

**State and Local Politics**  
PLS 136 Section 001N  
Northern Virginia Community College – Spring 2017

Professor Jennifer D. Sayasithsena, Ph.D.  
Office: CN Building, 214D  
Office Hours: T 9:30-10:30AM & 2-3:30PM  
W 12:30-1:30PM; R 2-3:30PM  
*Additional Hours Available by Appointment*

Classroom: CN 102  
Time: T/R 12:30-1:45PM  
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## 1. COURSE DESCRIPTION

**General Course Purpose:** State and Local Politics focuses on the structures, powers, and functions of state and local governments in the United States. Particular attention will be given to Virginia and its local governments.

### Course Objectives:

- A. To define what is political and what is not political and therefore within the scope of the discipline.
- B. To improve the basic skills of citizenship.
- C. To understand vocabulary and terms used in the discipline.
- D. To describe the major issues of the selected topic(s) in the course, such as Home Rule, types of government, county executive form in Fairfax, VA., etc.
- E. To demonstrate written and oral communication skills used in the discipline.
- F. To improve one's ability to think analytically in the discipline.

2. **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:** Students are expected to read on schedule. Assignments are to be read by the date of the class meeting listed on the schedule below. In addition to chapters assigned in the textbook, students will be asked to read articles posted on Blackboard. Students will also be asked to complete a research paper on state politics and to take three exams. More details about these requirements are found below.

**Required Text:** Dye, Thomas R. and Susan A. MacManus. 2015. Politics in States and Communities. Fifteenth Edition. Pearson: Boston. (Any edition of the book is acceptable)

### ADDITIONAL REQUIRED READING

Students are expected to keep up to date on state and local political issues by reading the metro section of *The Washington Post* and watching/listening to local news. Excellent state and local politics resources include Stateline.org and Governing.com.

- A. **Homework Assignments:** Students will be asked to turn in several, short homework assignments during the course of the semester. Homework assignments are to be turned in via Blackboard. **Late papers will be penalized.** See the late paper policy for details. Specific requirements for each assignment will be provided in class and on Blackboard.
- B. **Exams:** Three exams will be given. The first two exams are scheduled for **February 16<sup>th</sup> and March 28<sup>th</sup>** and the final exam is scheduled for **May 2<sup>nd</sup> at 12:00PM** (Please check the online exam schedule for any changes). The exams are *not* cumulative. The first two exams are each worth 15% of your grade and the third exam is worth 20% of your grade. Question formats include short answer, multiple choice and essay. No make-up exams will be given except under *exceptional* circumstances.
- C. **Local Government Meeting:** Students will attend one meeting of a local governing body during the course of the semester. This may include a public meeting of a local school board, board of supervisors, etc. Students will submit the agenda from the meeting in addition to a 1-2 page summary of their observations.
- D. **State Research Project:** Each student will select a state to research during the semester. Students are required to write an 8-10 page paper about their chosen state. The specific requirements for the assignment will be provided in a separate handout.
- E. **Participation:** Students earn participation points by attending class regularly and being on time. Students should actively participate in class discussions and be prepared to answer questions from the reading. If students do not participate actively, the professor reserves the right to use quizzes to determine whether reading assignments are being completed.

### 3. GRADING

Homework Assignments	15%
Local government meeting summary	10%
Exams	50% (Exam 1 and 2=15%; Exam 3=20%)
State Research Project	15%
Participation	10%
	100%

**Grades will be determined according to the following scale:**

A - 90-100, B - 80-89, C - 70-79, D - 60-69, F - 59 and below

#### **ADDITIONAL NOTES ABOUT GRADING**

Please note that INEVER change grades because someone needs a certain grade to transfer, or to graduate, or to receive scholarships, etc. There is no way at the end of the semester to do extra work or to submit required work to boost a grade.

### 4. COURSE POLICIES

#### **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Students are expected to follow the Information Technology Student/Patrol Ethics Agreement as posted in computer areas and academic integrity standards set down in the Student Handbook. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this course. The penalty for a first-time offense is automatic failure on the specific assignment. The penalty for a second-time offense is automatic failure of the course.

