



POS 2112
State & Local Government & Politics
88714 001
Fall 2026

Instructor Name

J. Edwin Benton

University Course Description

Analysis of the structure and function of state and local governments, of the social and political influences that shape them, and of the dynamics of their administrative processes.

Course Requisites

Prerequisite(s):

Corequisite(s):

Course Format

Online

Student Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students, it is the hope and expectation that students will have a fundamental understanding of and genuine appreciation for the basic operations and functions of state and local

governments as well as the political, social, and economic environment in which they find themselves.

Course Objectives

Part I. States and Communities: How to Study, Variations, Issues, and Policies

Study Objectives

1. What are the primary tasks of political science? Relate these tasks to the study of state and local government and politics and how they can be appropriate subject for a genuine comparative study.
2. Discuss two sets of the possible explanations for variations in state policies—economic development and political culture differences.
3. Discuss the challenges posed to state and their local governments with respect to illegal immigration and the impact on federalism (but especially, federal-state-local relations).
4. Identify and be prepared to discuss the major policy responsibilities of the states and their communities?

Part II. Constitutionalism in American States

Study Objectives

1. Discuss the notion of limited government and the legal status of state constitutions.
2. Discuss the origins of written constitutions, while distinguishing between three types of American colonies—royal, proprietary, and charter—and their constitutions.
3. Discuss the concept of constitutional decision making as being two things: the process of specifying organizations and processes of decision making and also determining many substantive policy questions.
4. Describe the key features that state constitutions share and the limits that they place on state governments.
- *5. Discuss the rationale behind the former U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) developing a Model State Constitution and suggesting that states use it as a guide to update or improve their present constitutions. Then, list and discuss the reasons why state constitutions traditionally have been excessive wordy and lengthy documents.
- *6. List and discuss the basic features of the ACIR's Model State Constitution.

1. Describe two processes by which state constitutions may be changed—amendment and revision—and four specific methods for bring about change—legislative proposal, popular initiative, constitutional convention, and constitutional commission.
2. Be able to clearly differentiate between representative and direct democracy and describe/discuss three types of direct democracy. Also, discuss the argument for both direct and representative democracy.
3. Be able to identify several issues that have been the subject of popular initiatives in recent years and discuss the politics and issues involving each.
4. Evaluate whether the proliferation of initiatives and initiative campaigns in some states is problematic.

Part III. Development and Structure of American States

Study Objectives

1. Define federalism.
 - *2. Describe governmental arrangements in the U. s. under the First and Second Continental Congresses
 - *3. Identify and describe the three optional forms of government that the Framers of the U.S. Constitution considered when writing the Constitution—unitary system, confederation, and federal system (a hybrid form or compromise between the first two options). Note: Local governments in the U.S. are creatures of their states and thereby exist in a unitary relationship with their state government.
1. Describe the advantages of federalism to government in the U.S.
 1. Describe some of the disadvantages of federalism to government in the U.S.
 2. Discuss the structure of American federalism with respect to the following (see Figure 1):
 - a. delegate powers and national supremacy
 - b. reserved powers
 - c. powers denied the states
 - d. powers denied to the nation and states

- e. national government's obligations to the states
- f. states role in nation government

1. Describe how the rise of federal grants-in-aid has brought about a shift in power to Washington, while knowing the following:

- a. origin of federal aid
- b. federal grants made possible by federal income tax (16th Amendment)
- c. magnitude of federal grant-in-aid money to states and local governments
- d. types of grants (categorical and block) and the what is meant by there being "strings attached" to grants
- e. grantsmanship

***8. Discuss the pro's and con's of federal grants-in-aid.**

1. Identify the changes or variations in themes or phases of federalism over time beginning with "Dual Federalism" and ending with "Bottom-Up" Federalism."
2. Discuss the notion of "devolution" within the context of American federalism since 1995 and the example of welfare reform.
3. Evaluate how recent Supreme Court decisions have affected the balance of power between the states and the national government.

