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## **State and Local Government OER Course Redesign**

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This course was created in D2L-Brightspace. It is available as an exported package in three formats:

- 1) Standard Brightspace package
- 2) Common Cartridge 1.3 package
- 3) Thin Common Cartridge 1.3 package

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Primary Text: This package is intended to be used with the OER text: State and Local Government and Politics: Prospects for Sustainability (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), by Simon, Steel, and Lovrich. The book is a CC-BY-NC-SA OER text, provided through Oregon State University (<https://open.oregonstate.education/government/>). This course was developed independently of Simon, Steel, and Lovrich, and there is no implied endorsement or approval of the materials presented in this course by the original text authors.

## About the Author, and the Course

Thanks for considering this course material for use with your students. First, a little about me. I am a normative Political Theorist by training, with Constitutional Law and Comparative Eastern Europe Politics as my secondary fields. I went to Louisiana State University for graduate school, finishing my doctoral comps in 1994 (at which time they handed me a Masters for my efforts to date). However, for various personal and professional reasons, I never finished my dissertation, so I've been "ABD" for over 25 years. In the late 1990s, while living back in my native North Dakota, I got involved in local party politics, and eventually worked on a couple of legislative campaigns. That culminated in a run for the State Legislature (a State Senate seat) in the 2000 election, which I lost. However, a friend in the House recommended me for the open Chief Clerk's position. That led to a lifetime of interest in State Politics and Government, and State Legislatures specifically. I was Chief Clerk in the North Dakota House of Representatives in the 2001 session, and then, once the session was over, headed out to the Washington DC area for a research position with Stateside Associates, a consulting firm that tracks pending state legislation and regulation, where I was responsible for tax legislation in 17 states, and then later managing the team that tracked privacy and healthcare legislation. After two years in DC, we decided to head back to North Dakota. I've been teaching at MState, a community college in Moorhead, Minnesota (the border city to Fargo) since 2003. I teach all of the Political Science courses for the college, as well as some American History and Geography.

My very first semester at MState, when still an adjunct instructor, I was hired to teach this course, a 1000-level State and Local Government survey, somewhat at the last minute. Other than my own work experience with campaigns and State Legislatures, I had no formal training in State Politics or Legislative Politics. But, after looking at a few textbooks, and thinking back to how we trained new research associates at Stateside, I realized that, for most faculty teaching this course, it's really just another way of teaching Comparative Politics, but with US States, rather than nation-states, as the unit of analysis. Minnesota does not require any state-specific content, so I was free to incorporate examples from any state, including those that I had observed or read about while working as a research analyst. Being that we're in a border area, my version of the course also lends itself nicely to this approach (most semesters, somewhere between a third and a half of my students are North Dakota residents, since Fargo has no Community College, and Moorhead is literally next door).

This course package, then, incorporates various materials, lessons, and assignments that I have developed in 17 years of teaching this class. It is very much a "comparative" approach, although the majority of my examples are local (from Minnesota and/or North Dakota) to help my students understand the real-world implications of the various classifications and theories covered in textbooks. For the first decade or so, I used Robert Lorch's State and Local Politics: The Great Entanglement, but it's been out-of-print for many years now. For a little while, I used Dresang and Gosling's text (also now out-of-print), and then the Smith & Greenblatt. However, with the push by our system office (and our student government associations) to use more OER, I began looking for alternatives. The Simon, Steel, and Lovrich book is a good intro, but I felt it needed some "fleshing out" in some areas. Hence, this OER "Course Redesign", which is what MinnState (our statewide System Office) calls this. The course is designed so that students incur no costs for books or other materials. It utilizes the Oregon State OER text, along with many web-based resources, in addition to materials that I developed.

## Units

The course is divided into twelve (12) units. Depending on what assignments you choose to utilize, and the length of your semester/quarter term, you could choose to consolidate or merge some units together. Units One (Comparing the States) and Two (Political Cultures) are both short enough that they could be merged into a single week. This is possible as well with Units Three (Federalism) and Four (State Constitutions), and it could be doable with the last two (Eleven is on Government Finance; Twelve is on the Bureaucracy and Public Policy). Units Seven (Legislatures) and Eight (Governors) are both rather lengthy, and have multiple assignments. In a 15-week semester, I provide two weeks for EACH of those, to give the students enough time to complete everything. Depending on how much emphasis you want to put on Redistricting, you could choose to cut that portion out of the Legislatures unit, or even split it off into its own separate unit.