#### **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Students are required to attend all classes. If a student has more than two weeks of unexcused absences, the student will receive a one grade semester reduction for the next two classes missed. Any more than three weeks of absences (six classes) and the student will fail for the semester. Ultimately, students are responsible for their own end grade for the semester, particularly regarding withdrawals. Students should NEVER assume that the professor will automatically drop a student from the class. If at the end of the semester a student has not withdrawn himself or herself from the class, that student will receive a failing grade for the semester. Students should consult their handbooks for specifics on withdrawals and failing grades. DOCTOR and DENTIST APPOINTMENTS ARE NOT EXCUSED ABSENCES. VACATIONS ARE NOT EXCUSED ABSENCES. TRAFFIC STOPS THAT PREVENT STUDENTS FROM MAKING IT TO CLASS ARE NOT EXCUSED ABSENCES.

Emergency situations may arise that qualify as excused absences, but the discretion of determining whether an emergency qualifies as an excused absence resides SOLELY with the professor. Authoritative documentation must be presented to the professor before an absence can be considered an excused absence.

Students CANNOT leave early for ANY reason. Any student who leaves early will be charged with a full absence from class. Do NOT make doctor or dentist appointments during this time, and do not tell relatives that you will pick them up from the airport during this time (or at least let them know they'll have to wait).

#### **TARDINESS**

Class starts promptly on time. Students are allowed to be late to one class without penalty by up to 15 minutes. After that first late arrival, or for any late arrival beyond 15 minutes of the start of class time, (regardless if it is the first late arrival) the student will receive an unexcused absence for every two late arrivals. The absentee policy is detailed in the above section.

#### **COURSE COMMUNICATION**

Students MUST make sure that they receive emails through their campus email accounts. The professor will usually contact students through Blackboard, and Blackboard sends those email communications to students' NOVA email accounts. As the NOVA system uses GMail (Google Email), it is easy to have your NOVA GMail account forwarded to your preferred personal account. Again, it is each student's responsibility to receive email sent to his or her NOVA email account.

Students MUST check Blackboard on a regular basis to stay informed of updates. The Blackboard online system is vitally important for this class. Grades will be kept on the system, assignments will be posted there, and all announcements will be posted on Blackboard. All students have access to Blackboard (same username and password that is used to access VCCS email). Become familiar with Blackboard.

**CELL PHONES OR ANY OTHER COMMUNICATION DEVICES MUST BE TURNED OFF PRIOR TO THE START OF CLASS.**

Text messaging or answering cell phones is strictly prohibited! Using a computer, iPhone, or any other "smart phone" technology to access the internet during class is strictly prohibited. Computers may ONLY be used to take notes. As with any and every disciplinary matter, the professor has the authority to handle the matter in any way she sees fit. The disciplinary measures can include grade penalty of any sort deemed appropriate by the professor, failure for the semester, withdrawal from the class, and removal from any class. Consider this every student's first and only warning.

### **GRADED WORK**

Students MUST retain copies of ALL GRADED assignments, exams, papers, etc., that are handed back to them by the professor. It is possible that something can be misplaced, so students must be able to prove that they received grades.

### **LATE ASSIGNMENTS**

Assignments must be submitted via Blackboard on the date which they are due. Failure to complete an assignment on time will result in a 10-point grade reduction for each day the assignment is late. No credit will be given for assignments submitted 10 or more days after the due date.

### **LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

This class has a NO TOLERANCE policy towards any student who displays any disrespect towards classmates, guest speakers, or the teacher. Different opinions make class time more interesting; on occasion, however, opinions held by some people clash with core values held by others. Even so, all students must respect the opinions of others and listen carefully to what everyone says. Every effort will be made to give every student the opportunity to respond respectfully to statements read or stated orally in class. Debates and discussions may be cut off at the instructor's discretion if the discussions go off topic or if the class is facing time constraints.

Disrespect towards anyone in the class and/or disruption of class sessions will result in grade punishments to the fullest extent allowed by Northern Virginia Community College guidelines. Grades will be lowered to the maximum allowed, and the determination of negative impacts on grades is left to the SOLE DISCRESSION OF THE INSTRUCTOR.

### **INCLEMENT WEATHER/SCHOOL CLOSING POLICY**

Please refer to the NVCC website for information on school closing:

<http://www.nvcc.edu/depts/homepage/closing.htm>.

### **EMERGENCY PROCEDURES**

In case of emergency, please follow the emergency procedure as posted in the classroom.

### **DISABILITIES**

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact a Counselor for Disability Services to discuss possible accommodations. All information is kept confidential and may increase your chances of success in the academic setting.

