

POSC 395: Spring 2024
DIRECTED GOVERNMENT & POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Kamy Akhavan

Exec. Director, USC Dornsife
Center for the Political Future
310-200-4461
kakhavan@usc.edu
Office Hours: Thursdays 1-2 p.m.
(also by appointment)

Steph Domond

Manager, Student Programming, Unruh Institute
domond@usc.edu
213-740-8511
Office Hours: M-F (9 a.m.-5 p.m.)
(By appointment only)

IMPORTANT DATES

Friday, January 26 by 5pm

Students must register for POSC 395 on WebReg (D-Clearance required prior to registration)

Friday, March 8 by 5pm

First political event write-up must be submitted on Turnitin on or before this date. ***Write-ups are due within one week of event.***

Thursday, April 25 or Friday, April 26

Final presentations to representatives of partner organization.

Sunday, May 5 by midnight

Submit final policy report
Second political event write-up

Bi-monthly #1 / Orientation	Thursday February 1
Bi-monthly #2 / Initial Partner Meeting	Thursday February 8
<i>Optional convening / Office Hours</i>	<i>Thursday February 15</i>
Bi-monthly #3	Thursday February 22 (report due)
<i>Optional convening / Office Hours</i>	<i>Thursday February 29</i>
Bi-monthly #4	Thursday March 7 (report due)
<i>Spring Break</i>	<i>March 10-17</i>
Bi-monthly #5 / Mid-Semester Exchange	Thursday March 21 (report due)
<i>Optional convening / Office Hours</i>	<i>Thursday March 28</i>
Bi-monthly #6	Thursday April 4 (report due)
Bi-monthly #7 / Run Through Practice	Thursday April 11 (last report due)
Run Through with CPF staff (#8)	Thursday April 18
Run Through w/instructors and guests (#9)	Monday April 22
Final Presentation (#10)	Thursday April 25 or 26
Final Paper due	Sunday May 5 by midnight

EVENT REQUIREMENTS

All Students ***Must Attend***:

- Bi-monthly meetings with Mr. Akhavan and Mr. Domond
- Mid-semester exchange with partnerships
- 2 Political Events (2-page write-ups are due within one week of each event)
- 2 Professional Development course activities
- 1 one-on-one meeting with Mr. Akhavan to discuss final policy report

1. Course Description

Students will take part in a team-based research project where they will work to develop potential solutions in their respective policy areas by conducting original fieldwork, interviewing policy experts, reviewing academic and policy reports, and using other forms of primary and secondary research. At the conclusion of the internship, each group will present their final product to representatives of their partner organization.

The two projects for the semester are:

A. “The Impact of Eminent Domain on BIPOC Communities and Their Intergenerational Wealth in Los Angeles” with [Congresswoman Sydney Kamlager-Dove](#)

Meeting Time: Most Thursdays from 2 p.m. – 3 p.m. First Meeting on Thursday, Feb. 1

Eminent domain allows the government to expropriate property for public use, with payment of compensation and with or without the consent of the property owner. It is constitutionally allowed with limits. The Fifth Amendment states in part: “[N]or shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.” Federal, state, and city governments have used eminent domain to acquire land for roads, bridges, parks, public buildings, railroad tracks, transmission lines, and more.

Students will explore the use of eminent domain in the 37th Congressional district to address the core question: “How has eminent domain affected communities in south Los Angeles, especially Black communities within California’s 37th Congressional district? And what, if anything, should be done to address those impacts on land ownership, generational wealth, and community prosperity?”

Students can use infographics, spreadsheets, and other forms of data visualization to demonstrate their findings. They will provide a verbal presentation using a slide deck highlighting their research and recommendations. Each student will also create a final report detailing their individual area of research within the broader topic. The slide deck, the final reports, and a link to the recorded video of the presentation will be provided to the Congresswoman.

