The fifty state governments are often referred to as laboratories of democracy. This phrase has taken on two distinct meanings. On the one hand, states experiment and innovate with policies that (may) diffuse to neighboring states and around the country. More broadly, it can refer to the central importance of the states in many policy areas. On the other hand, fifty governmental units with broadly similar political structures offer a natural laboratory in which to address general propositions of political behavior and policymaking.

In this course, we will look at state politics from both of these broad perspectives. We will look at the research and literature on the states themselves and their position within the federal system. And we will also look at how the states have been used to explore a broad array of political science questions. Throughout the course, our emphasis will be on both public policy and politics, with particular attention to the design and politics of state welfare policy.

Required readings each week are almost entirely in the journals. I’ve tried to mix both classic and seminal works with more recent research. I’ve included books on the syllabus as well for your reference and for a required book-report presentation. Other required work includes occasional reaction papers, and a final research paper (which may include research proposals and extended literature reviews as well).

**Requirements**

1. *Readings and Participation (20%)*: Each week you are expected to read the assigned articles. You may also want to choose one or two articles from the supplemental readings for each week but you are not required to do so. Everyone is also expected to participate actively and constructively in class discussion. Your goal should be to demonstrate your careful and critical reading of the material.

2. *Reaction Papers (25%)*: You need to submit 4 reaction papers for the weeks of your choice. These are due by 3:00 PM on Tuesday before class (submitted through Angel). For each you should read at least one supplemental article as well as the required readings. Your 4-5
Page essays should not summarize the readings but rather offer a critical assessment; in other words, don’t tell me what the articles say, tell me what you think about what they say. Critique the theory, the methods, the conclusions, etc. Ideally the paper will bring together the readings into a coherent essay, but some weeks you might find you need to take on the articles sequentially. The point is to cut right to the heart of what you think are the important theoretical, methodological and/or substantive issues raised by the readings and offer a critique.

Every reaction paper must conclude with 2 or 3 research questions provoked by that week’s readings. Ideally these will flow directly from your essay. Also, be prepared to introduce the supplemental article to the class.

You need to notify me the week of class if you will be preparing a reaction paper and which supplemental article you’ll be reading.

3. Book Review and Presentation (20%). You must write a review (4-6) of a book listed on the syllabus (or other books mutually agreed to) and present the book to the class. The review itself is due within 10 days of the book’s appearance on the syllabus although the presentation is due that day. Take a look at some good journal book reviews to get an idea of how to write these.

4. Research Paper/Literature Review (35%): My goal for this course is for each of you to come out of it with a solid researchable topic that comes out of the readings and course topics. In other words, your project should not simply be something you’ve been working on or want to work on, but rather one that can be linked directly to a particular section of the course.

Ideally, your paper will include a first or more refined cut at the empirics of your question. Certainly more advanced students will be expected to find the appropriate data and do this. But it may be also be appropriate for your final paper to be a comprehensive literature review or research proposal. We’ll talk about this on an individual basis as we move through the semester. The challenge in a course like this is to identify topics early even though we haven’t read yet in an area of interest to you. We’ll be talking about these research ideas throughout the semester and I’ll be encouraging you to read ahead as you begin to identify research questions.

There are several intermediate paper dates on the syllabus. Your final grade is based in part on meeting these deadlines.
Recommended Text:


Selected Data Sources (try to look over some of these before the first class)

The state politics data archive maintained by State Politics and Policy Quarterly:  
http://academic.udayton.edu/sppq-TPR/index.htm

Boris Shor’s (University of Chicago) data on state legislative ideology and polarization, multiple years:  
http://research.bshor.com/ideology/

Tom Carsey’s (UNC) data on state legislative election returns at the candidate-level (also available through ICPSR)  
http://www.unc.edu/~carsey/research/datasets/data.htm

Valuable data from the Census Bureau although much of the state and local level data collection has been discontinued due to budget cutbacks:  
http://www.census.gov/compendia/databooks/

Data from Book of the States is often up to date. For example, monthly state by state enrollment in the ACA.  
http://knowledgecenter.csg.org/kc/

The National Network of State Polls at UNC’s the Odum Institute:  
http://www.irss.unc.edu/odum/contentSubpage.jsp?nodeid=463

Data on state campaign can be found at Follow the Money:  
http://www.followthemoney.org/

PART 1. STUDYING STATE POLITICS AND POLICY

January 15: Class Introduction. Before class try to look over some of sources (above) for state politics data. And you don’t need to read these three overviews of the state politics field but I’m listing them in case you are interested.


January 22: Federalism and State Policy.


**Supplemental**


**Book Review Options**


**January 29: The Comparative Study of State Welfare Policy and Introduction to TANF.**


Supplemental


Book Review Options


PART 2. STATE-LEVEL POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS
February 5: Culture, Ethnicity, and Race.

V.O. Key. 1949. “Southern Politics in State and Nation.” Chapter TBA


Supplemental


Book Review Options


February 12: Political Parties

By 3:00 PM 2/11 prepare a 2 page (total) description of 2 possible final paper topics

V.O. Key. 1949. “Southern Politics in State and Nation.” Chapter TBA


**Supplemental**


**Book Review Options**


**February 19. Public Opinion and Elections**


(supplemental) Berry, W. D., R. C. Fording, et al. (2013). "A New Measure of State Government Ideology, and Evidence that Both the New Measure and an Old Measure Are Valid." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 13(2): 164-182


**Supplemental**


**Book Review Options**
February 26: Direct Democracy

We will use some time this week to discuss research topics. Come to class prepared to discuss one or two possible research topics. After class (by Thursday) you must hand in a 2 page discussion of your paper topic—either a revision of the previous proposal or a new one.


Supplemental


**Book Review Options**


**Part 3. STATE POLICYMAKING: APPROACHES, MODELS, INSTITUTIONS**

**March 5. Policy Responsiveness to Public Opinion**


**Supplemental**


**Book Review Options**


**March 12—Spring Break**

**March 19. Policy Diffusion**

*Preliminary Bibliographies for your final papers should be submitted this week, by class time.*


**Supplemental**


**Book Review Options**


**March 26. Competitive States**

*We’ll have an abbreviated class this week and hold individual meetings throughout the week to discuss research papers.*


**Supplemental**


**Book Review Options**

April 2. Legislatures-Professionalization


Supplemental


Book Review Options


April 9. Legislatures- Representation


**Supplemental**


**Book Review Options**


**April 16: Governors, Legislative-Executive Power**


Supplemental


Book Review Options


April 23. Bureaucracy and Implementation


Supplemental


**Book Review Options**


**April 30. Presentations**