State and Local Politics
Simmons University
Fall 2023

Professor Gregory P. Williams
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Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30 to 2:00 in C-330M
Course information: POLS 226, Palace Road College Building B-209, Mondays 11:00 to 1:50

Description

This course is an overview of American politics in the states and their relationship to the federal government. It covers variation in state governments and their public policies, with special attention to Massachusetts politics.

Booklist

Duquette, Jerold, and Erin O'Brien, eds. 2022. *The Politics of Massachusetts Exceptionalism*. Boston: University of Massachusetts Press. ISBN 978-1625346674.

Moncrief, Gary, and Peverill Squire. 2020. *Why States Matter: An Introduction to State Politics*, 3rd ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield. ISBN: 978-1538136157.

Course Schedule

Part I: The search for belonging in American federalism

Week 1 (9/4): No Class—Labor Day

Take today to consider the labor movement. This year, the American Political Science Association, the most popular association for political science professors, has decided to hold its annual meeting in Los Angeles despite a request from striking hotel workers to cancel, move online, or relocate its event. For more, see this piece in *Jacobin*.

Week 2 (9/11): States in American federalism

1. Moncrieff and Squire, chapters 1 and 2
2. Duquette and O'Brien, introduction: "Massachusetts Exceptionalism as Identity and Debate"

Week 3 (9/18): Fiscal policy and the organization of state governments

1. Moncrieff and Squire, chapters 3 and 4
2. Jeff Jacoby, "Short live the legislature!" *Boston Globe* (August 12, 2018).

3. La Raja, "In defense of legislatures," *Mass Political Profs* (August 23, 2018).

Discussion topic 1 closes Friday (9/22)

Part II: Ugh, gerrymandering!

Week 4 (9/25): Gerrymandering I: Drawing Legislative Boundaries
Moncrief and Squire, chapter 8
Prof. Williams' slide shows on "Constitutional Guidelines" and "Reapportionment and the Electoral College"

Exam 1 study guide handed out

Week 5 (10/2): Gerrymandering II: Racial and Partisan Gerrymandering
Duquette and O'Brien, chapter 8: O'Brien, "Voter Access in Massachusetts"
Prof. Williams' slide shows on "Racial and Partisan Gerrymandering" and "Partisan Gerrymandering and the Courts"

Discussion topic 2 closes Friday (10/6)

Part III: States as sites of resistance

Week 6 (10/9): Public Policy in the States: Executive, Legislative, Judicial
1. Moncrief and Squire, chapter 5
2. Duquette and O'Brien, chapter 4: Jenkins, "The Massachusetts General Court"

Exam 1 in class Monday (10/9)
Midterm/Interim grades posted by Friday October 13th (spooky!)

Week 7 (10/16): States and the Federal Government: Allies or Enemies?
Moncrief and Squire, chapter 6

Week 8 (10/23): Think Locally, Act Locally
1. Moncrief and Squire, chapter 7
2. Rebecca M. Townsend, "Town Meeting as a Communication Event," *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 42 no. 1 (2009): 68-89.

Week 9 (10/30): No Class—Indigenous People's Day

Take today to think about the role of indigenous peoples in the Americas. Fun fact: Did you know Professor Williams was once a park ranger? He worked at Colonial Pemaquid in Maine, which was once a settlement for the Wabanaki people.

Discussion topic 3 closes Friday (11/3)

Part IV: The exercise of power

Week 10 (11/6): Time to Party
1. Review Moncrief and Squire, chapter 8 (from week 4)
2. Duquette and O'Brien, chapter 8: O'Brien, "Voter Access in Massachusetts"

Week 11 (11/13): Executive Power in the States
1. Ku, "Gubernatorial Foreign Policy," *The Yale Law Journal* 115, no. 9 (2006): 2380-2415.
2. Duquette and O'Brien, chapter 5: Duquette, "The Governor of the Commonwealth"

Week 12 (11/20): Judicial Power in the States
1. To be announced
2. Duquette and O'Brien, chapter 6: Friedman, "The Courts and the Constitution"
Note—We have class Thanksgiving week!