B. “Vacant Properties, Vacancy Tax, and Growing the Housing Supply in Los Angeles” with [LA Councilwoman Katy Yaroslavsky](#)

Meeting Time: Most Thursdays from 10 a.m. – 11 a.m. First Meeting on Thursday, Feb. 1
Vacant properties that have been in disrepair are sometimes vandalized or used for illicit purposes. In light of the housing crisis, many people see these vacant buildings as “nuisance properties” that should be fixed up to become potential homes for unhoused Angelenos. What should be done with these properties? Would a vacancy tax compel property owners to refurbish them and add to the housing market? Or would such taxes be unfair burdens on property owners and ultimately lead to less housing availability? Vacancy taxes are seen by many as the next frontier in housing policy.

Students in this research group will review cities that have passed vacancy taxes and similar legislation to answer the core question: “What policies should be implemented to make the best use of vacant buildings in Los Angeles?”

Students can use infographics, spreadsheets, and other forms of data visualization to demonstrate their findings. They will provide a verbal presentation using a slide deck highlighting their research and recommendations. Each student will also create a final report detailing their individual area of research within the broader topic. The slide deck, the final reports, and a link to the recorded video of the presentation will be provided to the Councilwoman.

2. Internship Hours per Units of Credit

Units/Credits	2	3	4
Suggested weekly hours	8	12	16
Total hours at internship	100	150	200

3. Meetings and Communication with Partner Organization

An introductory meeting between students and representatives of their partner organization will take place in the beginning of the semester. The Mid-Semester Exchange in which students will share research progress with their partner organization will take place midway through the semester. Each policy group will deliver their final product to representatives of their partner organization. Students should stay in close contact with their partner organization throughout the semester, but are required to include the Internship Director and Student Programming Manager in any communication with them.

4. Meetings and Communication with Unruh Staff

Groups will meet with the Internship Director and Student Programming Manager on-campus twice a month. In these meetings, interns are expected to bring a **1 to 2-page summary** of their research (to be submitted on Turnitin before the start of the meeting)

and share research progress as an individual and as a group. Mr. Akhavan will be in contact with you throughout the semester via the Blackboard system, and Blackboard will have the most updated announcements regarding the course.

Student groups will present their final product to the Unruh staff and partner organization before the final presentations. The specific date and time are dependent upon the students' schedules. If a student does not adequately prepare for the run-through presentations, as determined by Mr. Akhavan and Mr. Domond, then he/she may not be permitted to present before their partner(s).

You are strongly encouraged to meet with your policy team at least once a week. The organization of these meetings will be left to group members.

5. Grading

Course grades will be based on satisfactory completion of the required number of hours at the internship, the supervisor's evaluation of your performance, and fulfilling other coursework requirements. The final grade for the course will be based on:

Bi-Monthly Evaluation*	25%
Final Policy Presentation	20%
Final Research Project	35%
2 Political Event Write Ups	10%
2 Professional Dev. Events	10%

6. Bi-Monthly Evaluation and Write-Ups

The Bi-Monthly Evaluation comprises attendance at all 10 meetings, submission of 5 bi-monthly write-ups, and participation during all partner and bi-monthly meetings.

The 5 bi-monthly write-ups should be turned in via Blackboard. The format should be a properly cited review of at least 3 sources (formal, graded) plus an area to keep your own notes and thoughts (informal, not graded, optional).

Example:

Bagchi, Alaknanda. "Conflicting Nationalisms: The Voice of the Subaltern in Mahasweta Devi's *Bashai Tudu*." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1996

Minimum 3-sentence summary of the reading/interview

Minimum one paragraph essay with your thoughts on the reading/interview as it relates to the project topic and ideally to your specific focus area within the project topic.

The idea is that you are accumulating source citations that you can copy/paste as needed into your final papers. AND that you are thinking through the utility of each source to your research and recommendations.

7. Late Assignments

All late write-ups will be marked down by 20% for each day they are late. Papers will be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade for every 10 hours of research that the student is short of the required 100 hours.

8. Professional Development Events / Course Activities

The course activities have been carefully organized with the intention of enhancing each student's career development skills. These activities bring in experts to give students an opportunity to gain life-long skills.

All students, including students who have previously taken POSC 395, are required to attend two course activities of their choosing. Students may attend more than two course activities for personal benefit, but will not receive any extra credit or course recognition.

Registration for all professional development course activities is first-come, first-serve. The list below may change with new or cancelled course activities. All changes will be communicated in writing as expediently as possible, and alternate professional development course activities will be offered in the event of a cancellation.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EVENTS (also called "Course Activities" in the syllabus) are meant to give students an opportunity to learn from experts in a small setting.

