

## **Urban Government and Politics**

Professor Julia Payson  
(POL-UA 360, SCA-UA 753)

### **Course Description**

This course will introduce you to the study of local and urban politics in the U.S. Municipal governments profoundly impact the day-to-day of citizens. Cities have substantial power over policy areas from education and public safety to transportation, and they also address basic needs: making sure the trash gets taken out, the water runs, and that people are safe from crime. And yet, cities are often quite constrained in their policy choices. For example, one of the central challenges facing municipal government is how to attract and maintain a middle class tax base while providing essential services for low-income residents. This course will explore patterns of city politics against the background of American social and cultural history, including the impulse toward reform and the effects of reform efforts on the distribution of power in the community. Additional topics will include issues related to voting, race and ethnicity, gentrification, and the relationship between cities and the federal government.

### **Learning Objectives**

1. Course Content: By the end of this course, you will have a better understanding of how politics and governance operate at the local level. You will be able to articulate the key theoretical arguments about political power in American cities and describe the political debates that have shaped city policy both historically and in the present day.
2. Social Science Majors: This course will incorporate a variety of political science tools and concepts that will appear in your other social sciences courses. Students in all majors will increase their understanding of how social scientists approach the systematic study of politics in a local setting.
3. Professional Skills: This course will emphasize critical reading, effective learning and study habits, synthesizing information, and research evaluation skills. You will continue to hone your ability to thoughtfully approach texts, interpret theoretical and empirical arguments, and formulate individual responses and critiques to the course material. These skills will be invaluable for anyone interested in going into law, public policy, government service, consulting, or any field that requires critical thinking.

4. Civic Engagement: Finally, I hope that learning about urban political dynamics and power structures will better equip and empower you to participate in the politics of your local community.

### Logistics

Class meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:00am – 12:15pm  
Kimmel 803

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Office 220 (2<sup>nd</sup> floor)

Office Hours: Tuesdays: 2-4pm  
Fridays: by appointment

While I will almost always be available during office hours, please use the following website if you would like to reserve a specific time or guarantee that I will be there: <https://jpayson.youcanbook.me/>

### Assignments

Attendance, Participation, and Homework: 15%

- Please attend class prepared to learn and participate. You are allowed **two** unexcused absences, no questions asked. If you must miss a class for a medical or family emergency, please email me as soon as possible, and you may attend office hours to make up that session. After two unexcused absences, each additional missed class will lower your participation grade by 10%.
- We will periodically incorporate more active learning activities and discuss the readings and lecture material as a class and in small groups. Please consider this an opportunity to develop your public speaking skills and ability to verbally articulate your ideas and thoughts. I am committed to creating an inclusive learning environment that encourages everyone to participate. Please come and see me during office hours if you are someone who has particular difficulty participating so I can get a sense of how you are handling the material.

In-Class Quizzes: 20%

- We will have 5 short quizzes over the course of the semester. They will cover both the readings and lectures and will provide you with an incentive to keep up with the material. The quizzes will generally be announced, although I reserve the right to administer pop quizzes—especially if attendance and participation become a problem. **Your lowest quiz score will be dropped when calculating your final grade.**

Midterm Exam: 20%

- The midterm exam will be a 75 minute in-class written exam. It will take place on **Tuesday 3/12**.

Final Exam: 25%

- The final exam will be a take-home exam that will cover the entire semester, with a focus on the material presented after the midterm. The final will be assigned on **Friday 5/10 and due Thursday 5/16 at 12pm**.

Course Paper: 15%

- You will complete a 7-10 page paper that draws from the course themes and allows you to further delve into a topic or question of interest. Prompts and additional details will be provided later in the semester.

### **Evaluation**

Grades will be assigned according to the following scale:

94 – 100	A	67 – 69	D+
90 – 93	A-	62 – 66	D
87 – 89	B+	Below 62	F
83 – 86	B		
80 – 82	B-		
77 – 79	C+		
73 – 76	C		
70 – 72	C-		

I will work hard to ensure assignment grades are administrated in a fair and timely manner. Please feel free to come to office hours at any time to discuss your grades. I do not typically re-grade work. However, if you feel you have an exceptional circumstance, you may write a 1-2 page memo explaining why a re-grade is justified. Keep in mind that your final score may also go down if you pursue this option.

### **Course Policies**

**This course will be laptop free.** Please bring a notebook and pen or pencil to take notes. We will periodically take time to compare and review notes as a class to aid your learning. After the midterm exam, you will have the opportunity to provide feedback on how the laptop free environment is working for you, and I may adjust the policy at that point.

Students Requiring Accommodation: New York University is committed to providing equal educational opportunity and participation for students with disabilities. It is the University's policy that no qualified student with a disability be excluded from participating in any University program or activity, denied the benefits of any University program or activity, or otherwise

subjected to discrimination with regard to any University program or activity. Students requesting accommodations must document their disability with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD).

Academic Integrity: I expect the work you do for this class to be your own. According to university policy, students who violate NYU's core principles of academic integrity by plagiarizing or cheating may fail a particular assignment, fail the course, or face suspension or expulsion.

