

**San José State University**  
**Department of Political Science**  
**Local Government and Politics**  
**POLS 103-1 (47919)/URBP 103-1 (49565)**  
**Local Government and Politics, Section, Fall 2021**

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 12:15 to 1:15  
Class Days/Time: TTH 10:45 to 12:00  
Classroom: DMH 149A

### **Course Description**

This course offers a theoretical and practical study of local politics and government. The structure, role, and functions of city and county governments are examined. Students gain knowledge of the resources and skills required for effective citizenship in their communities.

In the 40 years that I have been observing and participating in local government—beginning when I first took this very same PS103 course as a junior—I don't think there is a more exciting and challenging time to study this topic. It is breathtaking what is happening. COVID-19 is still affecting all of our lives—who is getting sick and why, measures to stop the spread, businesses closures, inequities in education, etc. There is Black Lives Matter and demands to reform police departments, all while there is a new police chief and city manager.

There is much activity going on at San Jose City Hall. There is a charter review committee looking at governance issues of the city, including moving the election of the mayor. The census information is coming out, and district boundaries will be redrawn at the city, county, state, and federal levels. We will analyze whether the balance of power has shifted at City Hall after the recent city council elections. For students reliant on VTA for transportation, we will follow some of the issues plaguing the organization after the mass shooting by an employee. We will look at the Google project and the impact that will have on adjoining neighborhoods. And what about the moratorium on evictions? Gentrification? Homelessness? The need for more housing? Who are the people we've elected that are making all these decisions? Do they know what they're doing?

In an attempt to shed light on these issues and concerns, the emphasis of the class will be on how local government works, who the players are, whose interests are being represented, and how in the world do ordinary citizens begin to make an impact. As the semester progresses, we will see if the COVID restrictions loosen or tighten up, and the consequences of either action for government, businesses, and residents.

## Course Format

This course will be conducted in person. Assignments will be posted on canvas, along with additional reading material and some interviews and recordings. Quizzes will be given online, and essays will be turned in on canvas well. Midterm and final exams will be given in person. Office hours will be in person.

## Faculty Web Page and MYSJSU Messaging

*Course materials such as syllabus, handouts, notes, assignment instructions, etc. can be found the [Canvas Learning Management System course login website](http://sjsu.instructure.com) at <http://sjsu.instructure.com>. You are responsible for regularly checking our Canvas course page to learn of any updates to the course syllabus.*

## Email Communication

The easiest way to contact me is via email. Please be aware though that I will not (unless in unusual circumstances) respond to email after normal working hours (Monday through Friday 8am-5pm). During busy times of the semester I receive a high volume of emails so please give me at least 24 hours to respond (not counting weekends for reasons just described) before sending me a follow up.

## Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. **CLO 1:** Learn and apply social science theories of government and politics to explain the behavior, decisions, and outcomes of real-life local governments.
2. **CLO 2:** Acquire knowledge and practical skills necessary to be an active participant in local government and political affairs.
3. **CLO 3:** Learn to think critically about the role and function of local governments in the broader American federalist system.
4. **CLO 4:** Develop a deeper understanding of the politics, issues, institutions, and governing processes of San Jose and/or other Bay Area cities and counties.

## Required Texts/Readings

### Textbook

**Understanding Urban Politics: Institutions, Representation, and Policies** (2020), by Timothy B. Krebs and Arnold Fleishmann. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. ISBN: **9781538105238**

This textbook is required for the course. It is crucial that you obtain a copy, as I will be assigning various chapters of the book as required readings throughout the semester.

The textbook is available for purchase from the SJSU Bookstore or on Amazon as a paperback, hardcopy, or as an eBook. You can also view a copy for several hours at a time from the SJSU Martin Luther King Jr. library. Feel free to purchase a used copy if you are able to find one.

