



**POLITICAL SCIENCE 200: STATE & LOCAL POLITICS  
SPRING 2021 ONLINE**

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This course fulfills the Common Curriculum Requirements for Social Sciences (S) and Community Engagement (C).

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course offers a comparative analysis of the political institutions, processes, and public policies of the fifty states and their more than 87,000 local governments – with special emphasis on Virginia government and politics. As these are the units of government that have the greatest impact on our daily lives, it is essential to understand how they function and how to participate in them. How do these "laboratories of democracy" make policy and what happens when they conflict with federal government rules and regulations? Which level of government should control issues like climate change, immigration, or healthcare? This class explores the changing nature of federalism as a framework for understanding both conflicts and cooperation in the current political climate (and during a pandemic!).

**REQUIRED READINGS:**

**Ann O'M. Bowman, 2017. State and Local Government, 10<sup>th</sup> Edition. Cengage Learning [ISBN 9781305888371 available in print, eBook, or for rent – there is also a new 2022 edition available in January but the older version is fine]**

Peaslee, Lilokanio and Nicholas J. Swartz. 2014. Virginia Government: Institutions and Policy. CQ Press [ISBN 1452205892].

Current Events in Virginia State and Local News. [vanews@vpap.org](mailto:vanews@vpap.org)

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Students will acquire knowledge and develop critical thinking, research, and writing skills through analysis of:

1. processes and institutions of state and local government
2. political leadership and participation at the state and local levels
3. the policymaking process and the public policies that affect states and localities
4. Virginia state and local politics

**STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES AND EVALUATION:**

Grades for each assignment are posted in the gradebook on Canvas. Regardless of how Canvas displays your grade online, your final grade is based on this **weighted formula**:

Assessment	Percentage of Final Grade	Late Policy
Quizzes	20%	Late Quizzes one letter grade deduction Quizzes not completed before exam = 0
Research and Writing Assignments	30%	On time and complete = 100 Incomplete or Late = 75 More than one week late = 0
Midterm Exam	25%	Rescheduled exams at discretion of professor
Final Exam	25%	Final Exams must be completed no later than April 19th

**Canvas:** This class has two sections for Spring 2021 and both are included in a central Canvas course where all course documents are posted, including the syllabus, quizzes, class notes, assignments, and review questions. Students on campus will be divided into groups and limited in terms of face to face class meetings as needed to comply with CDC recommendations for social distancing during COVID. Please check Canvas and your MBU email on a regular basis.

**Readings and Class Notes:** I recommend that you break up each chapter into small increments of reading and take handwritten notes with a list of concepts and questions. Class notes complimenting the reading for each module are posted on Canvas. Class notes are annotated, but you may have questions. Take notes to prevent rushing through the content and follow up with questions.

**Virtual Classroom:** There is an online class discussion on Wednesday nights from 7-8 p.m. open to all sections of the course. In addition, recordings of weekday class sessions are posted online. To attend a class meeting online, use the Blackboard Collaborate link in the Canvas course. The Blackboard Collaborate Link can also be used by students to meet for virtual group study sessions. For students on campus, appropriate documentation is required for permission to access the weekday class meetings remotely (i.e. students in quarantine).

**Office Hours:** Office hours will be held online using a separate Blackboard Collaborate link sent by email (open to all my students, not just this class). Additional times are available by appointment.

**Quizzes:** Each module has an online quiz (or quizzes) for readings and notes covered that week. Quizzes for each module are always due BEFORE we cover the topic in class each week in order to enhance class participation and discussion. These quizzes are posted on Canvas and assess comprehension of core concepts.

**Research & Writing Assignments:** The Civic Engagement portion of this class is fulfilled through hands-on participation, research, and writing assignments (and one short oral presentation) that focus on each level of government. There are a total of 12 assignments, some short and descriptive / some that require more research and analysis that cover policymaking at the local government level and the state government level (See Canvas for complete instructions on each assignment):

**1. Local Government Policy Analysis Assignments (5 total):** Students will learn about the structure of local government; participate (virtually or in person) in a minimum of 3 local government meetings (i.e. school board or city council); and research a local policy issue (communicating with the appropriate local government office and/or elected official for additional information).