## 5. COURSE SCHEDULE

- Jan. 10 Course Introduction  
Jan. 12 *Topic:* Why Should We Care About State and Local Politics?  
*Reading:* D&M Chapter 1; "The Big Issues of 2017" State Legislatures Magazine  
<http://www.ncsl.org/bookstore/state-legislatures-magazine/the-big-issues-of-2017.aspx>
- Jan. 17-19 *Topic:* Democracy and Constitutionalism in the States  
*Reading:* D&M Chapter 2; <http://www.dailypress.com/news/politics/dp-nws-session-preview-20170107-story.html>; [http://m.richmond.com/news/local/education/article\\_dc82c670-223f-52b4-8483-9ab8d760075a.html?mode=jqm](http://m.richmond.com/news/local/education/article_dc82c670-223f-52b4-8483-9ab8d760075a.html?mode=jqm); [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/mcauliffe-enters-final-general-assembly-session-with-eye-on-legacy/2017/01/07/e57a97fe-d41f-11e6-945a-76f69a399dd5\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.571a3ff062b7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/mcauliffe-enters-final-general-assembly-session-with-eye-on-legacy/2017/01/07/e57a97fe-d41f-11e6-945a-76f69a399dd5_story.html?utm_term=.571a3ff062b7)  
(Blackboard)  
**Homework #1 Due (1/19)**
- Jan. 24-26 *Topic:* Comparative Constitutions  
*Reading:* D&M Chapter 2; Smith and Tolbert
- Jan. 31-Feb. 2 *Topic:* States, Communities and American Federalism  
*Reading:* D&M Chapter 3  
John D. Donahue, "The Devil in Devolution", *The American Prospect*, May/June 1997; Peter Harkness, Devolution? What's That? July 2009;  
Peter Harkness, What Brand of Federalism Is Next? Obama's mixed approach of coercion and collaboration seems to be working, but that may not last. *Governing*, Jan 2012  
**Homework #2 Due (2/2)**
- Feb. 7 *Topic:* Federalism, cont.  
Feb. 9 *Topic:* Participation in State and Community Politics  
*Reading:* D&M Chapter 4 and 11
- Feb. 14-16 *Topic:* Participation, cont.  
*Exam Review*
- Feb. 21 EXAM ONE**  
Feb. 23 *Topic:* Parties and Campaigns in the States  
*Reading:* D&M Chapter 5
- Feb. 28-Mar. 2 *Topic:* Legislators in State Politics  
*Reading:* D&M Chapter 6; *The Economist*, "No More Packing or Cracking"; Goodman, "States Hope to Win on New District Maps in Federal Courts"; The ReDistricting Game (Blackboard)  
**Homework #3 Due (2/28)**  
**\*\*Research Paper Topics Due (3/2)**
- Mar. 7-9 SPRING BREAK – NO CLASSES**
- Mar. 14 **SNOW DAY – CLASS CANCELED**  
Mar. 16 *Topic:* Governors in State Politics  
*Reading:* D&M Chapter 7  
Ehrenhalt, "It Pays to Know Where the Bodies Are Buried." *Governing*, June 1998
- Mar. 21-23 *Topic:* Courts, Crime and Correctional Policy  
*Reading:* D&M Chapter 9  
Chemerinsky and Sample, "You Get the Judges You Pay For"  
Bonneau, "Why We Should Keep Judicial Elections"

Mar. 28	<i>Topic: Courts, Crime and Correctional Policy, Cont.</i> <i>Exam Review</i>
<b>Mar. 30</b>	<b>EXAM TWO</b>
Apr. 4-6	<i>Topic: Governing America's Communities</i> <i>Reading: D&amp;M Chapter 10</i> <b>Homework #4 Due (4/6)</b>
Apr. 11	<i>Topic: Community Power, Land Use, and the Environment</i> <i>Reading: D&amp;M Chapter 13</i>
Apr. 13	<i>Topic: The Politics of Education</i> <i>Reading: D&amp;M Chapter 16</i> <b>**State Research Project Papers Due** (4/13)</b>
Apr. 18-20	<i>Topic: The Politics of Poverty Welfare, and Health</i> <i>Reading: D&amp;M Chapter 17</i> "Why is Aetna Leaving Most of its ObamaCare Exchanges?" The Atlantic Aug. 2016 <a href="http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/08/aetna-obamacare/496118/">http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/08/aetna-obamacare/496118/</a>
Apr. 25-27	Class Wrap up and Exam Review <b>Local Meeting Summary Due (4/27)</b>
May 2	<b>Final Exam @ 12:00PM</b>