

China University for Political Science and Law

Local Government Operations in the US

Summer 2015

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Brief Course Description: The course will focus on the topic of local government operations in the United States. The various functional areas commonly found in municipal governments will be reviewed and discussed. Each class will consist of an interactive lecture in which students will be expected to participate, discussion on assigned reading and homework assignments and in-class exercises.

Course Description: Local government in the United States is considered the most responsive of all forms because it is closest to the people it serves. Citizens feel most connected to their municipal/city government because it is designed to meet their most common, basic needs – health, safety, infrastructure, etc. In addition, citizens have the ability to routinely interact with the elected officials who represent them. They do not have this same opportunity with state and federal officials. We will examine the makeup of local government operations in the US including the various services that are provided, common organizational structures, and general governance that outlines the roles and responsibilities of the various elected and appointed officials. Students will be asked to review various local government websites from cities in the US as part of their research throughout the course. Research findings will be discussed in class and will also be the basis for presentations that will be shared with the group.

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Understand the structure of local government organizations;
2. Recognize the areas of specialization within the public sector; and
3. Discern the different roles and responsibilities of various elected and appointed government officials.

Student Assessment

Overall course grades will be determined as follows:

- **Attendance and class participation** – 30% of the semester grade.
- **Individual presentation** – 20% of the semester grade. Each student will make a brief presentation (3 – 5 minutes) on a specific service delivery element of a city in the US based on internet research conducted outside of class.
- **Test** – 20% of the semester grade. A test on the subjects covered in class will be given during the final week of the course.
- **Final presentation** – 30% of the semester grade. Each student will be expected to develop a short but thorough research paper on a subject being discussed in class. Each student will then present their findings in class at the end of the course. This presentation will require reading and research outside of class. The subject of the presentation must be approved in advance.

Attendance Policy

Because this course meets only 12 times, attendance is imperative. However, because unforeseen emergencies can arise, each student may miss 1 class without impact to their grade, if prior notice is provided to the instructor. This exception to this policy is that all students must attend the last class when they are required to give their final presentations. All assignments and presentations due at a class that was missed must be made up at the next class. Any absences beyond the first one or in which prior notice was not given will lead to a 5% reduction in the final grade for the semester.

Readings

Various readings will be assigned throughout the course. Students will be expected to read all assigned materials within the established timelines as they will be relevant to the class discussions. Reading assignments may include excerpts from books, articles, websites and other related sources.

The background text book: Though there is not a required text book for this course, students may be assigned readings from various books in the ICMA Municipal Management Series

Important note: *This syllabus may be adjusted to account for current events in local government that are of relevance to this course.*

Students are encouraged to suggest reading assignments that are of interest and related to the subjects being covered.

Lecture 1 Class Theme: Course Introduction

- Instructor introduction
- Student introductions
- Review course outline
- Discuss expectations
- Provide research tips
- Review oral presentation techniques
- Start overview of local government in the US

Lecture 2 Class Theme: Introduction to Local Government

- Role of local government in the US
- Differences between local government and state/federal governments
- Electoral process
- Elected officials vs appointed officials in local government
- Policy vs operations

Lecture 3 Class Theme: Local Government Management

- Leadership vs Management
- What makes a good leader?
- What makes a good manager?
- Role of a City Manager

Lecture 4 Class Theme: Local Government Services

- Introduction of Local Government Services – internal vs external
- Administration
- Budget and Finance
- Information Technology

Lecture 5 Class Theme: Internal Services continued

Human Resources
Legal
Introduction of external services

Lecture 6 Class Theme: Local Government Services – external

Public Works
fleet, transportation, utilities, facilities, solid waste etc

Lecture 7 Class Theme: External Services continued

Planning and Development
Building Safety
Engineering

Lecture 8 Class Theme: External Services continued

Public Safety
police, fire, emergency management
Social Services

Lecture 9 Class Theme: External Services continued

Parks and Recreation
Economic Development

Lecture 10 Class Theme: Public Engagement

Importance of public information
Working with the media
Why engage the citizenry?
Role of volunteers in local government
Role of a Public Information Officer

Lecture 11 Class Theme: Organizational Structures **(FINAL PAPERS DUE)**

How are local governments typically organized
Pros and cons of various structures
What are the similarities and differences between local governments in the US and China?

Lecture 12 Class Theme Final Paper Presentations

Students will make presentations on their final papers
Course evaluations will be completed
Discuss any outstanding issues or lingering questions from the course