**2. State Government Policy Analysis Assignments (7 assignments total):** Students will learn about the Governor’s Agenda by analyzing State of the Commonwealth Addresses; track a topic of their choice through the legislative tracking system for the current legislative session; research the party control of the General Assembly and the committee handling the bills being tracked; compare states on data and policies related to the topic area tracked; and analyze and explain the outcome from the legislative session.

Note: Students should plan ahead (i.e. many local governments only meet once or twice per month, so plan your schedule early for which three meetings you will attend). Students can submit assignments early. All assignments are submitted online on Canvas.

<b>Due Date</b>	<b>Research &amp; Writing Assignment</b>	<b>Level of Government</b>	<b>Brief Description (Additional Guidelines on Canvas)</b>
1/22	#1	State	<b>Gubernatorial Speech Analysis:</b> Students will read and/or watch Governor Northam’s State of the Commonwealth speeches and identify agenda priorities and changes over time. These speeches provide an excellent snapshot of policy issues in Virginia.
1/29	#2	Local	<b>Local Government Profile:</b> Students will choose a local government to follow this semester (i.e. a city council, a county board of supervisors, or a school board—either Staunton/Augusta County or your hometown). Write a brief profile of the local government (organization, functions, terms of office, political balance...)
2/5	#3	Local	<b>Local Government Meeting Review #1</b> Watch/listen to a live stream meeting of local government and write a review. (or attend in person if available and safe during COVID)
2/12	#4	State	<b>Pick a state policy topic / track bill</b> Students will sign-up for a policy area (taxes, economic development, education, criminal justice, health & welfare, or

			environment) and then track relevant legislation introduced in the VA General Assembly this year (search using the online bill tracking system)
2/19	#5	State	<b>General Assembly and Committee Profile</b> Which political party controls the legislature? What committee was the bill(s) that you are tracking assigned to? What is the make-up of that committee? (Ratio of Democrats to Republicans, size, diversity)
2/26	#6	State	<b>Virginia Bill Research</b> What kind of media coverage is the bill(s) getting? What are the arguments being made by legislators and/or interest groups for or against the bill(s)?
3/5	#7	Local	<b>Local Government Meeting Review #2</b> Watch/listen to a live stream meeting of local government and write a review. (or attend in person if available and safe during COVID)
3/12	#8	State	<b>Comparison to other states</b> What are other states doing (generally speaking) and/or what are considered “best practices” for states on the issue that you are tracking? See NCSL.org
3/19	#9	Local	<b>Contact Local Government</b> Follow up with an elected official and/or local government employee (department or agency) for more information and/or opinion about a local policy issue that has come up in the meetings that you have been monitoring. Write a review of the information / response received.
3/26	#10	State	<b>Oral Presentation on State Policy</b> Create a 2-3 minute video that summarizes what happened to the bill you researched and why (as if you are reporter covering the General Assembly)
4/2	#11	Local	<b>Final Analysis of State Policy</b> Write up your final analysis of what happened (or not) to the bill(s) you tracked and what factors played a role in the policymaking process (i.e. divided government, budget constraints)
4/9	#12	Local	<b>Local Government Meeting Review #3</b> Watch/listen to a live stream meeting of local government and write a review. (or attend in person if available and safe during COVID)

**Exams:** Exams include multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. Exams are OPEN COURSE MATERIALS (this means that you may use the textbook and class notes, but **NOT** the internet). Please note that the exams require more critical thinking and analysis than the quizzes. You will need to understand the significance of concepts and how they apply to current events. Do not rush through the exams -- particularly the essay portion. I will be looking for thorough comprehension of the topics, clearly explained using examples to support your answer. You are tested on the course materials presented in this class. Do not be tempted to Google answers – use your course materials.

