

Political Geography

Mondays & Wednesdays, 10:20 – 11:45 AM,
Statesboro: Hollis Building, Room 1120
Armstrong: Gamble Hall, Room 201

Instructor

Dr. Helen Rosko

Herty 1113

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Student Hours

T & R: 2:00 – 3:30 pm

Office & Zoom appointments

Course Website

D2L, Folio

Required Textbook

CHANGE! A Student Guide to Social Action



Course Description

Politics and political processes are embedded in nearly every aspect of society as well as how societies understand the natural world around them. Geography considers the natural and social components that constitute different spaces and places, at different times. Together, the study of political geography interrogates the role that politics and political processes play in shaping how spaces and places are made and remade over time. Critical to this interrogation is the inter-relationship between power and politics and how geography matters! This course has significant focus on environmental politics, the politics of sustainability, and policy.

In this course, we consider how relations of power, politics, and geography materialize across a variety of intersecting spatial scales (e.g., local, regional, international). To accomplish our goal this course is organized around the power of social action to drive political change. In this course, we don't just study power, politics and geography, together with other students, we actively execute social action/civic engagement. This is an immersive experience for those looking to develop practical skills in advocacy, collaboration, and leadership – essential skills directly marketable for any future career.

Throughout the course we will survey key concepts and topics in political geography and social action such as: power, place, change theory, state-building, nationalism, identity, geopolitics, environmental politics/justice, and development.

While this course is designed to be an introduction to the sub-discipline of Political Geography with no prerequisites, as an upper division course we move at a faster pace than that of introductory, lower division course.

Course Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will:

- Have a general knowledge and contemporary context of sub-discipline of Political Geography.
- Be able to identify and describe key concepts and topics in Political Geography.
- Develop a topical, concrete strategy for addressing political and justice-oriented issues.
- Craft critical reading, discussion, writing, and thinking skills.

Department Learning Outcome:

- SLO 2: Graduates will be able to evaluate the spatial distribution of human activities and processes on the Earth's surface.
- SLO 6: Graduates will be able to critically analyze and effectively communicate geographic information related to human socio-cultural and/or environmental phenomena within the community, region, and world in written and oral form.

Essential Elements of this Course:

- Attendance and participation in lectures.
- Submission of assignments.
- Collaboration with peers to lead and implement social action campaigns.

Course Format

Assignments	Percentage of Final Grade	Due Dates Sundays by 11:59 pm
Course Material Quizzes	25%	Every class
Synthesis Deliverable	10%	November 22 nd
Social Action Campaigns (Collaborative):	Part 1: 10% Part 2: 15% Part 3: 5% Part 4: 10% Part 5: 15% Total: 55%	Part 1: Throughout semester Part 2: Throughout semester Part 3: November 30th Part 4: November 30th Part 5: Dec 2 nd
Attendance & Participation	10%	Every lecture
Total	100%	

Course Material Quizzes (20%): A significant portion of your grade requires you to engage with the course materials (e.g., readings, podcasts, media articles etc.). This is a seminar, collaborative, and participatory course that has a minimal lecture component and heavy discussion and group-work component. Discussions and collaboration only work if students show up prepared to engage and

have a lively discussion with their colleagues and instructor. To ensure students are engaging course material, you are required to complete short readings quizzes.

- Due: 10 minutes before every class starts

Synthesis Deliverable (10%): In this assignment, you will synthesize core theoretical frameworks, topics and ideas from political geography – such as the state, governance, justice, power, or scale – with theoretical and practical strategies of social action. Your goal is to analyze how the components of political geography (i.e. place, space, people, power, politics, and policy) shapes collective action (or vice versa) and explicitly connect this synthesis to your own career trajectory or personal research interests.