## Other Readings

San Jose Mercury News (Mercurynews.com)  
San Francisco Chronicle (SFGate.com)  
San Jose Metro (SanJoseInside.com)  
San Jose Spotlight (SanJoseSpotlight.com)  
San Jose Community NETWORK (SanJoseCommunity.com)  
Silicon Valley Business Journal (Bizjournals.com)

There will be more substantial articles assigned weekly to complement the readings, many of which students will write short essays for points.

All assigned readings on class schedule can be found on our class Canvas page.

## Library Liaison

The library liaison for Political Science is available to answer questions and provide one-on-one help for learning how to use the library for research.

His name and contact info is Paul Kauppila, [Paul.kauppila@sjsu.edu](mailto:Paul.kauppila@sjsu.edu), (408) 808-2042

## Course Requirements and Assignments (Required - Delete the word “Required” in final draft)

1. Course Readings: All assigned readings are required. It is expected that students will complete the assigned readings before the indicated deadline each week. Students may find it necessary to read all or portions of the assigned readings more than once to comprehend complex material. Students who feel they need additional help with effective reading comprehension strategies should consult with the professor during a scheduled appointment.
2. Exams: Two in-person exams—a midterm and final—are required. Exams will consist of multiple choice, true/false, and short-answer questions covering the assigned readings and lecture/discussion material. Please refer to the course schedule for appropriate dates.
3. Quizzes: A total of five quizzes will be given. They will be created and completed on Canvas. Quiz questions will consist of multiple choice and true/false questions. Quizzes will be open on Thursdays after class until Sunday at 11:59 pm. Please refer to the course schedule for appropriate dates.
4. Essays: Five times throughout the semester students will write a short essay on questions based on that week’s assignment. They will also need to respond to one of the essays written by a fellow student. Students will be graded on the completeness of their answers. Essays will be open on Thursdays after class until Sunday at 11:59 pm.
5. Newspaper Article: Students (generally in alphabetical order) will be told when they will be discussing a news story dealing with a city, county, or local agency. Students will write up a short summary of the article and then verbally discuss the story at the front of the class. Students should let me know ahead of time what the topic of the article is so I can confirm it’s appropriate.
6. Local Government in Action: Student Observation: Several experiential learning projects are tied to this course. Students will be required to observe components of local government in action. You can choose among the following options: observe a San Jose (or other Bay Area) City Council meeting; a Board of Supervisors meeting; observe another government agency meeting like Valley Transportation Agency. You must observe TWO meetings. They can be of the same agency or different ones. If you watch different ones, be sure to make comparisons between them. Students will be required to write a 6-page double-spaced reflection paper describing

what you observed and experienced. You can get information about the San Jose Council meetings at [sanjoseca.gov](http://sanjoseca.gov) or the Board of Supervisors at [sccgov.org](http://sccgov.org). Other governmental bodies will have a website containing information on when they meet and copies of their agendas.

The San Jose City Council meets every Tuesday, starting at 1:30. They often go late into the afternoon or into the evening. The Board of Supervisors also meets on Tuesdays (every other Tuesday, though) starting at 9:30 and often go late into the afternoon as well. Both the San Jose City Council and Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors stream their meetings live on their respective YouTube channels. Watching meetings on-line doesn't give you the same flavor as attending the meetings, but COVID forced all meetings to be virtual, which created its own set of issues. One advantage of watching a taped version of the meetings is it is easy to skip over portions you are not interested in and go directly to the ones that you are. As of the first day of class, the City of San Jose is doing hybrid meetings, both online and in person. The county is still doing just online, but by the end of Sept. all governments are required to return having in-person meetings. We'll see if that holds by October.

Your essay should NOT be a factual summary of the meetings. Rather you should attempt to assess, evaluate and analyze what you observed. If you watch a city council or Board of Supervisors meeting, make a special effort to understand the roles played by the various council members and any additional parties that are present or discussed, including administrators (manager, staff, bureaucracy) and citizens (audience, speakers, groups). Pay close attention to the relationships between and within each of these groups. Who seems to dominate, if anyone, and why? Be sure to include what major policy issues were discussed, such as COVID, homelessness, economic development, transportation, environmental issues, etc. Lastly, what surprised you, if anything, about the experience. What did you learn that we haven't discussed in class?

