POLS 4641: The Science of Cities

Spring 2021

Professor:	Joe Ornstein		**Time:**	MWF 11:30am – 12:20pm
Email:	jornstein@uga.edu		**Place:**	101D Baldwin Hall
Website:	https://uga.view.usg.edu/d2l/home/			

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

I will not lecture. Instead, each student will write two papers during the semester, and those student papers will serve as **Table Reads** for our class sessions. Class time will be structured like a Silent Meeting, where we take time to read our fellow students' papers and offer comments and suggestions over a shared online platform. 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 (10 minutes)

3. Comments and Edits (15 minutes)

4. "Loud" Discussion (15 minutes)

5. Closing Thoughts (5 minutes)

At the beginning of the semester, I will assign paper topics and dates based on your preferences (see Course Topics below). Your papers should be roughly 2000-3000 words (about 6 pages), short enough to read in 10-15 minutes. Please submit your paper draft 24 hours before your assigned class so I have a chance to review it. Late papers will be marked down a full letter grade.

Why structure the course this way? Well, in part it's an adjustment to the COVID-19 pandemic. I want to give everyone the option to participate remotely, and forcing a traditional lecture class into a hybrid format is awkward (as I'm sure some of you have experienced). But also, I want to experiment with something new! As I see it, the structure offers the following benefits:

- It sure beats sitting for 50 minutes 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. 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 two weeks 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. For those participating over Zoom, please turn on your cameras during this portion of class.

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. Our classroom will have a limited capacity (18 students), so if you would prefer to attend our sessions in-person, let me know when you send me your introductory email (details in the Course Topics section). If there are more students that prefer to meet in-person than capacity allows, I will divide the class into sections.

If you show any symptoms of COVID-19 or have been exposed to someone who tests positive for COVID-19, don't come to class in-person. Obviously. Everyone will have the option to attend our class sessions in-person or over Zoom, so you will not miss out on anything if you attend remotely. I will also hold virtual office hours after each class session.

When you come to class, please wear a mask. The University System of Georgia (USG) requires all faculty, students, and staff to wear appropriate face coverings while inside campus buildings. Reasonable accommodations may be made for those who are unable to wear a face covering for documented health reasons. Students seeking an accommodation related to face coverings should contact Disability Services at https://drc.uga.edu/. For more information on the University of Georgia's coronavirus response, visit https://coronavirus.uga.edu/.

Grading

Your grade in the course will be based on five equal components: class participation (20%), two Table Reads ($2 \times 20\%$), and two final drafts ($2 \times 20\%$).

The class participation grade is earned by consistently attending class, contributing your thoughts, and helping your fellow students improve their work. When you submit a final draft of your paper (due two weeks after your Table Read), you must include a footnote with the names of 5-10 students who were most helpful in improving your paper draft and a brief description of how they helped you. Your participation grade will be based on the number of times you are thanked in these footnotes. You will receive a full participation grade if you are thanked in 10 or more final papers, but I will make a final determination after considering the comment logs and class discussions.

I will have high standards for the papers you submit, because the entire class is 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

For a half an hour after each class session I will hold Virtual Office Hours over Zoom. Sign up for ten minute slots using this spreadsheet so you don't overlap with other students.

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 paper draft 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".

Course Topics

Ultimately, the content that we cover will depend on what questions you decide to write about. Below is a list of suggested paper topics, and I will provide a set of readings for each topic on the course eLC page. Take a few minutes to read over the prompts below and decide which you would most like to address in your paper. Then send me an email introducing yourself and ranking your top 10 choices. (If you'd like to suggest your own topic, please do! We'll work together to compile a good reading list.) Once I've assigned everyone's topics, I will post a schedule for the semester.

Note: I will write the Table Reads for the first two weeks of class, so no one is given too tight a deadline, and so you get a chance to read some examples of the kind of papers that I expect.

Historical Questions

- When and where were the very first city-states established? What enabled these cities to form, and what made them so fragile and prone to collapse?

- Where did urbanization occur prior to the Industrial Revolution and why?

- What does urbanization do to us, culturally & psychologically?

The Urban-Rural Divide

- What caused the geographic divide between liberals and conservatives?

- Why are the interests of city residents underrepresented in national government?

- Does it matter whether Democrats or Republicans are in charge of city government?

Federalism

- The Atlanta metropolitan area contains roughly 140 municipal governments. What are the benefits (and drawbacks) of dividing a city this way?

- What are the benefits (and drawbacks) of dividing the *responsibilities* of governing across multiple overlapping governments (e.g. municipalities, school boards, special districts)?

- During the late 20th century, many city governments fell deeply into debt and/or bankruptcy. What causes cities to lose money? Are we likely to see more municipal bankruptcies in the next decade?

City Limits

- Why don't liberal cities enact their own social welfare programs?

- Do economic development incentives (i.e. "corporate welfare") produce value, or do they just produce a "race to the bottom"?

- Should local governments be spending so much money on sports stadiums?

- How well do city governments represent their citizens?

Crime & Policing

- What caused the spike in violent crime from 1970 to 1990 and its subsequent decline?

- What reforms work best to reduce police violence?

Public Health

- Did urban density exacerbate the spread of COVID-19?

- What are the most effective things that cities have done to promote public health?

Race & Segregation

- Why is residential segregation such a persistent problem in US cities?

- What are the long-run effects of residential segregation?

Corruption

- What works to curb corruption in city government?

- What was "machine politics", and where did it go?

Political Institutions

- Do municipal political institutions matter? For instance, does it matter whether your city is run by a mayor or a manager? Does it matter whether your city council is elected at-large? Do ballot initiatives and popular referenda improve governance, or make it more chaotic?

- Does it matter *when* cities hold their elections?

- How has the decline of local news media affected local politics?

Transportation

- What were the long-term effects of the Interstate Highway System on US cities?

- Why do American cities sprawl while European cities are compact? And how does it affect our quality of life?

- What makes a city walkable? Bikable? What are the most cost effective ways to improve multi-modal transit?

- Why are mass transit projects so expensive in the United States compared to peer nations?

- Do US cities have too few or too many parking spaces? Why?

- What steps can city governments take to mitigate climate change?

Housing

- Why have home prices gotten so expensive in major cities?

- Why is it so hard to build more housing where we need it?

- What works to reduce homelessness?

- How common are residential evictions, who do they most burden, and what are some effective remedies?

Urban Decline in Industrialized Nations

- Where are Americans moving and what explains these migration patterns?

- Where have cities shrunk from their population peak? What makes urban decline so difficult to manage?

- Why do so many well-meaning (and not-so-well-meaning) Urban Renewal plans fail?

- Will the "Death of Distance" hurt or help cities in the long run?

Urbanization in the Developing World

- What explains the tremendous growth of "primate cities" (Mexico City, Bangkok, Jakarta, Lagos, Kinshasa, etc.)?

- Is urbanization helpful or harmful for the poor in developing countries?

- What programs and policies can best help those living in urban slums?

- How has China achieved such rapid urbanization? What are the effects of this massive internal migration on Chinese society?

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.