

Introduction to American Politics
Political Science 105 / Fall 2009
MWF 11:00-11:50 p.m.
Gavett 301

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Office Hours
Mon & Wed, 12-1
or by appointment

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Tues, 1-3

Course Description

This course will examine how the government of the United States is organized, the rationale behind its organization, and the ways citizens, political actors, and political institutions interact to achieve political goals. As we consider the foundations of American government, major political institutions, and mechanisms that link citizens and government, we will make particular note of the diversity of the American experience as evidenced in research on race and gender. This course is appropriate for political science majors who wish to gain a foundation in American politics as well as for non-majors who simply wish to gain a better understanding of American government and processes.

Objectives

- To acquaint students with the fundamentals of American government
- To introduce students to key political science concepts and research
- To familiarize students with perspectives on American politics informed by research on gender and race
- To develop students' critical thinking and analytical skills through class discussion and written assignments

Required Texts

Bianco, William. 2001. *American Politics*
Kernell Samuel, and Steven Smith, editors. 2010. 4th ed. *Principles and Practice of American Politics*
Fiorina, Morris. 2006. *Culture War?*
Wasserman, Gary. 2006. *Politics in Action*.

Grading

Participation 10%; Short Papers 15%; 3 Exams, 25% each

Class participation and attendance accounts for 10% of your final grade. Obviously those who do not attend class cannot participate in class discussion. Attendance in lectures and class discussion will be taken regularly throughout the semester. Because the exchange of ideas is an important part of learning, you are encouraged to frequently ask questions and share your informed opinions during regular class and in discussion sections. In order to maintain an atmosphere conducive to learning, students should use professional language in class discussions and written work. Reading and any additional assignments should be completed before class on the day assigned. Lectures from guest speakers and teaching

assistants are important contributions to the class and considered fair game for exams. Pay careful attention to the syllabus and to any adjustments that may occur. You are responsible for material presented in lectures and discussed in class regardless of your attendance behavior. Late and make-up assignments will be allowed only with a doctor's note or other equally serious documented reason for the absence. Athletes and other students that may miss class due to co-curricular travel should inform their TA and me of the relevant dates early in the semester. Students with any other special needs should meet with me early in the semester so that proper accommodations can be made.

Short papers may involve research online or in the library and require the analysis of course readings and current events. Two short assignments will be used to calculate 15% of your final grade. Papers should be 2-3 pages in length, typed, and double-spaced with 1-inch margins and a 12-point font. Support your arguments with evidence from course readings or other documented sources. Your opinion alone is not sufficient. You are required to complete at least two short papers to receive full credit. Failure to do so will result in a grade of zero for the missing work. Papers should follow proper writing and grammar rules and must be turned in at the beginning of class on the dates assigned. Late short papers will not be accepted.

Exams constitute 75% of your final grade. Three exams are each worth 25% and will take place during class on Oct 23, Nov 16, and Dec 11 (dates may change). Make-up exams will be administered only with prior approval.

Extra credit may be earned by attending U of R lectures on topics directly related to U.S. politics and writing a brief summary and response paper (1-2 pages). Be sure to include the title of the lecture, name of the speaker, and date of the presentation on the first page. Each response paper is worth one additional point on your final grade. Response papers must be submitted to your TA within 7 calendar days of the event (including weekends). A maximum total of 3 points may be granted to any individual student.

Academic honesty is expected. Turn in material that you have completed yourself. Absolutely no cheating or plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without proper citation) will be tolerated. Both cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses that will be reported for disciplinary action. Please refer to the University Handbook and/or speak with the instructor if you have any questions in this area.

Course Outline

Sept 2

Introduction and Course Overview

Sept 4

Annual meeting of the American Political Science Association
(No Class)

Sept 7

Labor Day (No Class)

Sept 9

Political Foundations

Designing Institutions

What makes decision-making "political?" What is rationality? What are institutions and why do they matter? What factors influence the likelihood of cooperation and compromise in political decision-making?

Bianco, "Introduction," pp. 3-15 and "Cooperation in Politics," pp. 36-66

Sept 11

(KS)— Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (excerpt), pp. 1-11; Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” pp. 12-24; Putnam, “The Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Public Life,” pp. 25-32

Sept 14, 16, 18

The Constitution, Making the Rules

What were the primary debates during the constitutional convention? In what ways did the Constitution provide for a just and fair government?

