

IDS 4930: Florida Legislative Politics

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FLORIDA LEGISLATIVE POLITICS

Experiencing a session of the Florida legislature is a unique experience. Each session is full of drama, conflicting political priorities, differing visions of the future of the state and last minute strategies to get legislation passed. State agencies, the Courts and local government are significantly affected by the decisions made by the legislature, but the impact often differs depending on a variety of factors. The Supreme Court not only has several major cases pending that will affect public policies, but will also have two new justices who could dramatically change the work of the court.

Florida is a relatively young state but has rapidly grown into the third largest and most diverse state in the nation; try to conceive of gaining almost 1000 people per day every day for 60 years and growing from under 2 million citizens to over 21 million!¹ The implications for governing are staggering. Since it is not a state with a clear social or political identity, regional differences play a significant role in policy development at all levels of government. The rapidly changing demographics also affect political priorities as do policies in Washington, DC.

Since we will have both a Presidential election and the decennial census this year, it should be more unique, full of drama and worth watching than usual, especially since Florida is a swing state. Thus, this short class has two priorities:

- Examine the ways in which the past may have affected legislative decisions during this session; and
- Evaluate the impact these decisions will have in the future on local governments in the state.

Class structure: This class will primarily be conducted through Canvas, although I hope to be in Tallahassee a couple of times during Session and I hope we can meet. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you have questions or concerns. I know some of you are not political science majors so I would much rather work with you early than try to resolve issues after the assignments are done.

There are three assignments:

1. This first one will be due on or before **January 18**, but try to shoot for before Session begins on the 14th because, as you will see, once it starts, it takes on a life of its own and becomes all-consuming. Please go to myflorida.com and find the home page for your elected official² or Department/Agency/Court. Please give me a 2-3 page summary of what you find but mainly I want you to tell me about yourself, why you chose to work where you did, what you will be doing in Tallahassee and what you hope to learn/gain over the semester. The goal here is for *you* to gain a bit of perspective and context about your “job” and allow *me* get to know you a bit....but in a stress-free way! Seriously, make this fun; it’s not a term paper☺.
2. A short analysis on the major political trends that have affected Florida politically since 1940. Are these trends still evident in the legislature in 2020 or have they been superseded by national and international events? **Due March 27.**

¹ <https://floridapolitics.com/archives/314736-florida-migrants-immigrants-top-nation-but-low-birth-rate-might-cost-congressional-seat>

² For those of you with a legislator, please be sure to see the demographics page and maps on your Legislator’s home page – tons of great info here on the House/Senate district they represent.

3. A local government report in which you evaluate the impact of legislation passed during the 2020 session on one local (city, county or school district) government OR if you are with the Supreme Court, the key cases as described below. **Due April 22.**

Required Reading & Resources – There is only one book and a bunch of websites and daily emails about Florida politics and government that most everyone in Tallahassee already gets daily to keep abreast of all that is going on. Note that FloridaPolitics.com has several daily and weekly emails and all are free so sign up for as many as you can keep up with. They also have some periodic local editions that focus on, for example, the Tampa Bay area or Jacksonville – check out your area and see if they have one specifically geared to where you are from and sign up for it for free.

Colburn, David R. *From Yellow Dog Democrat to Red State Republicans*. 2nd ed. University Press of Florida, 2013.

Myflorida.com – for one stop shopping on all things Florida government - <http://www.myflorida.com>

SayfieReview.com – please sign up for their free daily email - <https://www.sayfiereview.com>

FloridaPolitics.com - please sign up for their free daily email - <https://floridapolitics.com>

<https://floridapolitics.com/archives/314736-florida-migrants-immigrants-top-nation-but-low-birth-rate-might-cost-congressional-seat>

Census.gov - please sign up for their free updates and other free services; this also can give you tons of info on every county and city in every state....a treasure trove of info. <https://www.census.gov>

Housekeeping issues - I expect assignments to be turned in on the due date. One letter grade per day will be taken off for late papers unless you have obtained prior written approval for a different date due to special circumstances or have a documented illness or family emergency. Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have some type of special circumstance, but you must do so before the due date unless it is an emergency. For ease of access and so they are not sent to a spam folder, I will almost always have IDS 4930 in the subject line of an email and you should try to do the same. Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. The best way to reach me is by email (raustin@ufl.edu) or by texting my cell (904.571.5257).

