstract or references) asks students to research and analyze a local policy or public problem. As discussed at the beginning of the syllabus, never has local government had to deal with so many critical all at once, especially at a time of diminishing resources. Issues might include crime and policing, livable or minimum wage policies, public health mandates like wearing masks, jail inmates contracting COVID, saving small businesses from closure, transgender health issues, sex trafficking, domestic violence, stopping the spread of HIV, public school inequities, and urban redevelopment. Given all that cities and counties do, there certainly will be a topic that interests you greatly. Counties, in particular, work on social and health issues, which creates many opportunities. I have found it best for students not to write about homelessness because it is way too broad and complex for a 10-page paper.) When possible, go narrow. For example, environmental protection is too broad but saving Coyote Valley is manageable; immigration is too broad but consequences of San Jose being a sanctuary city

is doable. Black Lives Matter is quite all encompassing but reform of the San Jose Police Department is doable. Please share with me your paper topic before you start writing so I can make sure you are on the right track.

When researching and writing your paper, keep in mind three central points: 1) what is the precise issue or thesis of your paper; 2) whose problem is it to solve and why; and 3) what other levels of government or agencies can help solve it. The main point of this is to realize there is a web of policymakers involved in local issues. Throughout the semester we will study who all the players are and the role that each of them play.

You will need to include 6 citation sources, with at least three from the readings and/or lecture and three from peer reviewed articles or three from local and state reports. The last is emphasized because if there are not city/county staff memos or articles on the subject it is not an issue being addressed at the local level. At best, the issue should have come before the city or county and you can include the debate that occurred at the meeting. Again, this is way you should watch a council or government meeting early on in the semester.

Grading on the assignment will be based on the clarity and strength of your thesis statement, the quality of your research, and the overall strength of your analysis. It worth 20% of your grade. For students who may want to get feedback on their papers, they can turn in an optional outline of their paper on May 3rd, and I will review it.

Succeeding in a Four-Unit Course: *“Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally three hours per unit per week) for instruction, preparation/studying, or course related activities, including but not limited to internships, labs, and clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.”*

Final Examination or Evaluation

Faculty members are required to have a culminating activity for their courses, which can include a final examination, a final research paper or project, a final creative work or performance, a final portfolio of work, or other appropriate assignment. Our final examination will be held the week of December 9. The exam will consist of multiple choice and short answer/essay questions covering the in-class material and assigned readings.

Grading Information

Students' grades will be calculated using the following assignments (with corresponding points and percentages):

Assignment	Points	Percentage of Total
Online Quizzes (5 @ 10 points each)	50	12.5%
Midterm Exam	80	20%
Final Exam	80	20%
Local Government Observation Paper	50	12.5%
News Article	10	2.5%
Local Politics Term Paper	80	20%
Discussion essays (5 @ 10 pts each)	50	12.5%
Total	400	100%

Final Course Letter Grades will be assigned using the following scale:

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>A plus</i>	<i>96 to 100%</i>
<i>A</i>	<i>93 to 95%</i>
<i>A minus</i>	<i>90 to 92%</i>
<i>B plus</i>	<i>86 to 89 %</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>83 to 85%</i>
<i>B minus</i>	<i>80 to 82%</i>
<i>C plus</i>	<i>76 to 79%</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>73 to 75%</i>
<i>C minus</i>	<i>70 to 72%</i>
<i>D plus</i>	<i>66 to 69%</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>63 to 65%</i>
<i>D minus</i>	<i>60 to 62%</i>

Classroom Protocol

Late papers or Assignments Policy

Any and all assignments should be submitted by the deadline posted on Canvas. This includes quizzes, exams, discussions, papers, and any other assignments included in this syllabus. Since exams will be open for a substantial window of time, there should be no issues in regards to timely submission. However, if an extenuating circumstance prevents you from being able to submit an exam on time, reach out to me as soon as possible and I will try to figure out a solution for you. Make-up exams are only given in cases of excused absences in accordance with the university's policy on excused absences. Circumstances that may lead to an excused student absence are subpoenas, jury duty, military duty, religious observances, illness, illness of a dependent, and bereavement for immediate family.

Papers that are turned in late will be penalized a full letter grade. However, I will not deduct more than a letter grade, regardless of how late a paper is turned in, mainly to not penalize students who are dealing with an unforeseen issue likely related to COVID. For an assignment to be accepted, it must be turned in by 11:59 PM on the final day of the course.

University Policies

Per University Policy S16-9, university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. will be available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs Syllabus Information web page at <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/> I want to particularly draw your attention to the university's academic integrity policy which can be found here <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F15-7.pdf>. Please note, all exams, quizzes, and class writing assignments for this class must be your own original work and must follow the rules outlined in the university academic integrity policy.

POLS 103-1 (27276) URBP 103-1 (29172) Course Schedule

Course Schedule

Week/Lesson	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	1/27	Course introduction. Short video posted on Canvas
2	2/1	Why study local government? Read Chapter 1 and additional readings Discussion essay assigned OPTIONAL Zoom call to meet each other: Wed. 2/3 11am; Thurs. 2/4, 1pm 2/7 Discussion Essay #1 due
3	2/8	Forms of government Part 1: Political machines and patronage politics Read Chapter 2 and additional readings 2/14 Quiz #1
4	2/15	Forms of Government Part 11: Political reform and council-managers gov't Read Chapter 5 and additional readings 2/21 Discussion essay #2 due
5	2/22	Formal powers in city government: Read Chapter 6 (pgs. 115 – 128) Additional readings 2/28 Quiz #2
6	3/1	Local policy making: The bureaucracy. Read Chapter 6 (pgs 128-135), Chapter 10 and additional readings Essay #3
7	3/8	City Finances: Read Chapter 11 Note: 3/3 Zoom office hours to cover main points of midterm 3/7 Midterm: Exam open from 8 am to midnight
8	3/15	Non-voting forms of government: Interest groups. Chapter 9 Quiz #3
9	3/22	Elections and voting. Chapter 7 and additional readings 3/28 Due: Local government observation paper
10	3/29	Spring break
11	4/5	Reflections on observation paper and discussion of term paper
12	4/12	Candidates and campaigns. Chapter 8 and additional readings Quiz #4
13	4/19	Regional government: Read Chapter 4 (pgs 88-91) and additional readings Essay #4

Week/Lesson	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines	
14	4/26	Policies to promote quality of life. Chapter 13 and additional readings Quiz #5	
15	5/3	Building a city. Chapter 12 and additional readings Essay #5	
16	5/10	Emerging issues Term Paper Due – 5/10	
17	5/17	Review for the final	
	5/21	Final: All day Friday	