

Honors PS 125 (D)
Syllabus
Fall 2009

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What does it mean to you to be a citizen of the United States? What are your rights? Your responsibilities? What do you need to know to fulfill those responsibilities? To form your own political opinions? How are your opinions and political beliefs rooted in your own experiences, in your religion, in your family traditions and ethnic culture? How many Americans share your background? Do they all share your views? What about people who come from a very different walk of life? How do you think their views differ? It's easy to tolerate and compromise with people who are just like you. But democracy requires us to both tolerate and compromise with people who have completely different cultures, values and beliefs about the role of government. So just how can a diverse country like ours ever come to consensus about the common good? And when we try to come together to work toward a common good, what rules govern that discussion? How do those rules structure the behavior of individuals, parties, interest groups, and institutions? Do you like the outcomes of the political system? Do you know how they come about? How to change them?

In this class, we will consider these questions as we examine how politics and government in America work. Our objectives will be:

- 1) To help you understand the logic of the political process and the functions of government. Toward that end, this class places a strong emphasis on understanding what rules structure the political system, because those rules influence how the political game is played, and therefore the political and policy outcomes that we observe.
- 2) To help you think more deeply about your responsibilities as an American citizen—including self-education, participation, and tolerance.

I expect that you will come to class having done all of the assigned readings, and be ready to discuss them. The textbooks are as follows:

(*Logic*) Samuel Kernell, Gary C. Jacobson, and Thad Kousser *The Logic of American Politics* (4th edition), Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2009.

(Mayhew) David Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* New Haven: Yale University Press. 2004.

(Dahl) Robert Dahl, *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

Other readings (ER) are on e-reserve.

Assignments

The following is an overview of the assignments for this class. More specific guidelines will follow.

Exams. Your first exam will be on the nuts and bolts of the political system. Questions about current events and questions from readings and lecture will all be fair game. The final exam will build on that knowledge, but will ask questions about material covered since the midterm.

Readings. You will be expected to come to class every day having done the assigned reading, taken notes on its main points, and reflected upon what you have learned from it.

Short Papers. You will write two short papers. The first will be a 3-5 page comparison between public media and commercial media. The second will be a paper analyzing a public policy issue and arguing for a particular solution or set of solutions. Based on your research on this paper, you will stage a debate on that issue for the class. I will be happy to go over a draft of your essay with you in office hours, but I will not give drafts a thorough pre-grading reading.

Your grade will be composed as follows:

- Final exam (25%)
- Midterm (Feb. 23) 15%
- Media paper 3-5 pages (15%)
- Issues paper 5-7 pages (20%)
- Debate (5%)
- Quizzes (10%)
- Class attendance and active participation (10%)

Classroom policies:

I welcome questions and class discussions, as long as everyone is respectful of each others' viewpoints. We will talk about politics in this class, and people will disagree. I will attempt to moderate such discussions as neutrally as possible, and to challenge everyone to critically analyze their own assumptions. In general, I reward thoughtful consideration of both arguments, and will be more critical of strictly one-sided arguments. One important note: I request that you arrive at class on time. I will make all important announcements in the first few minutes of class. You will miss those announcements if you do not arrive in class on time. In addition, barring a medical condition that requires it, there is no excuse for leaving class to use the restroom or answer the phone.

I am especially sensitive to the needs of shy people, so if oral participation or presentations scare you, please talk to me personally and I am happy to work with you to make you more comfortable with these assignments. Readings, class discussions, and current events will all be fair game for the midterms and final.

Please come to class having done the reading assignment listed for that date.
I will give unannounced reading quizzes!

