Urban Politics
POLs 200
Spring 2007
T-TH 3:30-4:45
Buckman 325
Course Syllabus

Instructor: Corky Neale
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Course Overview
This course is designed to be an introduction to the structure and function of local government. The primary focus will be the interaction between mayors, city councils, constituents and civil servants as they influence local public policy and decision-making. The course will broaden understanding of how units of local government work and how decisions get made at the local level. The course requires significant field observation and study of local current events. One of the objectives of the course is to engage students in a dialogue about issues facing local governments and to encourage students to be involved in local government over the course of their careers.

The course will be divided into three parts. Part I will concentrate on background information—city governance structures, the role and function of local government and how local governments work on a day-to-day level. The primary focus will be on big cities with some attention devoted to small towns and suburban municipalities. Part II will dwell on the major issues facing cities and their elected representatives. Part III will focus upon applied decision-making and help students understand how power gets exercised through constituencies and collations. The course will require proactive student involvement with local governments through participant observation and key informant interviews.

The course will be run as a discussion course and seminar with students expected to assume responsibility for informing the discussion. The instructor will frame issues and topics with students contributing detail and evidence from their reading and research.

Two texts are required reading as follows:
City Politics, Dennis R. Judd & Todd Swanstrom, 2005;
Playing with Fire, Scott Lazenby, 2001

Additionally students will required to keep current with local government affairs by reading the Commercial Appeal daily and the Memphis Flyer. Class handouts will be numerous.

Course Grade Determination
Take Home Research Exams (2) 40%
Civic Affairs Portfolio Team Project (1) 40%
Discussion Leadership/ Team Participation 20%