**Accessibility Services:** Any student with documented accessibility needs who feels they may need academic accommodations while taking this course, should first contact Dr. Carey Usher,

Associate Provost ([cusher@marybaldwin.edu](mailto:cusher@marybaldwin.edu), 540-887-7064)  
or [Accessibility@marybaldwin.edu](mailto:Accessibility@marybaldwin.edu).

**The Academic Resource Center:** The ARC is your one-stop-shop for writing, math, and all other subject and studentship tutoring. Residential students can meet with tutors virtually or face-to-face in the Center for Student Success, on the first floor of Grafton Library. Online and remote students can work virtually with tutors on papers, assignments, and test-taking strategies. Appointments are scheduled through TutorTrac ([tutortrac.marybaldwin.edu](http://tutortrac.marybaldwin.edu)). For more information, contact Dr. Carey Usher, Associate Provost ([cusher@marybaldwin.edu](mailto:cusher@marybaldwin.edu), 540-887-7064) or [ARC@marybaldwin.edu](mailto:ARC@marybaldwin.edu).

**Honor Code:** The policy of Mary Baldwin University concerning cheating and plagiarism is strictly followed in this course.

**Pledge of Inclusivity:** We, the community of Mary Baldwin University, strive to celebrate humanity in all its wondrous and complex variation. Because we value diversity, it is our mission to sustain a community where all may flourish. We are safe to embrace our shared experiences and our differences. To this end, we treat all with respect and compassion.

**Course Schedule:** Date posted on Canvas and in this syllabus are set to keep you on track towards successful completion of this course. Teaching during a pandemic, however, requires adaptability and flexibility – so please communicate with me if accommodations are necessary.

Week	Agenda/Topic	Assignment
1/11	<b>Introduction to State &amp; Local Politics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Laboratories of Democracy</li> <li>VA Governor Ralph Northam’s Agenda</li> <li>2021 State of the Commonwealth Address</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skim Bowman Chapter 1, “State and Local Governments: New Directions”</li> <li>Peaslee Chapter 1, “An Introduction to Government and Policymaking in the Commonwealth”</li> <li>Introduce yourself on Canvas</li> </ul>
1/18	<b>Module 1: State Legislatures</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Citizen v. Professional v. Hybrid Legislatures</li> <li>VA 2020 General Assembly Legislative Session</li> <li>Year of the Woman in VA legislative elections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bowman Chapter 6, “State Legislatures: The People’s Representatives”</li> <li>Peaslee Chapter 5, “The Virginia General Assembly: Lawmaking in the Nation’s First Legislature”</li> <li>Module 1 Quiz State Legislatures</li> <li>Research and Writing Assignment 1</li> </ul>
1/25	<b>Module 2: Governors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Divided v. Unified Government Control</li> <li>Executive-Legislative Balance of Power</li> <li>VA’s 2020 Trifecta</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bowman Chapter 7, “Governors: Power, Politics, and Executive Leadership”</li> <li>Peaslee Chapter 6, “Steering the Ship of the State: Executive Power in Virginia”</li> <li>Module 2 Quiz Governors</li> <li>Research and Writing Assignment 2</li> </ul>
2/1	<b>Module 3: State Judiciary</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>appointments vs. elections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bowman Chapter 9, “The Judiciary: Independence v. Accountability”</li> <li>Peaslee Chapter 7, “Law and Order in Virginia: The State Court System”</li> <li>Module 3 Quiz State Judiciary</li> <li>Research and Writing Assignment 3</li> </ul>
2/8	<b>Module 4: Federalism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bowman Chapter 2, “Federalism and the</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CA, Climate Change, and the Trump Administration</li> </ul>	<p>States: Sorting Out Roles and Responsibilities”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Module 4 Quiz Federalism</li> <li>○ Research and Writing Assignment 4</li> </ul>
2/15	<p><b>Module 5: State Constitutions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VA and the ERA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Bowman Chapter 3, “State Constitutions: The Fundamental Rules of State Government”</li> <li>○ Peaslee Chapter 2, “A Framework for Governing: Exploring the Virginia State Constitution”</li> <li>○ Module 5 Quiz State Constitutions</li> <li>○ Research and Writing Assignment 5</li> </ul>
2/22	<p><b>Module 6: Citizen Participation &amp; Elections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiative, Referendum, and Recall</li> <li>• VA and Women’s Suffrage</li> <li>• Felon Voting in VA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Bowman Chapter 4, “Citizen Participation and Elections: Engaging the Public in Government”</li> <li>○ Peaslee Chapter 3, “From Blue to Red and Back Again: Voting and Political Participation in Virginia”</li> <li>○ Module 6 Quiz Participation &amp; Elections</li> <li>○ Research and Writing Assignment 6</li> </ul>
3/1	<p><b>Module 7: Political Parties &amp; Interest Groups</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Byrd Legacy in VA</li> <li>• Changing VA Demographics in the Urban Crescent</li> <li>• Ca</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Bowman Chapter 5, “Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Campaigns: Influencing Public Policy”</li> <li>○ Peaslee Chapter 4, “Organized Interests: Political Parties and Group Politics in the State Capital”</li> <li>○ Module 7 Quiz Political Parties and Interest Groups</li> <li>○ Research and Writing Assignment 7</li> </ul>
<b>Midterm Exam</b>		
3/8	<p><b>Module 8: Budgeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VA’s budget process &amp; priorities</li> <li>• Staunton Vision for 2030 &amp; Three Year Priorities</li> <li>• Staunton’s State of the City Addresses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Bowman Chapter 8, “Public Administration: Budgeting and Service Delivery”</li> <li>○ Peaslee Chapter 9, “Paying the Bill: Budgeting and Finance in Virginia”</li> <li>○ Peaslee Chapter 10, “Municipalities and Metropolitanism: Local and Regional Governance in Virginia”</li> <li>○ Module 8 Quiz Budgeting</li> <li>○ Research and Writing Assignment 8</li> </ul>
3/15	<p><b>Module 9: Local Government</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staunton’s City Manager Form of Government</li> <li>• Strong v. Weak Mayors</li> <li>• Councils v. Commissions</li> <li>• Virginia’s Dillon’s Rule</li> <li>• Home Rule</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Bowman Chapter 10, “Local Government: Types and Functions”</li> <li>○ Bowman Chapter 11, “Local Leadership and Governance: Continuity and Change”</li> <li>○ Bowman Chapter 12, “State-Local Relations: Fifty Different Systems”</li> <li>○ Module 9 Quiz Local Government</li> <li>○ Research and Writing Assignment 9</li> </ul>