- Due: November 22nd

Social Action Campaigns (Collaborative) (55%): In this course, we do not just study systems, policies, and politics – we actively engage with them. The Collaborative Social Action Campaign is designed to shift your role from passive observer to active change-maker. It can be easy to feel overwhelmed by complex social, environmental, or political challenges. However, civic agency is a muscle: you have the power, right, and ability to make a tangible difference. This project is your lab to practice using and wielding that power.

Passion alone, however, does not create lasting change. Sustainable impact requires practical execution. Over the course of the semester, you and your group will conceptualize, design, manage, and execute a real-world social action campaign from start to finish. In doing so, you will master essential professional skills that extend far beyond this classroom:

- *Project Management:* Taking ideas into actionable, phased deliverables, and meeting deadlines.
- *Collaboration:* Navigating group leadership, division of labor, conflict resolution, and collective accountability.
- *Strategic Communication:* Translating research and strategy into persuasive public messaging and community engagement.
- *Impact Evaluation:* Critically measuring outcomes and learning from both successes and setbacks.

Part 1: Campaign Implementation Worksheets (10%, 10 worksheets = 1% each)

To ensure your team moves systematically from ideation to action without falling behind, you will complete 10 Implementation Worksheets, nearly weekly over the semester. These worksheets serve as your strategic blueprint and project management foundation.

Due: See Folio for more details, but throughout the semester

Part 2: Campaign Activities (15%)

This is where planning meets action. Your group will design and implement concrete Campaign Activities aimed at building power, driving awareness, and ultimately some kind of change. These will be throughout the semester and your grade will be based on a simple completion or not. The completion (or not) of these activities will be aggregated to arrive at your final grade for this portion of the campaign.

Due: See Folio for more details, but throughout the semester

Project Part 3: Project Presentation (5%)

At the conclusion of your campaign, your group will present your social action journey to the class (and invited campus/community stakeholders) through a standard PPT/Slides

presentation. Presentations should last no longer than 20 minutes with about 12–15 on your campaign and time for Q&A afterwards.

Due: Final exam slot: November 30th, 12:30 - 2:30 pm

Project Part 4: Campaign Participation (10%)

Collective action requires individual commitment. Because this is a major collaborative endeavor, your individual participation grade ensures fair contribution and holds every team member accountable.

Format: Tri-Assessment: Self + Peers + Instructor

Due: December 2nd

Part 5: Final Campaign Portfolio (15%)

The Campaign Portfolio is the definitive, professional record of your project. It consolidates your planning, execution, tracking, and reflection into a single publication-ready document. This needs to be a digital archive & narrative report (Google Doc's). Your group is responsible for delegating the tasks of completing this final deliverable within your group.

Due: December 2nd

Attendance & Participation (10%): I do not explicitly take attendance. This is a small course that is inherently collaborative, you must show up, you must participate or you will not succeed – it's that simple. I will easily recognize if someone is not showing up. At the same time, you are all adults, juggling many obligations. It is your responsibility to maintain your obligations but that might mean you sometimes have to miss this class. All I expect and require from you is upfront communication about your needs to myself and your group. If I notice a trend of absence without prior communication to me or your group, points will be deducted.

Participation is composed of engagement in in-class discussion. Participation means coming to class prepared, having done the assignments, and ready to engage with your peers and instructor with care, intention, and attentiveness. Participation points will not just be awarded based on how much you participate, but in the way you participate. If, in each meeting time, I can consistently count on you to make multiple insightful comments that demonstrate critical engagement with the reading, you will earn an A for excellence. Participation points will be awarded at the end of the semester.

I am aware that it is hard for some folks to speak in class. If this describes you, I am sympathetic, but require that you use this course to practice learning how to overcome barriers you face. In your life beyond school, discussion skills are important. Meet with me during week 1 to make a plan for success.

Please refer to the **Course Expectations** section – *Cultivating a Respectful and Engaging Course* – to better understand how to participate and engage in this course

Style Guidelines on Written Assignments:

- Times New Roman, 12-point font
- Double-spaced, 1-inch margins
- Header: Your name, assignment number, and date
- Footer: Page number
- Bibliography and in-text citations must be provided for all sources using [APA format](#).
- All written assignments should be proof-read and checked for spelling and grammar errors.