For each unit, I've provided several items:

- A) An "overview" HTML page, with links to the Oregon State OER text (plus the other items listed below). I have chosen to not use most of the sustainability sections from that text. Other instructors, of course, might choose to utilize them.
- B) Notes that I've written in a "conversational" style, in simple HTML format. These originated as Word documents that I wrote for the very first time I taught the course online, and then have been modified, edited, added to, cut, folded, spindled, and mutilated a dozen times since. In the Spring of 2021, when I next teach this course, I will also be podcasting the lectures, at <https://anchor.fm/mark-l-johnson9>. The content of the podcasts will be the same as the notes, so you may use the notes as transcripts for students who need that for accessibility. Instructors in other states may wish to cut or de-emphasize the Minnesota and North Dakota examples, or substitute examples from your own local area.
- C) Numerous links to outside resources. I tried to find outside readings and materials that could reinforce the text reading and/or items from the notes. There is a wealth of information on State Politics, and the good news is, much of it is free. The various professional organizations (National Conference of State Legislatures, National Governors Association, Council on State Governments, International City/County Management Association, National League of Cities, National Association of Counties, and National Center on State Courts) provide lots of interesting (and generally readable) short papers and podcasts which are appropriate for intro-level college students. Ballotpedia, Governing Magazine, and the Brandeis Center are also useful resources. Politico magazine's new series "The Fifty", which is dedicated to issues of intergovernmental relations, has some interesting articles as well. I have had students use The Green Papers to do research, although it's not the most readable website, so I've tried to avoid using it.
- D) Assignments. Most units have two (or three) different types of assignments (see next section)

## Types of Assignments

Three types of assignments have been included with this course:

- 1) Quizzes – Every unit contains quizzes. Most of these are pretty short (5-10 questions), and the content comes almost exclusively from the notes. Instructors are encouraged to add additional questions, either specific to your state, or from the textbook and outside resource readings.

- 2) Short Essays - In an earlier version of this course, I used to assign these (sometimes more than one) in every unit. Students were asked to take a concept from the text or notes, or an issue that might be subject to some controversy, and write on it in a short essay (approximately 300-400 words). I have reduced these to only six in the current version, but they could easily be expanded (there are already three options in the Legislative unit). I have also added a document with some additional possible writing prompts for previously-used Short Essays (and longer Research essays) in the “Front Matter” section.
- 3) Case Studies – Because this is not a state-specific course, I have developed a “case study” approach. Each student, in the second week of the course, picks a state (this could take the form of a draft in class [if you have time], a lottery, a “ranked-choice” ballot, a “first-come-first-served” email, etc). That state then becomes the student’s “case” for the remainder of the semester, and he/she is expected to become the resident “expert” on that state. In most of the units, there are some “case study” questions, which I have posted as Discussion questions. Each student will answer those questions for his/her state. By posting them publicly, this also allows students to learn from each other. I used to have students prepare this as a single “final paper” at the end of the semester, but the results were uneven, possibly because it had been as many as ten or twelve weeks since they had studied some of the concepts. So, I decided to spread them out as smaller “notes” throughout the semester. I take Minnesota and North Dakota off the table in my classes: this allows me to utilize them as examples in class lectures (otherwise, a student with one of those states would have an advantage). It also allows me to “model” what quality responses to this should look like. I have prepared some “SAMPLE” posts for some of the Case Study (CS) questions: I provide these to students at the beginning of the relevant units. I have also left some of them here in the course package. For faculty who teach the course with required state-specific content (such as in California, Texas, and Wyoming), I recognize that this assignment might not fit your needs. Some possible alternatives: (1) have the students “crowd-source” the answers to these questions for your particular state; or (2) have students pick another state, and then have them do a compare-and-contrast between that state and your “home” state. Of course, you could always eliminate this set of assignments in favor of other things (longer quizzes and/or different types of writing assignments).

Thanks again for downloading this course.

Any questions, suggestions for additions, or if you’d like to share how you’re using it:  
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My website: [www.ndpoliprof.com](http://www.ndpoliprof.com) (my research on North Dakota and Minnesota elections, and Legislative roll-call voting. This is from my last sabbatical in 2015; it needs some serious updating).

Thanks again,  
-Mark (MLJ)