POLS 4641: The Science of Cities

Spring 2023

Professor:	Joe Ornstein	**Time:**	TTh 12:45pm – 2:00pm
Email:	jornstein@uga.edu	**Place:**	101D Baldwin Hall
Website:	https://joeornstein.github.io/pols-4641/		

Over half of the Earth's population lives within the sea of city lights visible on the satellite map above. These cities are the centers of global commerce and culture, but in order to function, they require effective governance. Cities need roads, schools, police, fire protection, parks, buses, sewers, and electricity. Many of our most pressing political problems — including education, criminal justice reform, housing, and climate change — are in large part problems of city politics.

In this course, we explore how research from political science, economics, sociology, psychology, and mathematics can help us build cities that are healthier, safer, fairer, and more livable for their residents. The semester will be organized around seven themes: the historical origins of cities, political geography, city limits, strengthening local democracy, transportation policy, housing policy, and finally a look at the unique challenges facing our community here in Athens, GA.

Course Structure

The class will meet twice a week, and each class period will be dedicated to one of the seven themes above (see our course website for a detailed schedule and course readings). During the semester, you will create and publish **two** projects in which you teach an "outside" audience an idea from the course. The format can be anything except a standard essay. And no Twitter threads. Otherwise, feel free to be creative. The project could be aimed at a social media audience (e.g. Instagram story, TikTok/YouTube video), a policy audience (letter to a public official, presentation at a public meeting), or other audience (podcast, editorial, blog post, policy brief). Feel free to discuss alternative formats with me. The purpose of these

assignments is to get you out of "writing for your professor" mode and into a mode where your work has some broader impact on the world.

Every two weeks, we discuss a new theme and begin a new set of projects. The core loop looks something like this.

- **Day 1 (Thursday): Lecture.** I will introduce this week's theme, and then randomly assign students to teams. Students completing projects will introduce themselves, describe the topics they find most interesting, and leave with a research plan for Journal Club the following week.

- **Day 2 (Tuesday): Journal Club.** Discuss what you learned from the readings. The objective of Journal Club is to help students decide on an idea/audience for their projects, and to leave with an annotated list of references.

- **Day 3 (Thursday): Table Read.** Students come to class with a rough draft of their project, and the team suggests edits and helps turn it into a final draft. (Something like a shared Google Doc is useful here.)

- **Day 4 (Tuesday): Symposium.** A mini-conference where students share their projects and answer questions about this week's theme.

The following Thursday, we start the loop over again with a new theme.

Grading

Your grade for the course will be based on four components:

- **Reflection Assignments (20%).** At the end of each class, you will submit (via Google Form) one new idea you learned in class and one lingering question you still have. I will grade these for completion and use the questions to help guide our subsequent class sessions and symposia.

- **MVP Awards (20%).** On Journal Club and Table Read days, you have the opportunity to help your classmates make their projects the best they can be. When students submit their projects, they will be asked to nominate three classmates whose suggestions were the most helpful. You receive 5 percentage points for each MVP nomination you receive, up to a maximum of 20%. (Note: if everyone is contributing equally, you should expect to receive roughly 8 of these nominations over the course of the semester).

- **Projects (30% each).** Remember, I want everyone to ACE these projects. They should be:

  - **Accurate (10 points).** These are public-facing projects, so we don't want to be spreading misinformation or half-truths. Make sure that you are accurately conveying the findings – and limitations – of the scientific research.

- **Convincing (10 points).** Your goal is to convince your audience of a single idea. To that end, your idea must be clearly communicated in a way that your audience would understand and find compelling.
- **Engaging (10 points).** In a world awash with content, 90% of the battle is grabbing and holding your audience's attention. Humor, stories, and pathos are effective tools for engaging your audience (Memes are nice too.)

Your projects must be published to their intended audience and submitted to eLC before your scheduled Symposium. Late projects will receive a full letter grade deduction every 24 hours until they are submitted.

Office Hours

I will be available for office hours by appointment, and you can sign up for 20 minute slots through the course website. With each project, you'll simultaneously be learning new content *and* trying to teach others what you've learned. This is a difficult task! I strongly recommend that you sign up for office hours before your project is due so we can discuss any questions you have. Even if you don't have any questions about the material, stop by office hours anyway! One of the great things about college is that your professors are all required to set aside time each week just to talk with their students. And, not to brag, but I'm *pretty good at talking.* My job title (Assistant Professor) is basically just Latin for "Assistant Talker".

Academic Honesty

Remember that when you joined the University of Georgia community, you agreed to abide by a code of conduct outlined in the academic honesty policy called *A Culture of Honesty.* It has some pretty specific things to say on the subject of cheating. Quite specific. Projects must be your own original creations, and I will report any and all dishonest conduct to the Office of the Vice President for Instruction.

Mental Health and Wellness Resources

- If you or someone you know needs assistance, you are encouraged to contact Student Care and Outreach in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-7774 or visit https://sco.uga.edu. They will help you navigate any difficult circumstances you may be facing by connecting you with the appropriate resources or services.

- UGA has several resources for a student seeking mental health services or crisis support.

- If you need help managing stress anxiety, relationships, etc., please visit BeWellUGA for a list of FREE workshops, classes, mentoring, and health coaching led by licensed clinicians and health educators in the University Health Center.

- Additional resources can be accessed through the UGA App.