Part IV. Participation in State Politics

Study Objectives

1. Identify and discuss several ways in which individuals may participate in state and local politics, including both orthodox (voting, working in or contributing to political campaigns, contacting a public official, etc.) and unorthodox (protest, civil disobedience, and violence) methods/strategies.
2. Discuss the rationality of voting.
3. Discuss several explanations why people vote (voting participation), including socioeconomic, partisan competition, legal/procedural, and media predicting winners earlier.

***4. Discuss the influence of three citizen attitudes (alienation, cynicism, and political efficacy on voting.**

1. Compare patterns of voter turnout among whites, African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asians.

1. Discuss the requirement and subsequent elimination of property qualifications as a voting requirement.
2. Identify and describe those tactics/techniques once used to deny African-Americans the right to vote and then match each with the methods that the federal government has used (constitutional amendments, congressional acts, and Supreme Court) to gradually expand the right to vote. Notice that notes also mentions the use of a tactic called the “grandfather clause to prevent African-Americans from voting.
3. Discuss the expansion of voting rights of woman and young people.
4. Discuss the continuing challenges of minorities, woman, and young people face in voting as well as gains they have made.
5. Be able to discuss the generation gap in political participation and the divergence of political views and issues among the old and the young.
6. Discuss three ways in which interest groups and political parties differ in how they organize individuals to make claims upon government.
7. Be able to identify the various interests that attempt to influence state and local politics and the role that lobbyists play in the process.

*13. Discuss how interest groups function to promote democratic ideals.

1. Describe several functions and tactics employed by interest groups to make claim upon government.
2. Explain why interest groups are more powerful in some states than in others.

Part V. Political Parties in State and Local Politics

Study Objectives

*1. Discuss the notion that political parties have arisen as result of the “unwritten Constitution” or the “outside language of the Constitution” and be able to trace the subsequent evolution of parties.

1. Discuss the importance of political parties in the American political system.
2. What is meant by the expression “Responsible Party Model”? Also, discuss the problems with and challenges to this model.

*4. Discuss how political parties can be viewed as three separate structures.

1. Discuss two party mechanisms for nominating state and local officials—party primaries and conventions. Also, identify three types of primaries (open, closed, and runoff) and how they operate.
2. Describe the typical state political party organization and the particular role and function of activists and state party organizations, committees,

and chairpersons. Also, be able to identify basic state laws that govern parties.

***7. Who are Democrats and Republicans?**

1. Discuss the fortunes of the Republican and Democratic parties with respect to state gubernatorial and legislative elections.
2. Describe the difference between divided party government and unified party government in stated legislatures, as well as the assertion that divided government produces gridlock.
3. What are the effects of party competition as well as the policy-relevance of state political parties?
4. Discuss the rise of mass media campaigns in state politics and elections while paying attention to the following:
 5. public relations firms
 6. polling
 7. name recognition
 8. campaign themes
 9. grassroots campaigning
 10. media campaigning
 11. negative ads
 12. free air time
 13. Web campaigns
 14. M-campaigning
15. Discuss the role of money in state elections with regard to the following:
 16. what money can do—buy name recognition
 17. fund raising sources—individuals, “big money,” and PACs
 18. campaign expenditures
 19. impact of third-party candidates
20. Discuss efforts of states to reform and better regulate campaign financing, while paying particular attention of state campaign laws. Also, discuss the effect of federal campaign finance laws and U.S. Supreme Court decisions on state campaign activity and financing.

Part VI. Legislatures in State Politics

Study Objectives

1. Describe the functions of state legislatures.
2. Describe the profile of the typical state legislator with respect to status, occupation, education, age, personal wealth, gender, race/ethnic background, and whether they are amateur politicians.
3. Analyze the extent to which women and racial and ethnic minorities comprise state legislatures, and trace how these patterns have changed over time.