Be sure to use at least 4 references from our textbook, but certainly it is alright to include other references as well. Use endnotes or footnotes to cite your sources. Please turn in on Canvas.

7. **Term Paper:** The term paper (10 pages, not including abstract or references) asks students to research and analyze a local policy or public problem. As discussed at the beginning of the syllabus, never has local government had to deal with so many critical issues all at once, especially at a time of diminishing resources. Issues might include crime and policing, livable or minimum wage policies, public health mandates like wearing masks, conditions in the jails, saving small businesses from closure, transgender health issues, sex trafficking, domestic violence, stopping the spread of HIV, public school inequities, evictions, and urban redevelopment. Given all that cities and counties do, there certainly will be a topic that interests you greatly. Counties, in particular, work on social and health issues, which creates many opportunities. (I have found it best for students not to write about homelessness because it is way too broad and complex for a 10-page paper.) When possible, go narrow. For example, environmental protection is too broad but saving Coyote Valley is manageable; immigration is too broad but consequences of San Jose being a sanctuary city is doable. Black Lives Matter is quite all encompassing but reform of the San Jose Police Department is doable. Please share with me your paper topic before you start writing so I can make sure you are on the right track.

When researching and writing your paper, keep in mind three central points: 1) what is the precise issue or thesis of your paper; 2) whose problem is it to solve and why; and 3) what other levels of government or agencies can help solve it. The main point of this is to realize there is a web of policymakers involved in local issues. Throughout the semester we will study who all the players are and the role that each of them play.

You will need to include 6 citation sources, with at least three from the readings and/or lecture and three from peer reviewed articles or three from local and state reports. The last is emphasized because if there are not city/county staff memos or articles on the subject it is not an issue being addressed at the local level. At best, the issue should have come

before the city or county and you can include the debate that occurred at the meeting. Again, this is why you should watch a council or government meeting early on in the semester.

Grading on the assignment will be based on the clarity and strength of your thesis statement, the quality of your research, and the overall strength of your analysis. It is worth 20% of your grade. For students who may want to get feedback on their papers, they can turn in an optional outline of their paper on Nov. 16, and I will review it.

**Succeeding in a Four-Unit Course:** “Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally three hours per unit per week) for instruction, preparation/studying, or course related activities, including but not limited to internships, labs, and clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.”

**Final Examination or Evaluation**

Faculty members are required to have a culminating activity for their courses, which can include a final examination, a final research paper or project, a final creative work or performance, a final portfolio of work, or other appropriate assignment. Our final examination will be held on December 9. The exam will consist of multiple choice and short answer/essay questions covering the in-class material and assigned readings.

**Grading Information**

Students’ grades will be calculated using the following assignments (with corresponding points and percentages):

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Points</b>	<b>Percentage of Total</b>
Online Quizzes (5 @ 10 points each)	50	12.5%
Midterm Exam	80	20%
Final Exam	80	20%
Local Government Observation Paper	50	12.5%
News Article	10	2.5%
Local Politics Term Paper	80	20%
Discussion essays (5 @ 10 pts each)	50	12.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100%</b>

Final Course Letter Grades will be assigned using the following scale:

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>A plus</i>	<i>96 to 100%</i>
<i>A</i>	<i>93 to 95%</i>
<i>A minus</i>	<i>90 to 92%</i>
<i>B plus</i>	<i>86 to 89 %</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>83 to 85%</i>
<i>B minus</i>	<i>80 to 82%</i>
<i>C plus</i>	<i>76 to 79%</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>73 to 75%</i>
<i>C minus</i>	<i>70 to 72%</i>
<i>D plus</i>	<i>66 to 69%</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>63 to 65%</i>