- All assignments, unless otherwise indicated, must be submitted on Folio.
- [The Georgia Southern Writing Center](#) offers free resources on writing and one-on-one assistance with your research papers. You may schedule an appointment online or drop-in to the Writing Center at both the Statesboro and Armstrong campuses. A session or two with writing consultants often improves the quality of student papers.

Guidelines on Uploading Assignments to Folio: All assignments will be turned in electronically to Folio on the appropriate due date. All assignments will also be graded and returned electronically under the graded section of each assignment portal. When submitting your assignments please follow the following format:

- Last name_first initial_assignment information
 - Example: Rosko_H_ProjectPart1
 - *Assignment feedback:* Assignments will be graded and returned electronically under the graded section of each assignment portal.

Course Expectations

Cultivating a Respectful and Engaging Course: The classroom is a space where we can all test our assumptions and discuss complicated and controversial issues. We do not need to agree with each other (how boring that will be!) but we do need to create a space so everyone feels that they can contribute. Good class discussion is not only about how well you can answer the questions your instructor may ask, but how well you work with your peers and involve them in collaborative discussion. Sometimes it may be hard to hear people, so make sure you engage in a way that elicits further engagement with your class colleagues. To make sure that everyone gets a chance to speak, I will favor calling on students who have not spoken that session.

Sometimes we will be discussing some emotionally intense topics, so approach everything with sensitivity and assume that your class colleagues have different life experiences than you and therefore might not see things the same. Sometimes people say things that may come off as offensive but judge their intent, be forgiving, and give the benefit of the doubt. In turn, do not feel defensive if someone politely corrects you. Give space for your peers to learn and grow. Do the same for yourself. When in doubt, stop and ask yourself what is this person's intention (or your intention)? If it is genuine and kind, practice patience, respect, and grace.

As a general rule, please be kind, respectful, and constructive when contributing ideas and responding to others' viewpoints. Suspend judgment, and do not assume that you know more than others or less than others. And please, no peacocking: monopolizing class discussion, or mentioning readings/theories/concepts from another class to impress others.

Working with your Instructor: I reserve the right to make changes to the course schedule and/or assignments and readings. I will make sure that any changes will be announced on Folio in a timely manner. Any changes that I make will not increase your workload in this class.

I will hold two office hours a week. You can join my office hours in-person or through Zoom. Please plan ahead and email in advance. If you cannot attend any of the allocated office hours, e-mail me and we will find a mutually agreeable time. Students are strongly

encouraged to meet with the instructor during office hours, at least once during the semester. My office hours are for students to visit and discuss the class with me, or speak about materials, talk about assignments, chat about GSU's geography programs, kibitz over what one does with a degree in geography, or just pop in to say hello.

You can also feel free to come by office outside of office hours. If I am available, I will make time to meet with you. My goal is to be a resource for you both on and off campus. If you need something outside of this course, I will do my best to help you or find someone appropriate who can help you. Remember, you are not alone.

Armstrong students – I will be coming to campus every other week to meet in person with you all. I plan to come early to campus and be available to meet in person should anyone wish to do so, please note, I want to be equally accessible and available to all of you as well.

I check my email daily but please give at most 24 hours to respond to you (though I will most likely respond much sooner). This means if that if you need an urgent answer to something, I may not get back to you in time (for example, "what is on the test that is due in two hours?"). Please respect that I will generally not respond to emails over the weekend or after 5:00 pm.

Health, Wellbeing, and Support: The multiple crisis of our world make our lives unstable and precarious. In the case that a crisis, event, or situation is impacting your life and ability to maintain active participation in the course (either because of health, the health of loved ones, or your financial situation), please let Dr. Rosko know and I will do our best to accommodate you. Please consider your health and safety first.

