

**Decision-Making in American Cities**  
**POSC 301**  
**Case Western Reserve University**  
**Department of Political Science**  
**Spring Semester 2014**  
**Location: Clark Hall, Room 104**  
**Day/Time: Tuesday/Thursday, 11:30am-12:45pm**

Instructor: Howard Maier  
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Office hours: by appointment  
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**Course Description**

To fully understand government and politics in the United States, we need to understand the role and functions of local governments. Local governments include cities, counties, villages, and townships. Cities, counties, villages, and townships have multiple functions such as street maintenance, trash pick-up and disposal, planning and zoning, as well as other governmental responsibilities. Local governments may also include special districts that deal with singular governmental responsibilities such as education, parks and recreation, public health, transportation, and a myriad of other tasks. Local governments, numbering in the tens of thousands, make decisions that affect our lives on a daily basis.

This course will look at the rich history of local, or urban, government in the United States. It will show how they are organized and function, how they receive and spend their funds, what their responsibilities are, how they interface with other local governments as well as state and federal governments. The course will also look at how local governments work with business, institutions, and the public at large.

All of this activity requires decisions on the part of elected and appointed officials based on legal precedent and responsibility, economic goals, political goals, and other factors. The public at large makes decisions through participation in civic life, voting, and basic citizenship. In addition, the course will explore the shifting demographics that have historically made profound impacts on government at all levels.

Because such issues are always in the news, participants in the course will discuss and analyze key events of the day as part of every class.

### **Readings**

Judd, Dennis R. and Swanstrom, Todd R., *City Politics: The Political Economy of Urban America*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition, Pearson, 2012 (“J and S”)

Kantor, Paul and Judd, Dennis R., editors, *American Urban Politics in a Global Age: the Reader*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Pearson, 2010 (“K and J”)

Pelissero, John P., editor, *Cities, Politics, and Policy: A Comparative Analysis*, Congressional Quarterly Press, 2003 (“P”)

Students are expected to purchase the Judd and Swanstrom and the Pelissero books. Selections from the Kantor and Judd book will be available through Blackboard and the \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to the assigned books, the instructor will suggest other books, articles, and periodicals as appropriate. Students will be expected to read with critical analysis and be able to discuss the subject matter.

### **Guest Speakers**

Guest speakers will be invited to meet with the class from time to time. The instructor has learned that appropriate guest speakers add variety and expertise to the classroom experience.

### **Current issues**

A portion of each class will be spent discussing current issues in urban government decision-making. Sometimes the issues are not yet found in textbooks. Information can be found in publications and web-sites of local governments themselves, such newspapers as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Plain Dealer*, your hometown newspaper, magazines, or other periodicals. *Governing Magazine* is a very resource. You can find it on-line at [www.governing.com](http://www.governing.com). The instructor will have other suggestions throughout the course. Use *Google Alerts* for specific topics of interest. You should never be without a topic to discuss.

### **Written assignments**

See handouts

**Class participation**

Class discussion will be encouraged as governmental decision-making has historically been the subject of deliberation and debate. One or two students will be assigned to take “minutes” for the class. These minutes are not a substitute for your own note-taking, but will help provide an “official” record of the class. Such a task will be helpful to your future careers.

**Grading**

Class participation – 10% of final grade; Mid-term exam – 20% of final grade; Final exam—20% of final grade; First writing assignment – 25% of final grade; Second writing assignment – 25% of final grade. Advice: Don’t obsess over the assignments. Work hard, but enjoy the learning experience.

**Grading criteria**

A – Outstanding work that shows excellent research, writing, and insight.  
 B – Very good work, but not to the same quality as A level work.  
 C – Basic knowledge and work. CWRU students should do better.  
 D or F – Failure to complete work in a competent manner. Incomplete assignments.

**Class calendar****Week/Date****Topics and Assignments**

Week 1/January 13

--Introduction of instructor and students  
 --Review of syllabus, assignments, expectations  
 --Diagnostic questionnaire  
 --Current issues in urban decision-making  
 --Career opportunities  
 --Evolution of American cities  
**Readings:** J and S, Chapters 1 and 2

Week 2/January 20

--Current issues in urban decision-making  
 --Review questionnaire  
 --Party machines and immigrants  
**Readings:** J and S, Chapter 3  
 Guidelines presented for first writing assignment:

*Decision-making in action: Observe how public policy is made at a meeting of local government.*

- Week 3/January 27
- Current issues in urban decision-making
  - Reforms
  - Role of mayors, councils, city managers in cities
  - Special districts
- Readings:** J and S, Chapter 4; P, Chapters 6,7, 8  
Approvals for first written assignment.
- Week 4/Feb. 3
- Current issues in urban decision-making
  - Cities in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century
  - Federal programs: e.g., New Deal, Great Society, New Federalism, etc.
- Readings:** J and S, Chapters 5 and 8
- Week 5/Feb. 10
- Current issues in urban decision-making
  - City/Suburb divide
  - Transportation, housing, land use
  - Migration
  - Race and ethnicity
- Readings:** J and S, Chapters 6 and 7;  
P, Chapters 3, 4, and 13.
- Week 6/Feb. 17
- Current issues in urban decision-making
  - City/Suburb divide (continued)
- Readings:** K and J, Chapters 4 and 5.  
**First writing assignment due.**  
Guidelines presented for second writing assignment: *Case study in decision-making.*
- Week 7/Feb. 24
- Current issues in urban decision-making
  - Sunbelt
- Readings:** J and S, Chapter 9; K and J, Chapter 2, Essay 6  
Presentations on first writing assignment.  
Approvals for second writing assignment.
- Week 8/March 3
- Current issues in urban decision-making

- Suburban politics
  - Fragmented metropolitan areas
  - Planning, zoning, transportation,
  - Readings:** J and S, Chapter 10;  
P, Chapters 2 and 3; K and J, Chapter 5
  - Midterm exam**
- Week 9/March 10      **No class!** Spring break.
- Week 10/March 17      --Current issues in urban decision-making  
--Governing fragmented metropolitan areas  
--Sprawl and responses to sprawl  
**Readings:** J and S, Chapter 11;  
K and J, Chapter 7
- Week 11/March 24      --Current issues in urban decision-making  
--Public finance  
--Economic Development  
**Readings:** J and S, Chapter 12; P, Chapters 9 – 11  
**Second writing assignment due**
- Week 12/March 31      --Current issues in urban decision-making  
--Downtowns  
--Culture, Arts, Creative Class  
**Readings:** J and S, Chapter 13;  
K and J, Chapter 1, essay 3 and Chapter 3  
Presentations on second writing assignment
- Week 13/April 7      --Current issues in urban decision-making  
--Governing the divided city  
--Neighborhoods  
**Readings:** J and S, Chapter 14
- Week 14/April 14      --Current issues in urban decision-making  
--Cities in the global economy  
**Readings:** J and S, Chapter 15;  
K and J, Chapter 2
- Week 15/April 21      --Current issues in urban decision-making  
--Education  
**Readings:** P, Chapter 12

Week 16/April 28 --Current issues in urban-decision making  
--Course wrap-up

Week 17/May4 **Final exam**