4. Describe the process of getting to and staying in the state legislature with respect to the following:
 - a. getting into politics
 - b. political experience
 - c. raising campaign money
 - d. facing the primaries
 - e. the general election
5. Discuss the advantages that incumbents have in winning elections
- *6. Discuss the issues of legislative reapportionment and gerrymandering and be able to discuss the importance of four U.S. Supreme Court cases pertaining to state legislative reapportionment
- *7. Differentiate between bicameralism and unicameralism and discuss several good points of both types of legislative structures. Also, identify the advantages that Nebraska experienced under unicameralism and provide several reasons why other states besides Nebraska have never switched to a unicameral legislature
- *8. Discuss the methods of organization and procedures of state legislatures by being able to describe the formal versus informal rules and procedures for enacting state statutes and the importance of the roles of committees and the leadership. In addition, be able to identify where one would find more or less important committees, as well as explain why state legislative committees, in general, seem to exert less influence over legislation than do congressional committees.
- *9. Discuss the influence of role-playing on the legislative policymaking.
1. Discuss the influence of political parties, the media, and interest groups in state legislatures.
- *11. Discuss why state legislatures tend to be “arbiters” as opposed to “initiators” of public policy.

Part VII. Governors in State Politics

Study Objectives

1. Describe the various roles of state governors.
2. Describe the varieties of background, profile (age, race/ethnicity, and gender), and political experience of governors.
3. Discuss competition in gubernatorial elections and identify and discuss those factors that seem to influence the outcome of gubernatorial

elections?

***4. Discuss the notion of “fear of executive power” and the subsequent evolution of gubernatorial power.**

1. Compare the powers of weak and strong governors with regard to the following:
 - a. executive reorganization
 - b. tenure power
 - c. managerial, appointment, and removal powers
 - d. executive orders
 - e. state cabinets
 - f. fiscal powers
1. Discuss the various legislative powers available to governors.
2. Analyze how divided government affects the relationship between the governor and the legislature.
3. Analyze how well governors are able to harness their informal powers to be effective political leaders.
4. Describe the duties and responsibilities of other executive offices (lieutenant governor, attorney general, treasurers, auditors, and comptrollers, and secretary of state).

Part VIII. The Judiciary in State Politics

Study Objectives

1. Discuss two types of law—common and statutory.
 2. Discuss how courts are “political” institutions and describe how judicial decision-making differs from legislative and executive decision-making.
- *3. Differentiate between norm enforcement and judicial policy-making.**
1. Describe the structure of state courts.
 2. Discuss five methods of selecting state judges.
 3. Describe state judges with respect to status, gender, race, and party affiliation.
 4. Describe how state judges can be disciplined and removed from office.
 5. Discuss the degree to which state judicial elections are competitive.
 6. Discuss the influence of the following factors on judicial decision-making:
 - a. political party affiliation
 - b. ideology
 - c. role perception (judicial activism and restraint)

1. Describe the “table setting” role played by police in the state judicial system, as well as the pivotal role played by the county sheriff.
2. Describe the important role played by and prosecutors and grand juries in the state judicial system; also, discuss what is meant by plea bargaining.

*12. Discuss the importance of three U.S. Supreme Court cases for state and local police and state judicial systems.

- a. *Mapp v. Ohio*
- b. *Gideon v. Wainwright*
- c. *Miranda v. Arizona*

Part IX. The Politics of State Budgeting as Policy

Study Objectives

- *1. Identify five changes occurring in revenue and tax policy in the United States since the early part of the 20th century.
- *2. Identify three restrictions in state taxing power and discuss to classifications of taxes (progressive and regressive).
- *3. Discuss three sets of rules or guidelines for taxing systems.
1. Identify and describe the primary sources of state and local revenue within the context of progressivity and regressivity.
2. What factor(s) seem to account for variations in revenue collections and tax burdens among states?
3. Discuss several characteristics of states and local governments experiencing fiscal stress, several types of tax limitation proposals and cutback strategies, and different explanations for public support of them.
- *7. Describe the budgetary process and discuss several related factors:
 - a. Describe the budget from formulation to execution and audit.
 - b. Discuss three types of budgets.
 - c. Discuss four characteristics of the budgetary process.
 - d. Discuss the declining influence of federal aid on state-local budgeting.
1. What is capital financing, what are some state constitutional restrictions on it, and when is it acceptable for state and local governments to borrow money in the short- and long-term? Discuss the use of four types of bonds (general obligation, revenue, mortgage, and industrial development) that are used in capital financing.

