

## Political Science 4127H

This Honors course will be offered to sophomores, juniors and seniors. Enrollment will be limited to 25 to ensure the opportunity for student participation and for faculty/student interchange.

### Statement of Qualitative Difference

1. How the specific goals of the course will be achieved.

Upon successful completion of the course, students will have learned about:

(a) the institutional, political, social, and economic context that shapes city politics and policy;

(b) challenges confronting major U.S. cities and urban areas in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the causes of these challenges;

(c) role of government policy as both a cause of and a potential solution to these challenges;

(d) the political dynamics and coalition-building strategies necessary to effectuate city-wide policy change.

Students will also engage the teaching process as active learners, peer educators, and public scholars. Among the skills they will develop and strengthen are:

(a) thinking and writing critically, imaginatively, and reflectively about the material covered in the course;

(b) respectful and constructive participation, not limited to verbal contributions;

(c) effective, analytical, and persuasive writing skills through the completion of one major essays and a number of smaller written assignments;

(d) regular group work that facilitates high levels and varied types of class involvement;

(e) cultivation of strong leadership skills.

These course goals will be accomplished through: (1) reading engaging, policy-relevant assignments and cutting-edge scholarly research on major urban issues; (2) regular small group class discussions; (3) completion of rigorous course assignments, including long written essays and shorter exams.

2. The exposure to the basic material in the course, and ways in which added breadth and depth

of material will be included.

Students in this course will begin by covering the basic topics normally taught in a city politics course and included in most city politics textbooks. These include the historical and legal development of American cities, the impact of both machine-politics and municipal reformers, and variation in local political institutions. However, this honors section will also cover a number of other in-depth topics, including citizen interactions with police, the causes and consequences of urban decline, and challenges facing urban school districts. On these topics, students will read some of the most recent, high-quality cutting-edge and methodologically sophisticated scholarly work.

3. The exposure to, and use of, methodology and research techniques, and especially the ways in which the course will provide exposure to the nature of scholarship in the field.

Students in this course will be required to read scholarly publication, which will provide them with exposure to a wide range of methodological tools and techniques (including randomized experimental methods, quantitative multivariate regression models, and qualitative interview-based and historical work). In the process, students will learn how to read such scholarly research and think critically and analytically about it. For the final research project, students will also carry out their own, original research, which will involve data collection and analysis, interviews with informants, and other traditional modes of conducting social science research.

4. Amount and quality of work expected from students on papers, examination(s), and projects; and the method of grading that work.

Students will be expected to complete a number of challenging assignments and do so at a high level of achievement. These assignments include: (1) daily quizzes; (2) take-home midterm and final exam essay questions; (3) two in-class exams; (4) short research paper; (5) long research paper; (6) two in-class presentations. Dailey quizzes and in-class exams will be completed and graded using Turning Technologies clickers and the associated TurningPoint software. All written assignments will be graded by the instructor, and students will receive in-depth, detailed comments on their work.

5. The amount and kind of student/faculty contact, including how the course will offer a significant level of interaction and engagement between faculty and students, and how such engagement will be achieved.

This course is unique — both in terms of the topics assigned, the use of the “Wire” show to orient and motivate the main questions in the course, and the expectations about daily attendance — in that it will require substantial participation on the part of the student. Working both in small groups and full-class discussions, students will debate and discuss the assigned readings and episodes on a daily basis. The goal of the course is to encourage the students to recognize how complex, thorny, and difficult the major policy challenges facing cities are, and doing so will require the students to engage the material in a very personal way. Engaging discussion will be essential to achieving that goal, and it will result in substantial and high-level interactions between faculty and students.

6. How an environment will be fostered that facilitates intellectual exchange among students (if applicable).

The course will rely on technology, including videos (“The Wire”), and clickers, to encourage greater student engagement in the material and a higher-level and higher-quality of intellectual exchanges among students.

7. Ways that creative thinking will be an essential aspect of the course requirements.

By pairing sophisticated scholarly research with “The Wire,” students will be challenged to bridge the gap between scholarship and real-world problems and applications in a way that is different from most other courses.

8. How the course will embrace, as appropriate, interdisciplinary work and study.

By focusing on urban issues more generally, students will be exposed to questions, topics, and scholarly research from a number of academic disciplines, including: political science; sociology; criminology; geography; education; and public policy. The interdisciplinary nature of the course is evidenced in the titles of the journals from which many of the readings are drawn.

9. Evidence of a pedagogical process that will demand a high level of intellectual output.

This course will be a challenging one. Students are expected to attend daily — and to come to class prepared, something that will be assessed through daily quizzes. By ensuring that students have a basic grasp of the facts, the quizzes will also allow me to target other course assignments (including the exams and research papers) less toward regurgitation of facts and more toward critical thinking and the application of theoretical constructs from the readings to address real-world issues and questions.