## **Reading**

Readings will be posted to NYU classes at least a week before they are due. The exception are readings from Judd and Swanstrom's *City Politics* (9<sup>th</sup> edition) textbook. This book is required and available at the bookstore (you may also rent it from Amazon or buy it used from another provider). Note that we are using the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of this text.

Dennis R. Judd and Todd Swanstrom. 2016. *City Politics: The Political Economy of Urban America, 9<sup>th</sup> Edition*. New York: Routledge.

## **Course Schedule**

The readings and thematic content are subject to minor revisions and updates as we assess how the course is proceeding and what interests you develop as a class. Additional readings may be posted with advance notice.

Please read the assignments **before** each class. They will often be the subject of the lectures and short quizzes. When appropriate, I may highlight the most important pages to read and provide reading questions to focus on.

Midterm: **In-Class Midterm Exam Tues. 3/12**

Course Paper: Assigned 4/2

Topic Due: 4/18

**Paper Due: 5/2** (If you want your paper grade before the final exam)

**5/7** (If you are ok without getting your grade before the final)

Final Exam: **Take Home Final Assigned Friday 5/10 and Due Thursday 5/16 at 12pm**

## **Introduction and Logistics**

**Tues. 1/29** First day of class  
No reading

## **Cities in America: Overview and Historical Foundations**

- Thurs. 1/31** Burns\*, The Formation of American Local Governments (20 pages)  
Judd and Swanstrom Chapter 1 (10 pages)
- Tues. 2/5** Judd and Swanstrom Chapter 2 (The Legacy of America's Urban Past) (35 pages)
- Thurs. 2/7** Judd and Swanstrom Chapter 3 (22 pages)  
Plunkitt of Tammany Hall (10 pages)
- Tues. 2/12** Judd and Swanstrom Chapter 4 (30 pages)  
Forms of Municipal Government (2 pages)  
City Manager vs. Mayor: Who Runs This Town Anyway? (2 pages)

## **Theoretical Approaches**

- Thurs. 2/14** Dahl, Who Governs? (20 pages)  
Bachrach and Baratz, Two Faces of Power (6 pages)
- Tues. 2/19** Tiebout, A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures (9 pages)  
Peterson, City Limits (27 pages)
- Thurs. 2/21** Trounstine\*, Political Monopolies in American Cities (17 pages)  
Harrick\*, Multi-minority Coalitions and the Future of Minority Representation (10 pages)

## **Local Institutions, Elections, and Voting**

- Tues. 2/26** Sharp\*, Political Participation in Cities (25 pages)
- Thurs. 2/28** Oliver and Ha<sup>†</sup>, Vote Choice in Suburban Elections (11 pages)  
Barreto<sup>†</sup>, Si Se Puede! Latino Candidates and the Mobilization of Latino Voters (14 pages)
- Tues. 3/5** Schaffner et al, Teams Without Uniforms (20 pages)  
Trounstine\* and Valdini\*, The Context Matters: The Effects of Single-Member versus At-Large Districts on City Council Diversity (13 pages)
- Thurs. 3/7** Catch Up and Midterm Review
- Tues. 3/12** **In-Class Midterm Exam**
- Thurs. 3/14** [No Reading]

[Tues. 3/19 and Thurs 3/21 Spring Break]

**Racial Migration, Economic Development Policies, and Urban Segregation**

- Tues. 3/26** Judd and Swanstrom Chapter 6 (32)
- Thurs. 3/28** Judd and Swanstrom Chapter 7 (25)
- Tues. 4/2** Moving to Opportunity Summary (10 pages)  
Oliver, Paradoxes of Integration (13 pages)  
**Papers Assigned**
- Thurs. 4/4** **No Class – JP @ Conference**  
House Rules\* (Podcast) (60 minutes)
- Tues. 4/9** Judd and Swanston Chapter 10 (24)
- Thurs. 4/11** Gentrification Debate (Variety of short readings posted to NYU Classes)

**Debates Over Urban Policy and Public Services**

- Tues. 4/16** Judd and Swanstrom Chapter 12 (24)  
When Mayors Matter — And When They Don't\* (2 pages)
- Thurs. 4/18** **Paper Topics Due**  
Wilson and Kelling, Broken Windows (18 pages)  
Podcast: How A Theory of Crime and Policing Was Born, And Went Terribly Wrong (30 minutes)
- Tues. 4/23** As Mayors Take Charge: School Politics in the City (12 pages)  
The Lightning Rod (16 pages)
- Thurs. 4/25** How Cities Address Homelessness (Short readings posted to NYU Classes)

**Cities Today and in the Future**

- Tues. 4/30** Judd and Swanstrom Chapter 13 (27 pages)  
Judd and Swanstrom Chapter 15 (5 pages)
- Thurs. 5/2** Case Study: Amazon H2Q (Readings TBD)
- Tues. 5/7** Urban America: U.S. Cities in the Global Era (7 pages)  
Glaeser, The Triumph of the City (12 pages)

**Thurs. 5/9** Final Exam Review  
Last Day of Class

**Take Home Final Exam: Assigned Friday 5/10  
Due Thursday 5/16 at 12pm**