Professional development events include:

- Coffee talks with CPF Fellows
- Coffee talks with other political experts convened by CPF
- The Unify Challenge College Bowl (you would only have to go to one of the many sessions being offered)

Notes on Professional Development Events:

- You must RSVP for the professional development events. You will receive an email with a Google form link with each available event. We cap RSVP's to keep each session intimate.
- Signing up and showing up as early as possible in the semester to professional development events is beneficial. As the semester continues, they fill up so our advice is to sign up early.

The following list of professional development course activities have been carefully organized with the intention of enhancing each student's career development skills. These activities will bring in experts in the corresponding fields to give students an opportunity to gain life-long skills in each category.

All students, including students who have previously taken POSC 395 in a prior semester(s), are required to attend two of the following professional development course activities of their choosing. Students who would like to attend more than two activities may do so for personal benefit, but will not receive any extra credit or additional course recognition.

A. The Unify Challenge College Bowl

February 27 – March 7 (one-on-one virtual conversations); 14 time slots available

The Unify Challenge College Bowl is a face-to-face video conversation between students who attend different colleges and may have different political orientations, live in different parts of the country, and have different life experiences. Throughout this exercise, students will discuss a wide array of issues and work at reaching common ground.

Event RSVP: <https://app.unifyamerica.org/usc/> - Select Kambiz Akhavan under “Professor or Organization You Are Affiliated With”

B. Mentoring Coffee Talks with our Fellows & VIP Guests

(in person), see schedule below

Throughout the semester, students sign-up to participate in small group mentoring sessions with CPF fellows and VIP guests who work in politics. You will hear first-hand about jobs in politics and how one enters into such fields. Event RSVP is required.

Maia Ferdman, February 14, 2:00pm SOS B15

Michael Tubbs, February 20, 3:00pm SOS B15

Jane Coaston, March 19, 1:00pm SOS B15

Douglas Brinkley, March 7, 3:00pm, SOS B15

Tim Miller, March 28, 1:00pm, SOS B15

Ron Galperin, April 3, 2:00pm, SOS B15

Shannon Watts, April 10, 4:00pm, SOS B15

9. Political Events and Write-Ups

You are required to attend at least two (2) politically-focused events during the semester and turn in a 2–page write-up for each event. Your write-up **MUST** follow the memorandum format, an example of which is attached to the syllabi. ***Please submit your write-up on Blackboard within one week of the event.*** Your write-up should briefly describe the event, including what was the event, who spoke, at least one page on what was said and at least half page on whether you agree or disagree on what was said and why. The first write-up is due by March 8 at midnight.

Political Events require a write-up in a memorandum format that you can find in the syllabus. Political events include:

- CPF events such as the ones on the [Center for Political Future Events calendar](#).
- Pizza and Politics
- Panel events we have with professionals
- Events outside of the CPF calendar, but you must get confirmation from Professor Akhavan before you go.

Things that will not count:

- Protests or events similar to political protest will not count. Allowing protests as events does not make sense for how a write-up is constituted.
- Events must be in-person, and they cannot be virtual.

The time you spend attending professional events or political events does NOT count towards the research hours of the class.

10. Final Written Policy Report & Presentation

You are required to complete a writing assignment in which you analyze your designated area of research and make policy recommendations.

Final written projects should be 8-15 pages (depending on units, see below) and must include substantial *scholarly research*, including consideration of relevant literature. Please discuss your project in detail with the Internship Director and Student Programming Director throughout the course of the semester.

A. Policy Presentation: Thursday, April 25 or Friday, April 26 (time TBD)

Presentations will be one hour in length comprised of a 30-minute presentation to representatives of your partner organization followed by a 30-minute Q&A session. Exact date and time will be set according to students and partner's schedules at the mid-semester partner exchange.

