State Legislatures (Indiana General Assembly Interns)
POLS 434 for Ball State Students
Spring 2026
Room 125
Monday's 5:30 – 8:00 PM

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Office Hours: Monday's Before/After Class at Assembly or Thursday's 5:00-6:30 PM at Ball State or By Appointment/Zoom
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Course Description & Goals/Objectives

People across Indiana live and interact politically in communities, and many pressing policy issues are handled by the General Assembly. You will experience demands from many different directions in your position as an intern at the General Assembly, and this class will give you a chance to learn about and interact with those involved with politics in the state. Attention is given to:

- The politics of Indiana
- The policies and services the state government provides
- How the branches of government interact in the state
- How to work with the media and general public
- Dealing with ever-changing demands of politics and federalism

The course is designed to be a practical experience that supplements what you will experience in your position. We will discuss many facets of the job and the actions taken by the Indiana General Assembly and others within the realm of state politics and governance.

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Explain the role that different branches of the Indiana state government play within the state political system.
- Understand the role of the media and of interest groups in contemporary American politics.
- Understand how to lead/manage staff on a daily basis and during crises.
- Apply experiences from your internship position to the class topics.

Required Readings

- All readings can be downloaded from the course webpage I have developed. These must be read by the dates listed on the syllabus.
- Also, please pay attention to political news from the state and local level here in Indiana as much as possible, but also out of Washington D.C. as we will incorporate the news into class discussions quite frequently.

Class Structure

Most days I plan to have interactive lectures that stem from the assigned readings/topic However, many days will consist of hands-on group activities and/or guests that relate to that week's topic. All lectures have a corresponding power point presentation that serves as an outline for the discussion, which will be available on the webpage before the start of each day.

Students will be graded on class participation, which includes more than simply coming to class and submitting assignments on time. Students **must** actively participate in class discussions and other scheduled group activities.

Furthermore, when a chapter or other reading is listed on a specific date on the syllabus, you are expected to have read the piece **prior to the start class that day**.

Course Requirements

(1) State Policy Paper	250 Points
(2) State Legislature/Assembly Comparison Paper	150 Points
(3) Attendance & Participation (9 days @ 15 Points each)	105 Points
Total	505 Points Available

Grade Scale

Since everyone is from different campuses Sean will track the grades using Excel. You may request your grade at any point via e-mail. Semester letter grading will be on the following scale:

Letter Grade	Aggregate Point Total to Earn Letter Grade	Minimum Percentage of Total Points Needed for Letter Grade
A	460 and Above	90.9%
A-	450-459	88.9%
B+	435-449	86%
B	415-434	82%
B-	400-414	79.1%

C+	385-399	75.5%
C	365-384	72.1%
C-	350-364	69.2%
D+	335-349	66.2%
D	300-334	59.3%
D-	285-299	56.3%
F	284 and Below	0%

Note that this grade scale is unique and not applicable to classes you may have taken elsewhere or with other professors. I also will not round up under any circumstances.

State Policy Paper Project

This major research project focuses on a policy area as it exists in Indiana. First, you will be assigned to a policy based on what topic you wish to research from a list that will be provided in class. You must e-mail Dr. Hildebrand your preferred choice of topics by **11:59 PM on January 15 (shildebrand@bsu.edu).** If you do not e-mail your preferences by this firm deadline, you will lose 25 points from your paper grade and you will be assigned a topic at random. The topics will be first come – first serve and a list will be maintained on a Google Sheets spreadsheet of what is/is not available as they fill.

The point of this project is to simulate an activity taken by an interest group when lobbying the state assembly. The topics are somewhat general in nature, but you will be expected to point out strengths and weaknesses in the state as they currently exist, effects from federal, state, and local actions in this policy area, and what options are viable to improve the situation in the state. This will require significant research and should be Indiana specific. *See the separate handout distributed in class with more specific information on what is required in the paper, what the topics are, and the grading rubric Sean will use.* The paper will be due **April 10** via e-mail and is worth 250 points.

State Legislature/Assembly Comparison Paper

You will be assigned a state at random and will need to research their current legislative agenda. The paper will be due **February 2** via e-mail and is worth 150 points.

The paper should take the following format:

Introduction – Set the scene for your state by explaining the state legislature/assembly in terms of basic size and make-up. Then get into their current policy priorities. You can paint in broad brush strokes with general categories (like health care, education, etc.) but give a picture on what the state prioritizes, policy-wise. Checking and discussing their budget as well as media reports are good places to start, and to help figure out what significant policies are in their culture.