Sept 2	Introduction	
Sept 4	Constitutional Structure Read the US Constitution. What do you notice about it? What comes first? What kinds of details are included? Not included?	(ER) Annotated Constitution, from O'Connor and Sabato, <i>Essentials of American Government</i> (New York: Pearson Longman 2006) pp. 63-99.
Sept 7	Federalism What policies are written at the national level and what policies are decided at the state level? Is this distribution ideal? What are the advantages of standardized national policies? What are the advantages of local policy autonomy?	<i>Logic</i> 95-123 (first thirty pages of Federalism chapter)
Sept 9	Presidential Elections What is unique about presidential elections? How does the Electoral College affect the campaign strategies of presidential candidates?	<i>Logic</i> 547 (Box on The Electoral College) and (ER) Richard J. Ellis and Michael Nelson, <i>Debating the Presidency</i> , "Resolved, the President should be elected..." (Washington: CQ Press 2006) pp. 30-45.
Sept 11	The Presidency What role does the president play in the policymaking process? Is the president more of a single leader, a follower, or is he on equal footing with Congress when crafting domestic policy?	<i>Logic</i> Presidency chapter
Sept 14	Congress How is the House organized differently from the Senate? Why are they organized differently? How important are political parties to the organization of Congress? Why are committees important to Congress' organization?	<i>Logic</i> 273 (Organizing Congress) through the end of the chapter

Sept 16	<p>Bureaucracy</p> <p>What is a bureaucrat? What is “the federal bureaucracy”? Who do they report to? What do they do? Why do we complain about them?</p>	<p><i>Logic</i> 363-394 (beginning of chapter up until “Who Controls the Bureaucracy?”)</p>
Sept 18	<p>The Judiciary</p> <p>What does a judge do? How do judges make their decisions? What cases are heard by the Supreme Court? What power do judges have over national policy? Should courts be restrained in light of their lack of democratic legitimacy?</p>	<p><i>Logic</i> 413-452 (beginning of chapter up until “The Federal Judiciary in National Policymaking”)</p>
Sept 21	<p>Civil Liberties I</p> <p>What is a civil liberty? What is the most important civil liberty to you? Why do so many civil liberties deal with the rights of accused criminals? When is it OK for the government to infringe on civil liberties?</p>	<p><i>Logic</i> 191-204, 220-232 (4th-8th amendments)</p>
Sept 23	<p>Civil Liberties II</p> <p>Opponents of the Bill of Rights argued that writing a list of rights down on paper would inevitably limit personal freedom. Has that been the case? How has the Supreme Court expanded and contracted the text of the constitution?</p>	<p><i>Logic</i> 204-220, 232-240 (First amendment, privacy, second amendment)</p>
Sept 25	<p>Interest Groups</p> <p>What can groups do in order to lobby Congress? If they lose in Congress, where else can they go? In what ways are interest groups good for democracy? In what ways might they be problematic? What is the difference between “grassroots” and “Astroturf” lobbying? What alternative strategies are available to groups who consider “insider” strategies to be outside the reach, or incompatible with their goals?</p>	<p><i>Logic</i> 621-647 (“Contemporary Interest Groups” to end of chapter)</p>

Sept 28	<p>Parties</p> <p>Why do political parties develop naturally from democratic government?</p> <p>What makes the two major political parties different? How are they similar?</p>	<p><i>Logic, Parties chapter.</i></p> <p>When you read pages 598-599, make a note of which position you agree with more for each issue. Do you really identify with the party you thought you did?</p>
Sept 30	<p>Midterm Review, Current events discussion. Bring questions to class! How does what we have covered so far relate to what's going on in the news?</p>	
Oct 2	<p style="text-align: center;">MIDTERM</p>	
Oct 5	<p>Why Government? Why Politics?</p> <p>What assumptions about human nature do the authors make here? What do they conclude about politics based on those assumptions? Based on their arguments, under what conditions is government necessary? Why are rules and institutions important?</p>	<p>(ER) Thomas Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> Part 1, Chapter 13.</p> <p>James Madison, Federalist 51, found at the end of the <i>Logic</i> book.</p>
Oct 7	<p>Why OUR government?</p> <p>What were the framers' motivations in designing the US Constitution? Were they enlightened statesmen or regular politicians, or both? Does this story challenge your view of the Framers and their motivations? How does the Constitution itself reflect the personal experiences of the Framers?</p>	<p>Dahl, chapters 1 and 2</p>
Oct 9	<p>Why not A DIFFERENT government?</p> <p>Why does Dahl argue that the US Constitution is undemocratic? What modifications could make it more democratic? What are problems with those recommendations? Do you agree with his argument?</p>	<p>Dahl, rest of the book</p>