Required Texts and/or Readings and Course Materials

Thomas R. Dye, and Susan A. MacManus, *Politics in States and Communities*, 15th edition, 2015.

Supplementary (Optional) Texts and Materials

None

How to Succeed in this Course

SKILLS NEEDED

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Students need to be aware that this course will move at a quick, regimented pace and therefore require your undivided attention at all times. To be successful in it, you will need the following skills:

- Communication: If you don't check your e-mail and Canvas Announcements on a daily basis, this is not the course for you!
- Time Management: You will take 9 quizzes and 3 tests and make 9 posts during the fall semester. Therefore, it is imperative that you must keep up with the readings and online video lectures.
- Computer Skills: All work for this course is completed online.

Grading Scale

Grading Scale (%)

90-100 A

80 - 89 B

70 - 79 C

60 - 69 D

0 - 59 F

Grade Categories and Weights

There are 204 possible points in this course. The three (3) exams will be worth 150 points and each test will consist of 50 multiple-choice questions with each question being worth 1 point. The nine (9) quizzes will be worth 36 points and each quiz will consist of 4 multiple-choice questions with each question being worth 1 point. Finally, the posts will be worth a total of 18 points and the possible scores can range from 0 to 2 points, depending on its quality (0 points for no post or a post that is totally off-track or provides no meaningful response; .5 points for a poor response with very little relevant supporting information; 1 point for an attempt that does a fair job of addressing the subject with relevant material or addressing adequately at least one-half of the post prompt; 1.5 points for good response but needs additional elaboration or discussion; 2 points for an excellent response that addresses thoroughly all aspects of the post prompt). The instructor reserves the right to exercise reasonable judgment in the assignment of points between the grading points based on the quality, originality, and comprehensiveness of posts.

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Instructor Feedback Policy & Grade Dissemination

The instructor will send out announcement via Canvas as to when grades have been posted in Canvas gradebook.

Major Topics and Course Schedule

Course Schedule

Meeting	Assignments Due	Discussion

USF Core Syllabus Policies

USF has a set of central policies related to student recording class sessions, academic integrity and grievances, student accessibility services, academic disruption, religious observances, academic continuity, food insecurity, pregnancy and related conditions,

and sexual harassment that **apply to all courses at USF**. Be sure to review these online:

<https://www.usf.edu/provost/faculty-success/resources-policies-forms/core-syllabus-policy-statements.aspx>

Student Recordings

Florida Statute 1004.097 Free Expression on Campus

Students may, without prior notice, record video or audio of a class lecture for a class in which the student is enrolled for their own personal, educational use (USF Policy 10-048). A class lecture is defined as a formal or methodical oral presentation as part of a university course intended to present information or teach enrolled students about a particular subject. Recording class activities other than class lectures, including but not limited to lab sessions, student presentations (whether individually or part of a group), class discussion, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving student participation, test or examination administrations, field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty member is prohibited. Recordings may not be used as a substitute for class participation and class attendance and may not be published or shared without the written consent of the faculty member. Failure to adhere to these requirements may constitute a violation of the USF Student Conduct Code.

Course Policies: Grades

Grading Scale

Percentages Points

A+ 99-100% 202-204 C- 70% 143-144

A 91-98% 185-201 D+ 69% 141-142

A- 90% 183-184 D 61-68% 124-140

B+ 89% 181-182 D- 60% 122-123

B 81-88% 165-180 F 59% and below 121 and below

B- 80% 163-164

C+ 79% 161-162

C 71-78% 145-160

Grades of "Incomplete"

The current university policy concerning incomplete grades will be followed in this course. For undergraduate courses: An "I" grade may be awarded to a student only when a small portion of the student's work is incomplete and only when the student is otherwise earning a passing grade. The time limit for removing the "I" is to be set by the instructor of the course. For undergraduate students, this time limit may not exceed two academic semesters, whether or not the student is in residence, and/or graduation, whichever comes first. For graduate students, this time limit may not exceed one academic semester. "I" grades not removed by the end of the time limit will be changed to "IF" or "IU," whichever is appropriate.