Details – From there get into at least 2 different policy areas of interest within the state. Describe the status quo as currently exists, and what policies on their proposed agenda would change.

From there, compare the state for which you've been assigned to Indiana in those same policy areas, as well as in politics. Discuss similarities and differences in culture and policy in detail.

Conclusion – Using the facts presented above, you may go into your own opinion regarding the future for your selected policies in the state you've been assigned. Should one or the other state consider changing something about its policy proposal (or expenditures for that policy area)? Consider state politics and cultural differences as you discuss your opinion, and why one state or the other may tax/spend as it does.

ALL papers should follow the following formatting guidelines:

- 5 Pages Minimum Double Spaced, Default Margins
    - ***The minimum page limit does not include a proper bibliography/works cited list or a cover page.***
- 12-point Times New Roman Font (this font)
- Include a Cover Page that notes which citation method you selected from those below
- Chicago **OR** MLA **OR** APA Citation & Bibliographic Methodology (use in-text citations, no footnotes) – just tell me which one you're using on the cover page.
- Make use of section headers as transitions throughout the paper.
- If you use/cite Wikipedia or similar online encyclopedias, you will get a 0. Do not use AI.

This paper is worth 150 points towards your term grade, and will be scored with this rubric:

	Exemplary	Good	Acceptable	Unacceptable
Content (90 Points)	81-90 Points Thoughtful and insightful commentary. Reader gains good insight	71-80 Points Basic commentary. Reader gains sufficient insight	61-70 Points Minor commentary. Reader gains slight insight	0-60 Points Paper is vague, off topic, or does not follow instructions
Organization (12 Points)	11-12 Points Ideas arranged logically, flow smoothly, and reader can easily follow throughout	9-10 Points Ideas for the most part are arranged logically, reader can follow most of explanation	7-8 Points Writing not logical and sometimes fails to make sense. Reader has to work out some of the meaning	0-6 Points Little semblance of understanding. Reader cannot follow it at all

	11-12 Points	9-10 Points	7-8 Points	0-6 Points
Vocabulary (12 Points)	Professional and appropriate for audience	Generally professional and mostly appropriate for audience	Occasionally professional and mostly appropriate for audience	Not professional and inappropriate for audience
	11-12 Points	9-10 Points	7-8 Points	0-6 Points
Mechanics (12 Points)	Free or almost free of errors	Mostly free of errors, but not distracting	Numerous distracting errors	So obscure it makes no sense
	11-12 Points	9-10 Points	7-8 Points	0-6 Points
References (12 Points)	Citations are presented clearly and consistently follow required format	Citations are presented clearly except for a few entries. Usually follow a required format	Citations are incomplete and unclear occasionally. Usually follow format	Citations are presented or mostly not presented
	11-12 Points	9-10 Points	7-8 Points	0-6 Points
Format (12 Points)	Follows the instructions and prescribed formatting	Mostly follows the instructions and prescribed formatting	Hardly follows the instructions and prescribed formatting	Does not meet assignment expectations

Attendance and Class Participation

It is your responsibility to attend all classes. Attendance for this class is "mandatory" and will be recorded daily. This is of particular importance on days when in-class exercises and group work occur. Each class period is worth 9 points (9 days * 15 points = 105 points possible), though you do not automatically get those points just for showing up. Your daily participation grade is in part attendance, but also in part the quality of the discussion by the class as a whole that day, as well as your contribution to it. If you're talking and paying attention, you will score better than if you're playing on your computer or phone. Tardiness will also cost you points, and traffic/parking issues are not valid excuses.

Note: if you are caught text messaging in class or doing anything other than taking notes on your laptop you will lose all points for that day, plus one other day. **DON'T DO IT!**

Because of the size of the class, it is not fair to expect everyone to talk every day. Thus, a portion of the participation grade will be based on the participation of the entire class during the day. If I ask the group a question, and you all leave me hanging – no one will get full credit for that day. Conversely, do not rely on the same handful of people who will be the "chatty" ones to carry your grade. I expect everyone to talk at some point during the semester, hopefully very frequently.

Furthermore, if you do not have a valid (university/assembly approved) reason for your absence, then do not bother to ask me for one. Because of past abuses, if you claim an excused absence due to a tragedy or personal event (such as a death in the family), then the claim must be verified.