Oct 12	<p>Introduction to Collective Action Problems</p> <p>What is a collective action problem? The tragedy of the commons? The free rider problem? Can you think of examples of these phenomena in every day life? Why are they so difficult to overcome?</p>	<p><i>Logic</i> 10-26, 224-227, 95, 284-285, 372-373</p>
Oct 14	<p>The Free Rider Problem: Becoming Informed</p> <p>How would you characterize American citizens' level of political knowledge? Can a democracy function effectively based on that level of knowledge?</p>	<p>(ER) Walter Lippman, "The Phantom Public" in Ann G. Serow and Everett C. Ladd, <i>The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity</i> (Baltimore: Lanahan, 2007) pp. 413-417.</p> <p>(ER) Thomas E. Patterson, "Voter Competence" In Stephen C. Craig, ed., <i>The Electoral Challenge</i> (Washington: CQ Press 2006) pp. 39-57.</p>
Oct 16	<p>The problem of producing a public good: The Media</p> <p>In what way is consumption of news a public good that is subject to the free rider problem? What five W's does the author argue really control news content? What factors increase the production of soft news? What does the author mean by "race to the bottom news coverage," and what produces it? What kind of news do YOU prefer to consume, hard or soft? How do you think that preference affects news production? How do economic incentives lead to herding behavior among journalists?</p>	<p>(ER) James T. Hamilton, "Economic Theories of News" from <i>All the News that's Fit to Sell</i> (Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 9-39.</p>
Oct 19	<p>The Media II: Who can you trust?</p> <p>Do the media provide the information needed for Americans to make informed political decisions? If not, why not? Whose fault is it?</p>	<p>MEDIA PAPER DUE</p>

Oct 21	<p>The Free Rider Problem: Participation</p> <p>What are some ways in which individuals can participate in the political process? Why do these authors argue that Americans do not participate enough? Who is less likely to participate and why? Does “who participates” systematically bias the outcomes of the political process?</p>	<i>Logic</i> 424-436
Oct 26	<p>The Free Rider Problem: Forming Groups</p> <p>How do collective action problems make it difficult for groups to form? What kinds of groups are easier to organize? Are those groups representative of the whole population? What are “special interest groups?”</p>	(ER) Mancur Olson, "The Logic of Collective Action" excerpt from Kernell and Smith, <i>Principles and Practice of American Politics</i> 2nd edition, Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2004.
Oct 28	<p>The Free Rider Problem: Why should social movements take place? How are movements like the Civil Rights Movement organized?</p> <p>As you read, think about: What alternative strategies are available to groups who consider “insider” strategies to be outside the reach, or incompatible with their goals?</p>	(ER) Sydney Tarrow, <i>Power in Movement</i> (New York: Cambridge University Press 2004) pp. 9-27.
Oct 30	<p>Why was the Civil Rights Movement successful? In what ways was it NOT successful? How did the American system of government help to create the oppression that required it in the first place? How did the American system of government help to undo those problems?</p>	<i>Logic</i> , Civil Rights chapter
Nov. 2	<p>Catch up/Concluding discussions on free rider problem/Discussion of current events</p>	

Nov. 4	<p>Does a member of Congress need to face a tough re-election bid to be responsive to his constituents?</p> <p>Why do incumbents win re-election at such high rates? What factors affect the outcome of a congressional election? What is the role of professional political advisers in campaigns?</p>	<i>Logic</i> , Congress chapter from beginning to “Organizing Congress”
Nov. 6	Redistricting Simulation: Bring your laptop to class!	
Nov. 9	Do Members of Congress care about their constituents?	Mayhew, chapter 1.
Nov. 11	Who do members of Congress really represent? Do PAC contributions buy votes? How do members of Congress think about their constituents? Who do they pay the most attention to? Who do they pay the least attention to? How do their re-election needs affect their voting decisions and other behavior in Congress?	R. Douglas Arnold, <i>The Logic of Congressional Action</i> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) pp. 60-87.
Nov. 13	<p>Congress’ Collective Action problem</p> <p>What organizational problems face members of Congress? How do they overcome them?</p>	Mayhew, chapter 2.
Nov. 16	<p>Who does the President represent?</p> <p>How does the system by which we select the president influence who runs, who gets nominated, and who wins? If you don’t like your options, how could you change the rules of the game to get better ones?</p>	<p>(ER) David Wasserman and Larry J. Sabato, “Invisible Primaries: The Crystal Ball’s Magnificent 7 in ‘07”, University of Virginia Center for Politics, May 11, 2007. www.centerforpolitics.org</p> <p>(ER) Christopher Hanson, “Voices: the Invisible Primary: Now is the Time for All-Out Coverage”, <i>Columbia Journalism Review</i> March/April 2003.</p>