3/22	<b>Module 10: Policymaking Part 1</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taxing and Spending</li> <li>• Economic Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Peaslee Chapter 11, “Inside the Laboratory: Public Policymaking in Virginia”</li> <li>○ Bowman Chapter 13, “Taxing and Spending: Where the Money Comes from and Where it Goes”</li> <li>○ Bowman Chapter 14, “Economic Development: Competing for Growth”</li> <li>○ Module 10 Quiz Taxes</li> <li>○ Module 10 Quiz Economic Development</li> <li>○ Research and Writing Assignment 10</li> </ul>
3/29	<b>Module 11: Policymaking Part 2</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education Policy</li> <li>• Criminal Justice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Bowman Chapter 15, “Education Policy: Reading, Writing, and Reform”</li> <li>○ Bowman Chapter 16, “Criminal Justice: Cops and Corrections</li> <li>○ Module 11 Quiz Education</li> <li>○ Module 11 Quiz Criminal Justice</li> <li>○ Research and Writing Assignment 11</li> </ul>
4/5	<b>Module 12: Policymaking Part 3</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Welfare &amp; Healthcare Policy</li> <li>• Environmental Policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Bowman Chapter 17, “Social Welfare and Health Care Policy: Addressing Poverty and Sickness”</li> <li>○ Bowman Chapter 18, “Environmental Policy: Regulation and Innovation”</li> <li>○ Module 12 Quiz Welfare &amp; Healthcare</li> <li>○ Module 12 Quiz Environment</li> <li>○ Research and Writing Assignment 12</li> </ul>

**Final Exam Week April 13-19, 2021**