Academic Integrity Statement

Students are expected to complete their assignments with due regard to academic integrity. In order to do so they should familiarize themselves with the relevant sections of the student code of conduct. By submitting work on paper, or by identifying themselves in work submitted electronically, students affirm that they neither gave nor received unauthorized aid. Collaboration on assignments among students may only occur when explicitly authorized by an instructor. Do not use AI.

In particular, the Department of Political Science takes plagiarism very seriously. Plagiarism is "the representation of another's works or ideas as one's own; it includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of another person's work, and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person's ideas." Students found guilty of academic misconduct will at a minimum receive a 0 for the assignment and have their conduct reported to the office of student affairs. Depending on the severity of the infraction, it is possible that you will automatically fail the course. If you have any additional questions, please ask me as soon as the concern arises. Again, do not use AI.

Non-Discrimination Policy Statement

Ball State University is an affirmative action, equal opportunity institution. It is the policy of the BSU administration that there will be no discrimination or harassment on the basis of age, disability, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status in any educational program, activity, or employment. Any questions or concerns about this can be directed to the Office of University Compliance at 765-285-5162 or http://cms.bsu.edu/about/administrativeoffices/legal/equal-opportunity-and-affirmative-action-policy.

Ball State University aspires to be a university that attracts and retains a diverse faculty, staff and student body. We are committed to ensuring that all members of the campus community are welcome through our practice of valuing the various experiences and world views of those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse as evident in our Beneficence Pledge. For Bias Incident Response information, go to http://cms.bsu.edu/campuslife/multiculturalcenter/bias-incident-reporting or e-mail mc2@bsu.edu.

Statement on Students with Disabilities and Ethical Issues

Ball State University is committed to providing equal educational opportunities for students with documented disabilities. Students who require disability services must identify themselves as having a disability and provide current diagnostic documentation to the College's Center for Disability Services. Wherever possible "reasonable accommodations" will be made in order to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities. Any student with such a need is encouraged to make an appointment with Sean in order to obtain the necessary assistance. In order to take advantage of available accommodations, students must register with Center for Disability Services at 765-285-5293.

In recent years, Student Affairs, through the bias incident response team, has provided an informal support and referral service to students who report experiences of bias. Effective summer 2024, to provide a more effective response to bias incidents, the Bias Incident Response Process and Team will transition to the practice of direct referral. Students reporting incidents will be directly connected with university policies and resources to efficiently address their concerns. The university currently provides multiple formal policies, procedures, reporting mechanisms, and dedicated staff to address discrimination and harassment. Student Affairs will remain a resource for students who experience negative incidents on campus and support students in identifying university policies and campus resources that meet their needs.

The Title IX Policy, Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, Indiana Code 21-39.5 2-4 Complaint Procedure, Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Policy, Whistleblower Protection Policy, and Freedom of Expression Statement provide existing formal policies for students to address complaints that are currently referred to the bias incident response process. Students reporting incidents will be empowered to utilize university policies, taking direct action to address their concerns. Students may continue to report incidents of concern through Say Something and EthicsPoint.

Additional General Tips for Class Success

As is obvious here in the syllabus, you will have to work hard to succeed this semester. You should not see this as an impediment to success, but a challenge to improve your knowledge base, life skills, learn about a new subject area, and accomplish goals set for you. The goals can be met! After all, you aren't Sisyphus and I'm not asking you to roll a boulder up a hill; *success is possible*! What I am asking from you is the following, and if you do this you can succeed in this class.

- ***Keep up with the assigned readings.*** I know it's not cool to read, and you've likely taken classes that you could do particularly well in without reading the assigned material. I did that too when I was in college. But you're paying money to come here to learn, not waste time. That means what you'll find here is new material, or at least a new way of thinking about the topic. The readings provide

the basis for not only the class discussions and tests, but also any future use of this subject matter in life.

