

# POLS 4641: THE SCIENCE OF CITIES

Spring 2021

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<b>Professor:</b>	Joe Ornstein	<b>Time:</b>	TTh 9:35am – 10:50pm
<b>Email:</b>	<a href="mailto:jornstein@uga.edu">jornstein@uga.edu</a>	<b>Place:</b>	101D Baldwin Hall
<b>Website:</b>	<a href="https://joeornstein.github.io/pols-4641/">https://joeornstein.github.io/pols-4641/</a>		

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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. 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 team will be responsible for dividing up the paper topics. You can find the complete list of course topics and their associated readings on the website. 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.
- Everyone does the reading. We're literally on the same page when it comes time for class discussion.
- 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 detailed 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.

## 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. My rubric for grading papers looks like this:

- **A:** This is a *really good* paper. It could be published for a wider audience with minimal revision, and people would be made better off by reading it. It's fun to read, it effectively teaches the concepts, and it accurately portrays the scientific research.
- **A-:** This is a good paper. With some minor revisions, it could be published for a wider audience. It effectively teaches the concepts and accurately portrays the scientific research.
- **B+:** Your paper "meets the brief". It teaches the concepts and does not contain anything misleading or inaccurate. It falls short of an A- due to an organizational or stylistic problem that makes it difficult to read, or perhaps the omission of an important concept.
- **B:** Your paper "meets the brief", but would require significant revisions before I would recommend it to a wider audience. It teaches the concepts and does not contain anything misleading or inaccurate. However, it contains a number of organizational or stylistic problems that make it difficult to read and/or it omits a number of important concepts.
- **B-:** Your paper "meets the brief", but would require significant revisions before I would recommend it to a wider audience. It teaches the concepts and does not contain anything misleading or inaccurate. However, it contains a number of organizational or stylistic problems that make it difficult to read and it omits a number of important concepts.
- **C:** Your paper fails to meet the brief. It contains misleading or inaccurate information, is difficult to understand, and/or omits enough important information that it does not help other students understand the topic. It would need significant revisions to be a good Table Read.
- **F:** Somehow worse than a C.

## 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 cognitive 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.