It is important to us for you to know that if you are having any crisis, due to physical and mental health and wellbeing, that is hindering your ability to keep up in class, I am happy to talk with you and consider some ways to accommodate you. This can cover everything from a familial situation, financial stress, depression, and more. Try to come to me early on, before things may be due so that I can better accommodate you. Please do know that Georgia Southern University provides many resources for support:

- [Counseling Center](#)
- [Mental Health](#)
- [Physical Health](#)
- [LGBTQ+ Health](#)

If you are a caregiver, for children or other adults, please know that I will happily accommodate you.

Other Resources: In general, I want you all to be aware of the many resources available to you as a Georgia Southern student and especially in the Department of Geology & Geography and the College of Science and Math. Here is a link to many of these valuable resources: [student resources](#). If you need help securing food, housing, finding articles, or have questions about policies, whatever it might be, this will help navigate you to the right place. Of course, my door is always open and I promise a safe and confidential space for you.

Course Policies

Grading Policies: Grades will be returned in a timely manner. If you would like to contest a grade, remember to do this respectfully – after all, it is your grade, and everyone makes mistakes. Do know that if you ask for something to be graded again, it is possible that your second grade could be lower than the first if, upon a second review, it did not merit the original score.

In exceptional circumstances, I will allow you to take an incomplete in this course. However, to take an incomplete, you must work directly with Dr. Rosko to set up the expectations for the work you will complete and its deadlines.

This course follows all University policies and timelines regarding Pass/Fail and Withdrawal.

Excused absences follow University policy. In addition, I excuse all absences related to religious observation. I will also be understanding if you have issues with work or care-taking – just communicate with me.

Academic Integrity: You are expected to abide by the Georgia Southern University [Code of Student Conduct](#) and academic honesty. If you are suspected of [Academic Dishonesty](#), you risk being reported.

Students with Disabilities: Georgia Southern University is committed to accessibility and providing accommodations for all persons with disabilities. Students who need course accommodations because of a disability must contact the instructor as soon as possible to speak confidentially about the needed accommodation. Students should also contact the [Student Accessibility Resource Center \(SARC\)](#) since they are the designated office responsible for approving and coordinating reasonable accommodations and services for university courses. Please note that students who need accommodations must be registered with the SARC before requesting accommodations from the instructor.

Student Accessibility Resource Center
Second Floor of Cone Hall
P.O. Box 8037
Statesboro, GA 30460
Phone: (912) 478-1566
Fax: (912) 478-1419
Video Phone: (912) 225-9877
sarcboro@georgiasouthern.edu

Electronics: The use of laptops and tablets are generally not allowed in the classroom unless you need specific accommodations. For days when we need electronic devices for in-class activities and in-depth discussion of readings, I will make an announcement in advance. For note-taking, I strongly encourage you to use a pen and paper; research shows that students [learn better this way](#). However, if you must use laptops or tablets, email me within the first three weeks of the semester, clearly explaining why I should grant you permission. Mobile phones should remain in silent mode at all times during class; they should be stored where they are completely out of sight to you, me,

and everyone else in the class. Students who are distracted by electronic devices, or those who distract others, will receive deductions in their participation grades.

Late Assignments: All assignments must be submitted on time. Late assignments will not be accepted, full stop. Late assignments will receive a grade of 0. If you are unable to complete an assignment by the due date, you should contact Dr. Rosko in advance, or, in exceptional circumstances, within 24 hours of the deadline. At the professor's discretion, only cases of emergencies will warrant an exception to this penalty.

Extra Credit: As a general rule, there will be no extra credit opportunities available in this course. This means you should focus your attention and efforts on the required assignments.

