Graduate Colloquium: State Politics
Columbia University
Spring 2013
Tuesday, 4:10-6:00pm

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Office Hours: Tuesday 2:30-4 pm
& by appointment

Course Description

This seminar is designed as an overview of the major debates in the comparative study of U.S. state politics. The primary goals of the course are to familiarize students with the principal questions being asked by scholars in this subfield, the methodological approaches employed, and the avenues available for future research. Students will be asked to critically evaluate the existing literature. Throughout the course, special emphasis will be placed on states as laboratories for the empirical examination of political institutions, behavior, and the policy-making process.

Course Requirements

Reading & Discussion
This course is conducted in a discussion format so it is essential that all students complete the required readings prior to the class section in which they will be discussed. Our seminar discussions will sacrifice scope for the rigorous examination of each of the week’s readings. In particular, we will focus on the nature of the contribution that each makes to the study of state politics as well as its theoretical and empirical shortcomings. All students must be prepared to participate in these discussions. Participation grades are determined by the quality of informed commentary contributed during our discussions. Students need only complete those readings labeled “required.”

Assignments
Students are required to complete, during the course of the semester, five short (4-5 pages) review papers reacting to the week’s readings. Students are free to write papers for the weeks of their choosing. However, these papers must be turned in (via e-mail) no later than 5 p.m. on the Wednesday prior to class. No late papers are accepted. These papers must address each of the week’s readings. Furthermore, students should avoid lengthy summarization and instead present critical analysis.

High quality papers will discuss the following:

1) Questions addressed by the readings
2) Contributions of the readings (i.e., what have we learned?)
3) Critiques of the authors’ theoretical arguments, research design, evidence, and conclusions
4) Avenues for future research

Grades for the seminar will be based upon performance in two areas:
Week 1 (January 22nd): Introduction & Overview

Week 2 (January 29th): State Elections & Electoral Institutions

Required:


Recommended:


Week 3 (February 5th): Direct Democracy I

Required:


Recommended:


**Week 4 (February 12th): Direct Democracy II**

Required:


Recommended:


**Week 5 (February 19th): Measuring Subnational Public Opinion**

Required:


**Recommended:**


**Week 6 (February 26th): Studying the Responsiveness of State Governments**

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


**Week 7 (March 5th): Interest Groups**

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


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**Week 8 (March 19th): States as Legislative Laboratories**

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


Week 9 (March 26th): Legislative Professionalization

Required:


Recommended:


Week 10 (April 2nd): Term Limits

Required:


Recommended:


Week 11 (April 9th): Governors & Executive-Legislative Bargaining

Required:


Recommended:


Week 12 (April 16th): Judicial Politics

Required:


Recommended:


**Week 13 (April 23rd): Race, Gender & Sexual Orientation in State Politics**

*Required*


*Recommended:*


Week 14 (April 30th): Policy Innovation, Diffusion, & Competition

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


