

POLS 4641: THE SCIENCE OF CITIES

Spring 2022

Professor:	Joe Ornstein	Time:	TTh 9:35am – 10:50pm
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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 will explore what makes cities tick, and 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. We’ll begin with foundational research on the origins of cities and how best to govern them, then discuss some of the specific policy challenges faced by cities today, and end the semester with a few questions about the future of cities, both in the US and worldwide.

Course Structure

The class will meet twice a week, and each class period will be devoted to a particular topic. You can find the complete list of topics and schedule on the [class website](#). At the beginning of the semester, we will split the class into teams of five or six students. Every day, one member from each team will be responsible for researching that day’s topic and writing a paper that serves as a **Table Read** for the class session. Class time will be structured like a [Silent Meeting](#), where we take time to read our fellow students’ papers and offer comments and suggestions. These comments will both motivate class discussion and help the students revise their papers for final submission. Our agenda for most class days will look like this:

1. Introduction (5 minutes)
2. Table Read (15 minutes)
3. Team Discussion and Revisions (20 minutes)
4. Class Discussion (20 minutes)
5. Closing Thoughts (5 minutes)

Each student will write five papers over the course of the semester, and teams can divide the topics among themselves however they choose. Papers should be roughly 2000-3000 words (about 6 pages), short enough to read in 10-15 minutes. After your table read, you have 24 hours to make any revisions and submit the paper. Late papers will be marked down a full letter grade per 24 hours.

Why structure the course this way? Well, originally it was an on-the-fly adjustment to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. But the structure proved popular and enduring, because it offers a few nice benefits:

- It sure beats sitting for an hour and getting talked at.
- Your papers don't just get skimmed by your professor and discarded; they're the primary way your peers will learn about the material that day, which makes writing a paper for class less pointless.
- Everyone gets peer feedback on their work and a chance to improve.
- Everyone can contribute during class, regardless of background knowledge or comfort with public speaking. (I, for example, tend to get nervous when asked to speak in front of 45 of my peers, but I'm happy making comments on a Google Doc. Perhaps you are like me.)
- The class project isn't something that gets tacked on at the end of the semester. Researching and writing your papers will be your primary intellectual activity during the course.

During the Table Read portion of class, take time to first read the paper from beginning to end, then go back and add comments, questions, and suggestions for edits in the margins of the shared document. Don't worry that criticism will harm your peers' grades! Quite the opposite. If you frame your critiques as suggestions, it can only help them improve the draft and get a better grade upon final submission (due 24 hours after the Table Read). Your comments can take any form: grammatical edits, suggestions for how to make a point more clearly, clarification questions, flags for further discussion, and points of agreement/disagreement. And don't forget: positive feedback is just as important as negative feedback! If you read something that was thought-provoking or interesting, highlight it!

Once the silent portion of class is over, we will have a more traditional "loud" discussion, focusing on deeper questions brought up during the Table Read.

COVID-19 Precautions

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I expect that there will be more than the usual share of setbacks and hardships this semester. Please don't hesitate to ask questions or reach out to me with your concerns. If you test positive for COVID-19, please isolate for five days and report the positive test through [DawgCheck](#) (woof woof), which will automatically inform me that you'll be missing class for a few days. Given the structure of the course, you can easily miss a couple of classes and catch up by reading the Table Reads. See [this page](#) for more up-to-date and detailed guidance.

Grading

During the semester, I will select three of your papers at random to grade, and your final grade will be the average of those three paper grades. I have high standards for the papers you submit, because your classmates will be relying on your paper to help understand the topic that day. In other classes, bad papers might be painful for the professors who read them, but they don't actually *harm* anyone. In this class, they do! So I expect your effort to be commensurate with that responsibility. I grade papers on a 4-point (GPA) scale using the following four-part rubric:

Accurate

- **1 point:** The paper either fails to engage with the scientific research on the topic, or does so in a mostly misleading way.
- **2 points:** There are one or more major mistakes that mislead the reader about the scientific research on the topic.
- **3 points:** There may be few minor inaccuracies, but nothing terribly misleading.
- **4 points:** The paper accurately portrays the scientific research, including some of the denser pieces you were assigned to read. Impressively done!

Clear

- **1 point:** The paper lacks a clear organization, and I have trouble understanding its meaning.
- **2 points:** While reading your paper, I often had trouble understanding your point or following your train of thought.
- **3 points:** The paper was clear, but there were a few places where I had trouble understanding your point or following your train of thought.
- **4 points:** This is a paper of exceptional clarity. I understood everything you were trying to say, and the paper was well-organized so that I could easily follow your train of thought.

Meticulous

- **1 point:** The paper contains relatively few ideas and only cites a few sources.
- **2 points:** There are several good ideas in here, but there are a lot more facts/ideas/arguments you could have packed into 2000-3000 words.
- **3 points:** This is a well-researched and thoughtful paper, although there are a few places where I wish you would have added more detail.
- **4 points:** The paper is brimming with facts and ideas from a large array of sources, thoughtfully woven together into a coherent thesis.

Entertaining

- **1 point:** The paper was difficult to read.
- **2 points:** The paper has some entertaining parts, but it is mostly difficult to read.
- **3 points:** This paper was fun to read, but dry in a few places. It could use some “punching up”.
- **4 points:** This paper was really fun to read! In several places, it may have elicited a physical emotional response – like laughter, tears, or spontaneous dancing.

Your final letter grade will be assigned based on average score. A (3.8 to 4), A- (3.5 to 3.8), B+ (3.2 to 3.5), B (2.8 to 3.2), B- (2.5 to 2.8), C+ (2.2 to 2.5), C (1.8 to 2.2), C- (1.5 to 1.8), or F (less than 1.5).

Office Hours

I will be available for office hours by appointment, and you can sign up for 15 minute slots through the course website. With each paper draft, 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 table read is due so we can discuss any questions you have about the material you're reading. Even if you don't have a problem with 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. Plagiarized papers are unacceptable, 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.