(KS)— Roche, “The Founding Fathers: A Reform Caucus in Action,” pp. 33-57; Brutus, “Anti-Federalist No. 3,” pp. 58-62; Madison, “Federalist No. 10,” pp. 63-69; Madison, “Federalist No. 51,” pp. 70-72

DISCUSSION SECTIONS BEGIN THIS WEEK

Sept 21, 23, 25

Federalism

(KS)—Kettl, “Federalism: Battles on the Front Lines,” pp. 82-102; Rauch, “A Separate Peace,” pp. 103-106

Sept 28, 30

Civil Rights

Lawson, “Debating the Civil Rights Movement: The View from the Nation,” 3-46 (electronic)

Payne, “Debating the Civil Rights Movement: The View from the Trenches,” 115-155 (electronic)

Oct 2

Documentary: *Eyes on the Prize*

NO SECTIONS, ALL STUDENTS MEET IN DEWEY 2-162

Oct 5

Fall Break (No Class)

Oct 7, 9

Modern Day Civil Rights

KS—Glazer, “American Diversity and the 2000 Census,” pp. 122-133; Wasserman, “Affirmative Action at the University of Michigan,” pp. 25-38; Jost, “Gay Marriage,” pp. 327-352 (electronic)

Oct 12, 14, 16

Civil Liberties: Freedom of Speech

(KS)—Sunstein, “From *Republic.com 2.0*,” (excerpt), pp. 134-150; Wasserman, “Freedom of Speech and Campus Speech Codes,” pp. 39-48.

Oct 19, 21

Civil Liberties: Right to Privacy

KS— *Roe v Wade*, pp. 160-168; Rosenberg, “The Real World of Constitutional Rights: The Supreme Court and the Implementation of the Abortion Decision,” pp. 169-198; Wasserman, “Abortion and Public Opinion,” 49-59; Wilcox and Carr, “The Puzzling Case of the Abortion Attitudes of the Millennial Generation,” pp. 199-211

Oct 23 (F) Exam 1

NO SECTIONS, ALL STUDENTS MEET IN DEWEY 2-162

American Political Institutions

Oct 26, 28, 30

The Congress

How is Congress organized and why? What motivates the legislative behavior of members of Congress? (KS)—Smith, “Congress, The Troubled Institution,” pp. 212-227; Pearson and Schickler, “The Transition to Democratic Leadership in a Polarized House,” pp. 228-250; Aldrich and Rohde, “Congressional Committees in a Continuing Partisan Era,” pp. 251-272; Bianco, “Strategic Behavior in Congress,” pp. 121-146

Nov 2, 4

The Presidency

How might we understand presidential power? How does who the president is shape what the presidency is at any given time?

(KS)—Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (excerpt), pp. 273-293; Kernell, *Going Public* (excerpt), pp. 303-320; Bianco, “The Separation of Powers and the Executive Branch,” pp. 147-173; Wasserman, “Presidential Power in Crisis,” pp. 128-142; Purdum, “Henry Paulson’s Longest Night,” in *Vanity Fair*, October 2009 (electronic)

Nov 6

Gender, Race, and the Presidency

Duerst-Lahti, “Presidential Elections: Gendered Space and the Case of 2004,” in Carroll, Susan and Richard Fox (eds.), *Gender and Elections*, pp. 12-42; KS—Abramowitz, “The Triumph of Diversity: Barack Obama, Race, and the 2008 Presidential Election,” pp. 572-586

Nov 9, 11, 13

The Judiciary

Is the judiciary the “least dangerous branch?” Can the Supreme insulate itself from major political controversies of modern American life? What are some consequences of “politicizing” the courts?

(KS)—Scalia, A Matter of Interpretation (excerpt) pp. 389-406; Breyer, “Active Liberty” (excerpt) pp. 407-420; Hamilton, “Federalist No. 78,” pp. 421-426; Binder and Malzman, “Congress and the Politics of Judicial Appointments,” pp. 427-439; Wasserman, “Watergate, *U.S. v Nixon*, and the U.S. Supreme Court,” pp. 156-168

Nov 16 (M) Exam 2

Linkage Mechanisms

Nov 18, 20

Public Opinion

(KS)—Asher, “Analyzing and Interpreting Polls,” pp. 459-487; Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson, “Dynamic Representation,” pp. 488-502

LAST WEEK OF DISCUSSION SECTIONS

Nov 23, 25

Public Opinion

Fiorina, *Culture War*, (Read entire book)

Nov 27
Thanksgiving Break (No Class)

Nov 30, Dec 2

Political Parties

KS—Aldrich, *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America* (excerpt) pp. 587-599; Bartels, “Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952-1996,” pp.600-610; Wasserman, “Parties and Technology,” pp. 73-84.

NO SECTIONS, ALL STUDENTS MEET IN DEWEY 2-162

Dec 4, 7, 9

Voting, Campaigns, and Elections

Bianco, “Voters and Vote Decisions,” pp. 67-90; “Winning and Holding Elective Office” pp. 91-120 (KS)—Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter* (excerpt) pp. 522-529; Wasserman, “Redistricting and Reelection,” pp. 60-72

NO SECTIONS, ALL STUDENTS MEET IN DEWEY 2-162

Dec 11 (F) Exam 3

NO SECTIONS, ALL STUDENTS MEET IN DEWEY 2-162