Campus Free Expression

It is fundamental to the University of South Florida's mission to support an environment where divergent ideas, theories, and philosophies can be openly exchanged and critically evaluated. Consistent with these principles, this course may involve discussion of ideas that you find uncomfortable, disagreeable, or even offensive.

In the instructional setting, ideas are intended to be presented in an objective manner and not as an endorsement of what you should personally believe. "Objective" means that the idea(s) presented can be tested by critical peer review and rigorous debate, and that the idea(s) is supported by credible research.

In this course you may be asked to engage with complex ideas and to demonstrate an understanding of the ideas. Understanding and engaging with an idea does not require you to believe it or to agree with it.

Course Policies: Technology and Media

It is the student's responsibility to have reliable computer equipment and access to the Internet. If you experience technical problems on a quiz or exam, you should notify me within **five minutes** of experiencing that problem, and I will determine if you are eligible to take a makeup. If you are eligible, I will issue you a "ticket" for the quiz or exam to be made up. **You must use Mozilla Firefox or Google Chrome rather than Internet Explorer when taking exams or quizzes.**

Course Policies: Student Expectations

Health and Wellness

Your health is a priority at the University of South Florida. We encourage members of our community to look out for each other and to reach out for help if someone is in need. If you or someone you know is in distress, please make a referral at www.usf.edu/sos so that the Student Outreach & Support can contact and provide helpful resources to the student in distress. A 24-hour licensed mental healthcare professional, offered through the counseling center, is available by phone at 813-974-2831, option 3. Please remember that asking for help is a sign of strength. In case of emergency, please dial 9-1-1.

Title IX Policy

USF is committed to fostering a safe and respectful learning environment, free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment, in accordance with Title IX and USF Policy 0-004. If a student shares an experience of sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, or relationship violence with a USF employee (including faculty), that employee will notify the Title IX Office. This allows the Title IX Office to send the student an email with information about support resources and options—if it is safe to do so. Students are not required to respond to this email. The Title IX Office is a private resource. Information is shared only on a need-to-know basis to provide students with support measures. To speak to a confidential resource, students may contact USF Center for Victim Advocacy at 813-974-5757. Confidential resources do not notify the Title IX Office unless the student requests it. For more information about Title IX, available resources, or to make a report, please visit www.usf.edu/title-ix.

Course Hero / Chegg Policy

The USF Policy on Academic Integrity specifies that students may not use websites that enable cheating, such as by uploading or downloading material for this purpose. This does apply specifically to Chegg.com and CourseHero.com – almost any use of these websites (including uploading proprietary materials) constitutes a violation of the academic integrity policy.

Professionalism Policy

Per university policy and classroom etiquette; mobile phones, iPods, etc. must be silenced during all classroom and lab lectures. Those not heeding this rule will be asked to leave the classroom/lab immediately so as to not disrupt the learning environment. Please arrive on time for all class meetings. Students who habitually disturb the class by talking, arriving late, etc., and have been warned may suffer a reduction in their final class grade.

Turnitin.com

In this course, turnitin.com may be utilized. Turnitin is an automated system which instructors may use to quickly and easily compare each student's assignment with billions of web sites, as well as an enormous database of student papers that grows with each submission. Accordingly, you may be expected to submit all assignments in both hard copy and electronic format. After the assignment is processed, as instructor I receive a report from turnitin.com that states if and how another author's work was used in the assignment. For a more detailed look at this process visit <http://www.turnitin.com>.