Week 13 (11/27): State Governments in Context
Moncrieff and Squire, chapter 9

Exam 2 study guide handed out

Week 14 (12/4): Diversity in Massachusetts Politics
Duquette and O'Brien, chapters 10 and 11: Jiménez, "Latinx in Massachusetts Politics;" O'Brien, "Women, Women of Color in Massachusetts Politics"; and, "Conclusion—Massachusetts Politics: Exception? It's Complicated"

Week 15 (12/11): Conclusion
Exam 2 in class on Monday (12/11)
Discussion topic 4 closes Friday (12/15)

Assignments and Grading

1) Exams (50%). Twice you will write timed, thesis-based essay exams. More information will be provided closer to the first deadline.

2) Critical Summary and Critical Questions (20%). On two occasions, you will present to the class your impressions of the reading for that week. One will be a critical summary of the material, and the other will be critical questions.

The weeks you present summary and questions are very much about your thoughts and impressions of the readings. Yes, you should faithfully present the reading to the class, but I and the rest of the class are interested in how you have interpreted the readings. Perhaps there was one idea that was central to the rest of the reading. Or perhaps there was a common theme in two or three readings. Or perhaps there were contrasting views in the readings.

However you approach the assignments, think about how you would present it to someone not in the course. What main ideas to you want to say to this person, and how do you want them to think about the topic?

You will present twice this semester. When it is your week to present a summary:

--Write a 2-3 page (double spaced) summary that critically reviews the readings.
--Post the summary under assignments on Moodle by Sunday.
--Write notes for a 5 minute presentation.
--On Monday, give the class a five minute presentation.

When it is your week to present questions:

--Write 4-6 questions. Each one should take a sentence or two to introduce the topic, present a question for discussion, and take a stab at answering your own question.
--Post on Sunday.
--Present on Monday.

Pro Tip: Do the readings early, and then write an e-mail to me or meet with me to talk about your ideas for your presentation. I cannot read whole drafts of your assignment, but I can give feedback on the general approach you intend to take. Feel free to send a short paragraph on what your summary will include, or, feel free to send a sample question. The earlier your write to me, the better the odds of good feedback.

Common Question: "Things are busy this week. May I present on the same subject next week?" I always say "no" to this reasonable question. There are lots of reasons for this, but the short version is that these discussions are really for the benefit of the class, not for the presenter.

3) Discussion Board (20%). This course is divided into six sections, listed on this syllabus and on Moodle. For each section, you should post at least four times (and you may do more if you like). The first is a longer, more formal, answer to my prompt. The other three are responses to others that move the conversation along considering the political problems we confront. The objective is not to be correct per se, but to explore the course material. Here are some expectations to keep in mind:

i. Your first post of the week shall have an original subject line. Remember, titles are appetizers of the mind!

ii. Your first post shall include 3 specific references to the text, with page numbers indicating where you got the idea.

iii. Your first post shall have at least one quotation. When citing sources, remember to "end the quote, then end the sentence" (p. 27).

iv. Spelling and grammar shall be correct, always.

v. Your subsequent posts may be far less formal. However, they should deal with the substance of one of your peers: expand on a concept, question an idea, or raise points that are puzzling.

vi. Your posts cannot all be on the same day. You must be continually engaged in the discussion board.

vii. Old discussions will be closed when new discussions begin. It is not possible to post to closed topics.

4) In-Class Participation (10%). Grades are holistic and non-formulaic, based on the quality of your comments in class. Students with excellent participation may, in addition, see a 1/3 letter grade benefit at the end of the semester.

Other Policies and Notes

1. Students are expected to treat one another with respect and hold themselves to high academic standards. Follow this link for Simmons University's policies on academic integrity, student resources, accessibility, and sexual harassment: https://internal.simmons.edu/students/academics/syllabus-policies.

2. This syllabus is not a contract. The instructor reserves the right to alter course requirements and/or assignments based on new materials, class discussions, or other legitimate pedagogical objectives.

3. The use of ChatGPT and other machine learning programs, even as a first draft, is considered plagiarism. Writing is hard, and it is only through practice that one becomes a strong writer. The writing process begins by staring at a blank page.

4. Letter grades will be assigned to averages as follows: >93= A; 90-92.9= A-; 86-89.9= B+; 83-85.9= B; 80-82.9= B-; 76-79.9=C+; 73-75.9= C; 70-72.9= C-; 66-69.9= D+; 63-65.9= D; 60-62.9= D-; <60= F.

5. Want to talk politics? Please write to me at gregory.williams@simmons.edu with questions (both worldly and practical) or with your ideas about how politics works. To me and to most folks my age or greater (including employers), e-mails are more like letters than text messages. E-mails should have a greeting/salutation, a message, and a closing. I try to respond to messages within one business day.