Nov. 18	<p>Presidential Power</p> <p>What is the constitutional framework of the presidency? Where does the president's strength come from? Why might many political scientists argue that presidential power is the power to persuade?</p>	<p>(ER) Richard Neustadt, "The Presidency" excerpt from <i>Presidential Power</i> in Kernell and Smith, <i>Principles and Practice of American Politics</i> 2nd edition, Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2004 pp. 274-294.</p>
Nov. 20	<p>Congress vs. the President during times of War</p> <p>How have Americans' interpretations of presidential war powers changed over time? Why do you think that is the case? Do you think that is appropriate?</p>	<p>(ER) Louis Fisher, "What is the Appropriate Role of Congress in National Security Policy?" in George C. Edwards III, ed., <i>Readings in Presidential Politics</i> (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006), pp. 263-290.</p>
Nov. 23	<p>Politics: Should regulatory policymaking be political?</p> <p>By what mechanisms can we democratically control the bureaucracy? How have those mechanisms changed over time? If it's a debate between neutral expert policy and democratically controlled policy, which do you prefer?</p>	<p>Gardiner Harris, "Surgeon General Sees 4-Year Term as Compromised," <i>New York Times</i> 11 July 2007.</p> <p>Cornelia Dean, "Scientists Criticize White House Stance on Climate Change Findings," <i>New York Times</i> 31 January 2007.</p> <p>Gardiner Harris, "Bush's pick as FDA Chief faces long road to vote," <i>The International Herald Tribune</i> 17 March 2006.</p> <p>Cass Sunstein, "On the Unitary Executive," <i>New Republic.com</i>, accessed 20 August 2007.</p>
Nov. 30	<p>Politics: Should judicial decision-making be political?</p> <p>How are judges like politicians? How do they balance the struggle between private beliefs and adherence to precedent? How do they deal with the court's legitimacy problem? How did Chief Justice Warren confront the legitimacy problem with <i>Brown I</i> and <i>Brown II</i>? Why are judicial nominations so politically controversial? Is it a good thing that judges are appointed not elected? Why or why not?</p>	<p>(ER) Antonin Scalia, "Common law Courts in a Civil-Law System: The Role of the United States Federal Courts in Interpreting the Constitution and its Laws," from <i>The Enduring Debate</i> ed. David Canon, John Coleman and Kenneth R. Mayer (New York: WW Norton 2003) pp. 233-240.</p> <p>(ER) Stephen Breyer, "Our Democratic Constitution" from <i>The Enduring Debate</i> ed. David Canon, John Coleman and Kenneth R. Mayer (New York: WW Norton 2003) pp. 240-253.</p>

		(ER) David O'Brien, "The Court in American Life" from <i>The Enduring Debate</i> ed. David Canon, John Coleman and Kenneth R. Mayer (New York: WW Norton 2003) pp. 220-226.
Dec. 2	<p>Does our system protect against majority tyranny?</p> <p>What makes our government just? Fair? Could the government become illegitimate to you? What constitutes legitimate protest? Illegitimate protest?</p> <p>Could any national security conditions ever make it OK to restrict the civil liberties of an ethnic group? Of everyone in the country?</p>	<p>James Madison, Federalist 10, found in <i>Logic</i> pp. 608-610.</p> <p>(ER) Martin Luther King, Jr. "Letter from the Birmingham Jail" from <i>The Enduring Debate</i> ed. David Canon, John Coleman and Kenneth R. Mayer (New York: WW Norton 2003) pp. 74-82.</p> <p>"Debating the Issues: Racial Profiling and Fighting Terrorism", from David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, <i>The Enduring Debate</i> (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003).</p>
Dec. 4	Debate #1	Debate #1 paper due
Dec. 7	Debate #2	Debate #2 paper due
Dec. 9	Debate #3	Debate #3 paper due
Dec. 11	Debate #4	Debate #4 paper due
Dec. 14	Final Review	