Grading Scale:

A	90 - 100	D	60 - 69
B	80 - 89	F	Below 60%
C	70 - 79		

Course Schedule & Readings

Week	Date	Lecture Topic	Assignments
1	W – Aug 19 th	Course Introduction: Political Geography + Social Action	- Syllabus
2	M – Aug 24 th	Issue Development I + Community Speaker (<i>Young Democrat Socialists</i>)	- <i>CHANGE! A Student Guide to Social Action</i> , (XI XVII), & Ch. 1 (p. 1-6)
	W – Aug 26 th	Introduction to Political Geography	- Jones et al. (2015) – Chapter 1: Power, space, and ‘political geography’
3	M – Aug 31 st	Issue Development II + Community Speaker (<i>Bulloch Action Coalition</i>)	- <i>CHANGE!</i> , Ch. 1 (p. 7-18) - Watch: ‘Walk the Walk’ (1st 15 minutes)
	W – Sept 2 nd	The State	- Blake & Gilman (2024) – COMS: Chapter 1, How The State Became Hegemonic
3	M – Sept 7 th	Labor Day, NO CLASS	
	W – Sept 9 th	Setting the Tone + Social Action Speaker (<i>Dr. Myers-Lipton</i>)	- <i>CHANGE!</i> , Ch. 2, p. 20-25
4	M – Sept 14 th	Change Theory	- <i>CHANGE!</i> , Ch. 3, p. 28-40
	W – Sept 16 th	Power I: Overview	- Avelino, F. (2021). Theories of power and social change.
5	M – Sept 21 st	Building Power	- <i>CHANGE!</i> , Ch. 4, p. 51-58
	W – Sept 23 rd	Power II: Scale + Governance	- Blake & Gilman (2024) – COMS: Chapter 2, Governing beyond the National State
6	M – Sept 28 th	Research	- <i>CHANGE!</i> , Ch. 5, p. 60-69
	W – Sept 30 th	<i>Geographies of Empire, Imperialism, & Colonization</i>	- Watch: <i>Parasite</i> (2019)

			- McNamee (2023) - Settler Colonialism
7	M – Oct 5 th	Group Dynamics	- <i>CHANGE!</i> , Ch. 6, p. 72-79
	W – Oct 7 th	Capitalist political geographies	- Listen: Thier (2022) - A Peoples Guide to Capitalism, <i>Upstream</i>
8	M – Oct 12 th	Strategy & Tactics I No class – group work on your own	- <i>CHANGE!</i> , Ch. 7, 81-88
	W – Oct 14 th	Neoliberalism & socialism	- Peet, R. (2002). Ideology, discourse, and the geography of hegemony: From socialist to neoliberal development in postapartheid South Africa.
9	M – Oct 19 ^h	Strategy & Tactics II No class – group work on your own	- <i>CHANGE!</i> , Ch. 7, 81-88
	W – Oct 21 st	<i>Remote class:</i> Polycrisis	- Scheffran, J. (2025). Planetary boundaries, polycrisis and politics in the anthropocene
10	M – Oct 26 th	Campaign Kickoff	- <i>CHANGE!</i> , Ch. 8, 99-106
	W – Oct 28 th	Environmental Politics	- Thomas, K. A., & Rhiney, K. (2024). Moving beyond a climate politics of justice with no peace.
11	M – Nov 2 nd	Campaign Kickoff II	- <i>CHANGE!</i> , Ch. 8, 99-106
	W – Nov 4 th	Politics & Culture I: Music	- Various music videos (Folio)
12	M – Nov 9 th	Campaign Plan	- <i>CHANGE!</i> , Ch. 9 (p. 114-120)
	W – Nov 11 th	Politics & Culture II: Film	- Watch: <i>Don't Look Up</i>
13	M – Nov 16 th	Campaign Evaluation	- <i>CHANGE!</i> , Ch. 10 (p. 122-124)
	W – Nov 18 th <i>Last Day of Class</i>	Reflections & Conclusions	
14	M – Nov 23 rd	Happy Thanksgiving	
	W – Nov 25 th		
	Nov 30th – Dec 5th	Final Presentations: Nov. 30th 12:30 – 2:30 pm	