Netiquette Guidelines

- Act professionally in the way you communicate. Treat your instructors and peers with respect, the same way you would do in a face-to-face environment. Respect other people's ideas and be constructive when explaining your views about points you may not agree with.
- Be sensitive. Be respectful and sensitive when sharing your ideas and opinions. There will be people in your class with different linguistic backgrounds, political and religious beliefs or other general differences.
- Proofread and check spelling. Doing this before sending an email or posting a thread on a discussion board will allow you to make sure your message is clear and thoughtful. Avoid the use of all capital letters, it can be perceived as if you are shouting, and it is more difficult to read.
- Keep your communications focused and stay on topic. Complete your ideas before changing the subject. By keeping the message on focus you allow the readers to easily get your idea or answers they are looking for.
- Be clear with your message. Avoid using humor or sarcasm. Since people can't see your expressions or hear your tone of voice, meaning can be misinterpreted.

Email and Discussion Board Guidelines

- Use the subject line effectively by using a meaningful line of what your email or discussion is about.
- Keep your emails and postings related to the course content. You should not post anything personal on a discussion board unless it is requested by the instructor.
- Any personal, course or confidential issues should be directly communicated to the instructor via email. The discussion boards are public spaces; therefore, any issues should not be posted there.

End of Semester Student Evaluations

All classes at USF make use of an online system for students to provide feedback to the University regarding the course. These surveys will be made available at the end of the semester, and the University will notify you by email when the response window opens. Your participation is highly encouraged and valued.

Food and Drink Policy (for in-campus sessions only).

Please adhere to the firm policy of no beverages (other than bottled/capped water), food, tobacco products, or like items in the classroom. Your understanding of the necessity for this policy and cooperation will be greatly appreciated. This policy will be strictly enforced.

Learning Support and Campus Offices

Academic Accommodations

Students with disabilities are responsible for registering with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) in order to receive academic accommodations. For additional information about academic accommodations and resources, you can visit the SAS website.

[SAS website for the Tampa campus and Sarasota-Manatee Teachout site.](#)

[SAS website for the St. Pete campus.](#)

Academic Support Services

The USF Office of Student Success coordinates and promotes university-wide efforts to enhance undergraduate and graduate student success. For a comprehensive list of academic support services available to all USF students, please visit the [Office of Student Success website](#).

Canvas Technical Support

If you have technical difficulties in Canvas, you can find access to the Canvas guides and video resources in the “Canvas Help” page on the homepage of your Canvas course. You can also contact the help desk by calling 813-974-1222 in Tampa or emailing help@usf.edu.

[USF IT Services](#)

Center for Victim Advocacy

The [Center for Victim Advocacy](#) empowers survivors of crime, violence, or abuse by promoting the restoration of decision making, by advocating for their rights, and by offering support and resources. Contact information is available online.

Counseling Center

The Counseling Center promotes the wellbeing of the campus community by providing culturally sensitive counseling, consultation, prevention, and training that enhances student academic and personal success. Contact information is available online.

[Counseling Center website for the Tampa campus and Sarasota-Manatee Teachout site.](#)

[Counseling Center website for the St. Pete campus.](#)

Tutoring

The Tutoring Hub offers free tutoring in several subjects to USF undergraduates. Appointments are recommended, but not required. For more information, email asctampa@usf.edu.

[Tutoring website for the Tampa campus and Sarasota-Manatee Teachout site.](#)

[Tutoring website for the St. Pete campus.](#)

Writing Studio

The Writing Studio is a free resource for USF undergraduate and graduate students. At the Writing Studio, a trained writing consultant will work individually with you, at any point in the writing process from brainstorming to editing. Appointments are recommended, but not required. For more information or to make an appointment, email: writingstudio@usf.edu.

[Writing studio website for the Tampa campus and Sarasota-Manatee Teachout Site.](#)

[Writing studio website for the St. Pete campus.](#)

Student Ombuds Office

Florida Statute 1006.51 and Florida Board of Governors Regulation 6.011 require that all public institutions provide ombuds services to students. The Student Ombuds Office at USF is a confidential, impartial, informal, and independent resource for students experiencing challenges related to the university. Ombuds can help students safely explore options, clarify processes, and consider next steps. [Learn more or make an appointment at usf.edu/student-ombuds.](https://usf.edu/student-ombuds)