Political Power in American Cities (Introduction to Urban Politics)
POLISCI 121Z (Summer Term Course)
Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:00am-10:20am, Building 200 Room 107

Instructor: Prof. Clayton Nall, Department of Political Science, email: nall@stanford.edu
Office Hours: Thursdays 12-2 pm

Course Overview
In this course, we will develop answers to “big questions” in American urban politics.

Why should we study the politics of cities? In a global economy, cities appear to have decreasing control over their own affairs and seem to be at the mercy of economic change. Cities find themselves in competition for citizens, industries, and resources. Somehow, though, they manage to provide for densely settled populations even as they cope with their often deserved reputations for vice, dangerous streets, and public disorder. In recent decades, they have relied on aggressive (even desperate) policy initiatives ranging from slum clearance to school reform to corporate welfare to stadium construction to attract and retain desired businesses and residents. The city described here, the “limited city,” appears to play second fiddle in American politics while all the important decisions are made at the state and federal level.

Yet municipal governments, not national or state governments, are the ones with which citizens interact the most, and that have the biggest day-to-day influence on routine life. They have substantial power in areas including education, public safety, and public works, to name only a few. Cities operate at the level of basic needs: making sure water runs, sewers flow, streets are clear, and people are safe from crime and life-threatening injury. So, cities have power in an important set of issue domains. But how do they use it? How do they control their streets (and their citizens), maintain public order, shape buildings and infrastructure, and make themselves attractive to the middle class residents that drive local economies? Are their efforts working? If so, why, and if not, why not?

Each class session will be built around answering one of these big questions about cities and their role in American politics. While we will read some of the classic research in American urban politics, we will build much of our class discussion around recent debates over the proper role of local governments, approaching these controversies with knowledge gleaned from the social sciences. The readings cover ongoing debates over the drug war, police militarization, urban development projects, and suburban sprawl. Students will get direct experience dealing with these issues through four short field research projects conducted in cities in Silicon Valley.
Learning Objectives
By the end of this class, you should have an improved understanding of the place of local government in American politics, and will have learned to approach major questions about cities and their role from a social-science perspective. You will have gained direct experience in survey research, obtaining information from government bureaucracies, and converting social observations into usable data for social science analysis.

Prerequisites
There are no course prerequisites. However, POLISCI 2, AP American Government and Politics, or equivalent experience with American politics and social science research is highly recommended.

Grading Criteria
The grading criteria are intended to place approximately equal emphasis on course readings and research. The course will appear to be heavy on quizzes and exams, but these are designed to ensure continual focus on the class. The semi-“pop” quizzes will cover only material taught since the previous quiz.

35% Field Research Papers (2, distributed throughout quarter, each about 5-7 pp)
15% Two reading response papers (five-paragraph essays, no more than 2 pp. each)
15% Three reading quizzes on readings and lectures (5% each, unscheduled but announced at end of previous class)
25% Final Exam
10% In-Class Participation

Assignments are due at the date and time specified. They will lose a full letter grade for each day late (or portion thereof).

We will use the standard Stanford numerical grading scale for all assignments, quizzes, and exams. Grades will be “curved up” at Professor Nall’s discretion, never curved down.

Note: Readings, assignments, and deadlines on the syllabus is subject to revision before or during the quarter, at Professor Nall’s discretion.

Assigned Books


Students with Documented Disabilities: Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae).

**Class Schedule**

**Week 1.**  
The Limited City

Judd and Swanstrom, Ch. 2


**Week 2.**  
The Powers of Cities


James Scott (1998). *Seeing Like a State*, Ch. 2. [Coursework]


Writing instruction: We will discuss the particulars of writing in the social sciences, including APSR bibliographical style and guidelines for writing about politics from a scientific perspective.

Field Research Paper 1: Documenting the Local Governments of Silicon Valley. Assigned January 15, due at start of class January 27.

Week 3 - 4.
Machine Politics and Governing Coalitions

Judd and Swanstrom, Ch. 3


Jessica Trounstine (2008). Political Monopolies in American Cities, Ch. 1. [Coursework]

Clarence Stone, “Urban Regimes,” in Judd and Kantor, pp. 20-34.


Week 4 – 5.
Urban Reform and Its Consequences

[Had some lecture notes on education reform and Teach for America. Need to track down recent debates over education reform.]

Judd and Swanstrom, Ch. 4


http://www.freep.com/story/opinion/columnists/nancy-kaffer/2015/01/04/detroit-revenue-bankruptcy/21215969/

Week 5.
How Cities Deliver Services

Judd and Swanstrom Ch. 12 (pp. 320 – 321; 331 – 336)


[Add Boston Globe article regarding critique of the Broken Windows theory.]
Also add Monica Potts article, “What Are the Police For.”
http://talkingpointsmemo.com/theslice/what-are-cops-really-good-for-a-brief-history

Week 6.
Why Do Cities Invest in Big Projects? What Do They Achieve?


View the PBS documentary, American Experience, *The World that Moses Built*. Currently available on Youtube. Also available for in-library use at Green Library.

Part I: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUmI6mUzSH8
Part II: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtU-2KZJzRQ
Part III: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7ULM-AgLQg
Part IV: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QiEd5KnGE6w
Part V: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=22JdtAhX4oU
Part VI: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJtg9sdNuaU
Part VII: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o11VJ002Mjc

Week 7.
How do the rules of the game shape city elections? Can local elections be made more “fair”?


Lance Williams (2011). “Critics aim to end ranked-choice voting after SF mayoral race.” California Watch, 15 November. [Coursework]


Week 8.
How Does Racial Diversity Shape City Politics?


J. Eric Oliver, “Paradoxes of Integration,” in Judd and Kantor, pp. 198-213.


**Week 9.**  
**How Do Americans Decide Where to Live? How Does This Change Cities?**


Ryan Avent (2012). *The Gated City* (Kindle Single) [Sold for $1.99 on Amazon.com and readable using Kindle or various Kindle apps.]


[Add in some material on public debates re: development, possibly TOD.]

**Week 10.**  
**Are Cities and Suburbs in Conflict?**

Judd and Swanstrom, Chs. 6-7.


Nall, Book Chapter, TBA.

**Final Exam:** [Scheduled Exam Period] Location TBA.

Possible added readings for 2017:  
Fischel, Zoning: An Economic History of Zoning and a Cure for Its Exclusionary Effects