- ***Ask questions.*** I take a rather Libertarian approach not only in politics, but in life and in teaching. That means we each get what we make out of our own experiences. I will always come in with a prepared, informative lecture that is relevant to the week's assignment, and will always be as responsive as possible outside of class time. That's my commitment to you. But this also means that if you do not ask questions or make comments about the subject material and/or assignments then I will assume you understand what is going on. I always try to adjust the amount of detail I go into based on what I see presented in front of me, and on quizzes/exams. If you're all sitting there quietly, I assume you're absorbing the info and comprehending it based on what you've read. I only know if you're confused about the subject if you say so! So, don't be shy about it, both in class and during assigned office hours. I can't do everything for you, and I can't read your mind. To get the most out of this experience do not be afraid to communicate questions, concerns, complaints, anything.
- ***I'm only here to help***! I see my job as having two key components: teaching you the requisite material (which I assume is new to nearly everyone involved) and preparing you for future success. If you don't strive to produce in the real world, you're not working anymore. If you don't strive to produce in my class, you won't do well. When you go out into the job market looking for a career (by which I mean using your degree, not part-time at Wal-Mart) you may not like what you find after a lifetime of classes that didn't challenge you. Small mistakes or sloppy errors are what set you apart in a bad way compared to your peers. This is why I will harp so much on technical precision on written and presented assignments. If you gave a potential employer an incoherent resume and cover letter, guess what happens to it? It goes in the trash. If, when in the workplace, you don't submit the required work by the deadline, or don't meet the basic requirements of the project, then you're not working anymore. How is any of that different from giving me an incoherent, sloppy, and late research paper or similar assignment now as a student? Additionally, when you're in that career down the line your boss will not sit there next to you and hold your hand every day. You will have to make decisions and be ready to stand on your laurels to explain why you made those decisions. You may have rules to guide you (just like you have paper requirements in here) but ultimately what happens is up to you. Of course, *you can seek advice/clarification along the way*, but getting to the bottom line in producing a successful product (test, paper, assignment, whatever) is up to you now just like it will be in the future.
- ***I believe in free expression.*** In my opinion, the point of college is not supposed to be indoctrination into one single way of thinking about anything. This is a social science class; we're not studying the laws of gravity or those sorts of "hard science" absolutes. Not everyone can/will/should believe the same thing about everything the government does or does not do, and there is nothing wrong with that. We don't agree on clothes, or sports teams, or music, so why should we about government and political actors/actions? Consider this your "trigger warning" in that I feel it is my job to present all sides of issues and have open

discussion about the topics at hand along with current events and I will challenge students to discuss things with one another and/or myself. That means we won't always be "woke" and we may be critical/praising of things you like or do not like. It's important to understand one another and why we come to our beliefs and discuss why/how we can work together to overcome differences and not just scream "*YOU'RE HITLER*!" at someone that disagrees with you. So, if I ask questions of you, I'm doing so not to criticize or agree, but to build discussion and understanding from all sides. Additionally, it is not your job to agree with me or everyone else in the class, and open discussion means you can respectfully challenge me/others as well and you should not feel any pressure to regurgitate to me what you think are my beliefs.

Schedule of Topics, Events, and Assignments

Dates	Topic	Reading Assignment	Other Assignments
January 5	**Introduction & Overview of State Legislatures**	N/A	
January 12	**Working With the Executive Branch**	Governor's Power and Authority – National Governors Association Institutional Characteristics and State Policy Priorities – Lewis, Schneider, & Jacoby	**Group Project Choices Due Via E-Mail By January 15**
January 19	**MLK Day – No Class**		
January 26	**Working With the Judiciary**	State Legislatures, State High Courts, and Judicial Independence - Leonard What's It to The Legislator? - Curtis	
February 2	**Dealing With Crisis**	Legislatures Help or Hinderance - Stark Emergency Powers and the Pandemic – Davis Et Al.	**State Legislature/Assembly Comparison Paper Due February 2 Via E-Mail**
February 9	**Working With the Media**	Media Tactics in the State Legislature – Cooper Using Social Media Data to Reveal Patterns of Policy Engagement – Payson Et Al.	
February 16	**Leading and Managing Staff in Government**	Legislative Staff and Representation in Congress – Hertl-Fernandez, Mildenberger, & Stokes The Motivational Bases of Public Service – Perry & Wise Tips for Building a Strong Team – Ready to Govern	
February 23	**Interest Groups/ Lobbying**	The Influence of Lobbying Activity in State Legislatures – Grasse & Heidbreder Grass-Roots Lobbying and the Provision of Information Processing – Cluverius A New Dataset of State Interest Group Policy Positions – Hall Et Al.	

March 2	**Elections**	National Forces in State Legislative Elections – Rogers The Influence of the Party – Wright & Schaffner	
March 9	**Topic TBD**	N/A	Topic will be determined depending upon the IN General Assembly Schedule
April 10	**Final Policy Paper Due Via E-Mail April 10**		