

State and Local Government

Last Updated: Sat, 01/03/2026

Course prefix: POL

Course number: 2101

Section: MP

CRN (you may add up to five):
88252

Instructor First Name: Michael

Instructor Last Name: Polak

Semester: Spring

Academic year: 2026

Course description:

Apart from the theoretical understanding of political science, it is important students gain a hands-on understanding how the political process of state and local government operates in the United States. The structure of POL2101 is based on problem-based learning principles on the foundation that Georgia Tech students are among the best in the world at solving problems. Therefore, the class empowers students to use those skills and talents to come up with solutions to solve state or local policy problems facing society today, as well as how to implement those solutions through state and local government political process.

Course learning outcomes:

Research

Students will learn how to compose a policy paper which includes developing a problem definition, researching key causes of the policy, identifying top five possible solutions, and justifying a final recommendation which includes writing legislation or a budget recommendation. The policy topic can be either a current local or state issue.

Political Processes

Students will learn strategies to how to change state law and how to advocate for money in the state budget. The foundational element of this learning outcome comes from the Professor's ten years of experience of passing dozens of bills and annually impacting the state budget as a Georgia State Representative and State Senator. Students will also thoroughly understand the policy process through participation in simulated Legislative and Appropriations committee meetings.

Communications

Students will improve their writing and verbal communication skills through the development of the policy paper, as well as participation in daily policy discussions, and later in the semester, participate in local and state campaign debates. Students will also learn advocacy techniques by connecting with state and local policy leaders.

Required course materials:

There is not a required textbook.

Grading policy:

- Class participation and class engagement. (approx. 20%). 10% is based on class attendance and 10% on class participation. Class participation is full engagement in the discussions, debates and exercises. Attendance is mandatory unless the professor is notified beforehand due to a family, health, job interview or academic conflict.
- Assignments (approx. 25%). Assignments must be submitted by the due date. Otherwise, no credit will be given unless with a valid excuse. The date on Canvas for an assignment is the class day the assignment is assigned, NOT when it is due.
- Part 1: Policy Paper and Part 2: Political Strategy (approx. 25%). Part 1: The policy paper includes defining a problem, conducting secondary and primary research, identifying a solution set, recommending a solution. Part 2: Political Strategy includes a detail plan to get money into the State Budget AND passing legislation as it relates to the student's policy issue. The paper is built in stages throughout the first part of the class from the assignments. Once a recommended solution is developed, solutions will Test and Validate the solution with policy leaders and experts.
- Final Project (approx. 15%). The final paper culminates what students learn from the class by advocating their solution to a policy leader and initiating steps to move their solution forward within the local and state political process. Students also have the option to help a local non-profit related to their issue. The Final Project for students with a policy partner will be a presentation to that policy partner.
- Campaign Debates and Campaign Video (approx. 15%)

Grade allocation is an approximation and may be modified by the discretion of the Professor

Attendance policy:

Attendance is required

Academic honesty/integrity statement:

One serious kind of academic misconduct is plagiarism, which occurs when a writer, speaker, or designer deliberately uses someone else's language, ideas, images, or other original material or code without fully acknowledging its source by quotation marks as appropriate, in footnotes or endnotes, in works cited, and in other ways as appropriate (modified from WPA Statement on "Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism"). If you engage in plagiarism or any other form of academic misconduct, you will fail the assignment in which you have engaged in academic misconduct and be referred to the Office of Student Integrity, as required by Georgia Tech policy. We strongly urge you to be familiar with these Georgia Tech sites:

[Home | The Office of Student Integrity](http://www.osi.gatech.edu/index.php/)
<http://www.osi.gatech.edu/index.php/>

Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):

Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help students master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:

- *How do I understand human experiences and connections?*

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome:

- *Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social, or geographic relationships develop, persist, or change.*

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- *Intercultural Competence*
- *Perspective-Taking*
- *Persuasion*