<i>D minus</i>	<i>60 to 62%</i>
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**Classroom Protocol**

**Late papers or Assignments Policy**

Any and all assignments should be submitted by the deadline posted on Canvas. This includes quizzes, exams, discussions, papers, and any other assignments included in this syllabus. Since exams will be open for a substantial window of time, there should be no issues in regards to timely submission. However, if an extenuating circumstance prevents you from being able to submit an exam on time, reach out to me as soon as possible and I will try to figure out a solution for you. Make-up exams are only given in cases of excused absences in accordance with the university’s policy on excused absences. Circumstances that may lead to an excused student absence are subpoenas, jury duty, military duty, religious observances, illness, illness of a dependent, and bereavement for immediate family.

**Papers that are turned in late will be penalized a full letter grade.** However, I will not deduct more than a letter grade, regardless of how late a paper is turned in, mainly to not penalize students who are dealing with an unforeseen issue likely related to COVID. For an assignment to be accepted, it must be turned in by 11:59 PM on the final day of the course.

**University Policies**

Per [University Policy S16-9](#), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on [www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php](http://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php). Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources. I want to particularly draw your attention to the university’s academic integrity policy which can be found here <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F15-7.pdf>. Please note, all exams, quizzes, and class writing assignments for this class must be your own original work and must follow the rules outlined in the university academic integrity policy.

**POLS 103-1 (27276)/URBP 103-1 (29172) Fall 2021 Course Schedule**

**Course Schedule (Required - Delete the word “Required” in final draft)**

<b>Week/Lesson</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b><i>Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines</i></b>
1	8/19	Course introduction.
2	8/24  8/26	Why study local government? Read Chapter 1, Chapter 4 (pgs. 70-75), and additional reading  Current issues; Who are the players

		Discussion Essay #1 assigned
3	8/31  9/2	Forms of government Part 1: Political machines and patronage politics. Read Chapter 2 and additional readings  Forms of government Part 1 cont.  Quiz #1 posted
4	9/7  9/9	Forms of Government Part II: Political reform and council-managers gov't. Read Chapter 5 and additional readings  Forms of government cont.  Discussion essay #2 assigned
5	9/14  9/16	No class. Opportunity to attend a city council meeting  Formal powers in city government: Read Chapter 6 (pgs. 115 – 128). Additional readings  Quiz #2 posted
6	9/21  9/23	Local policy making: The bureaucracy. Read Chapter 6 (pgs 128-135), Chapter 10 and additional readings  Local policy making, cont.  Discussion Essay #3 assigned
7	9/28  9/30	City Finances: Read Chapter 11  <b>Midterm (conducted in-class)</b>
8	10/5	Non-voting forms of government: Interest groups. Chapter 9

	10/7	Interest groups, cont. Quiz #3 posted
9	10/12	Elections and voting. Chapter 7 and additional readings <b>Local government observation paper due</b>
	10/14	Candidates and campaigns. Chapter 8 and additional readings Quiz #4
10	10/19	Reflections on observation paper and discussion of term paper Regional government: Read Chapter 4 (pgs 74-91) and additional readings
	10/21	Regional government, cont. Essay #4 assigned
11	10/26	Policies to promote quality of life. Chapter 13 and additional readings
	10/28	Building a city. Chapter 12 and additional readings Quiz #5 posted
12	11/2	Circleville begins Essay #5 assigned
	11/4	Circleville Optional: Students may turn in draft/outline of term paper
13	11/9	Circleville
	11/11	Veteran's Day. Campus closed

14	11/16	Circleville
	11/18	Circleville
15	11/23	Circleville <b>Term paper due</b>
	11/25	Thanksgiving; Campus closed
16	11/30	Circleville ends
	12/2	Review exam
17	12/7	Study/conference day. No class
	12/9	<b>Final exam - 9:45 - noon</b>