Details on the assignments:

Short analysis (45%): In this paper you should choose the two or three historic trends from your assigned readings (additional readings are encouraged, but not required) and analyze whether or not these trends were present in the 2020 legislative session. For example, did the state's population growth play any role in budget considerations? Did the large proportion voters over the age of 65 sway any policy decisions? This paper should be about 5-7 pages with usual margins and font size. You may use your preferred style, but be sure to include citations as necessary. Material from your text and any additional sources (including statements made in the legislature) must be cited. The goal here is to have this due approximately 2 weeks after Sine Die.

Local government/Case report (45%):

During the session:

1. Track legislation that could have an impact on local government including city and county governments and school boards or the Courts. If you need some assistance in determining local government oriented bills check these organizations: Florida School Boards Association (<http://fsba.org/> ([Links to an external site.](#))), Florida Association of Counties (<http://fl-counties.com/> ([Links to an external site.](#))) and the Florida League of Cities (<http://www.floridaleagueofcities.com/>), or the Florida Court system (<https://www.flcourts.org/Florida-Courts/Supreme-Court-of-Florida>) or try <https://www.floridabar.org/news/news-journal/> for tracking

the pending Supreme Court appointments or legislation involving new judges. Each of these will have information on their sites about bills they are tracking.

2. You may choose to focus on one area of local government such as cities or school boards if you have a specific policy interest.
3. Decide which Florida county you plan to study. This should be a county that you can personally visit.
4. For those of you at the Supreme Court provide a review and analysis of the most high profile cases before the Court this session. This will include a brief summary of the cases, the issues each address, the parties involved and the outcome (if decided). It should also include the impact of having two new justices on the court (there were 3 new justices in 2019 and 2 were recently elevated to the Federal bench, so 2 new ones are being appointed now). Your analysis should focus on what these cases indicate about politics and the judicial system in Florida. I realize your reports will not be the same as for those reporting on legislation, so we'll adjust as needed and as a recovering attorney, I can help you with this.

After session:

- Decide which bills/cases you will focus on and write a brief summary of each. The number of bills/cases you choose will depend on their scope. You may have several narrowly focused bills or two more comprehensive bills. Check with me if there are any questions. The summary should include the purpose of the bill, its sponsors and cosponsors, committee action, final outcome and the reason(s) why the bill(s) either passed or failed. Unless this is a really complicated example of legislation the summary should be a page or less per bill. These summaries will be included as appendices in the final report.
- Research your county. Did county leaders take any positions on the legislation/cases³ you are analyzing? Check the web page and social media as well as any other relevant sources.
- Interview at least two local officials about the legislation. Be sure to collect a business card or some type of artifact from the person interviewed. The persons to be interviewed will depend on the legislation you have selected. For example, if you focused on legislation affecting K-12 education you should interview members of the school board and/or school district administration. If you are interested in economic development choose elected officials (city or county commissioners) and the administrative staff in charge of economic development.

Format for the report: The final report should include a brief description of your county, the position that the local government took on your legislation/cases and the ways in which they think these bills could or will affect the county in the future. It is not a problem if no position was taken. In that case simply ask them why there was no position and then continue to the impact.

- I recommend writing this in sections with an introduction to the county/cases and your chosen legislation, followed by a summary of the interviews concerning each bill, an analysis of the county's position and future plans and a summary. Don't forget to add the bill summaries as appendices.
- The length will be determined by the legislation/cases you choose and the complexities of the county officials' positions on them. If the legislation passed local officials may have a more or less difficult implementation process. If it did not pass, there may be issues to resolve or simply happiness that they dodged a potential problem. No report should be less than 8 – 10 pages.
- Please scan the business card or other material you received from the local officials and include this as an appendix to the report.

³ Sometimes cases deal with local governmental entities and sometimes those entities may be a party or could file an Amicus Curiae (friend of the Court) brief in a case,