B. Written Policy Report: Sunday May 5 by midnight

The final written component should be in the format of an 8 to 15-page policy report. Papers must be typed and double-spaced in 12-point font with 1" margins. Paper/project length is dependent on the number of credits/units earned:

- 2 units: 8-10 pages
- 3 units: 10-12 pages
- 4 units: 12-15 pages

Students' papers will receive 20% deduction for failing to meet the minimum page length, failure to include a "Works Cited" page, and failure to meet the deadline (20% penalty for every day late). Note: You must use in-text (parenthetical) citations along with your work-cited page. Only include citations in work cited that are used in the paper. **Students are**

required to submit their final papers on Blackboard through the “Turnitin” system by the deadline.

Some final papers that got high grades are shared (with student permission) in this Google Drive https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/14q5wImEgngO69GyCVgyG9lo-ZlaC8D_Y.

11. Academic Integrity

Because the completion of the internship is a major part of this course, you **MUST** work all of the hours listed on your internship agreement form. All written assignments for this class must be your original work, completed only to fulfill the requirements of this course. Sources must be cited accurately and completely. You may **not** use AI assistance such as Chat GPT for research or writing.

NOTE ON “RECYCLING PAPERS”: Your paper/project **MUST** be original work done for this class and related to your internship. You may not re-use another student’s paper, or your own paper from a previous course or a course in which you are currently enrolled. Please refer to the SCampus chapter on “University Student Conduct Code” (scampus.usc.edu/university-student-conduct-code) or contact the Internship Coordinator if you have any questions.

*Please note POSC 395: Directed Government and Political Leadership Syllabus is not a binding contract. Mr. Akhavan has the discretion to make changes as deemed necessary.

MEMORANDUM

FROM: **(Your name)**

SUBJECT: California Water: Planning for a Better Future **(Memo/Event topic/Event Participants)**

The purpose of this memorandum is to understand how climate change, population growth, long droughts, and severe floods have created stark regional differences in availability and demand of water throughout California. Consequently, this means the State might have to make inconvenient legal and political changes in order to reach effective solutions.

Background (This section should include general event details such as who spoke at the event, what was the general topic of the panel, etc...)

The event was sponsored by the California Water Project and participants included: John Jones, Jane Smith and Sam Hadley. Hadley began by suggesting the biggest challenge behind California's water system is the issue of instability in the Delta, which is considered to be the hub of California's water supply. The instability issue with the Delta comes from weak levees, damaged by earthquakes, rising sea levels as well as climate change and the collapse of native fish species (creating cutbacks for pumping water). Jones noted California is fortunate enough to have many tools to be able to cope with the challenges facing its water system, because the economy continues to prosper. . . .

Tools to Combat Water Scarcity (This section should be a general summary of what was learned at the event, at least 1 page):

The following targeted reforms are believed to be the key to seeing fruitful changes in water management in California so that our state will be able to overcome its current challenges:

- **Bay Delta Conservation Plan**

The construction of two tunnels, upstream on the Sacramento River, and move the tapped water to underneath the Delta, where pumping occurs. The results would be having fewer native fish trapped in the pumps and it would become easier to restore more natural water flow in the Delta.

- **Governance and Finance Solution**

While the state's economy will benefit from an improved quality and supply of water and taxpayers are willing to support the new required infrastructure, moving to more locally based funding will help to fill funding gaps in water management efforts.

- **New Water Efficiency Options**

Options such as using recycled water or water marketing (the sale or leasing of water) will provide more incentives to conserve.

- **Underground Storage**

Storing underground can be a cost-effective way to save water for drought years, which will become more important with climate change.

Analysis (This section should be your analysis of the event – do you agree or disagree with the topic? Your analysis must be at least ½ page):

While we have laid out some very thought-provoking solutions to the issue of California water management, only through policy reform and new investments will these solutions see the face of reality. The Bay Delta Conservation Plan, while a good concept, will require solid policies on finance, governance, and mitigation for the residents of the Delta to be in full support. In addition, the state of California always seems to face issues of funding. In order to truly find a solution to this issue, we will need to have more local funding, which requires making a solid case to the voters. I agree with Hadley's comments on the reasons for the reason California has so many water issues, however, I believe that he overlooks one key factor Jones correctly acknowledges that California possesses many solutions to deal with these issues. However, I would have liked Jones to offer greater specific solutions rather than simply relying on the strength of the California economy as a means of resolving this significant problem. Overall, there will need to be a more active policy approach to preserving California's ecosystem.