

AMERICAN POLITICAL PROCESS

University of Pittsburgh

Political Science 0200

Monday/Wednesday 3:00-4:15pm

David Lawrence Hall 105

Fall 2009

Professor: Jennifer Nicoll Victor, Ph.D.

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Office: 4613 Wesley W. Posvar Hall, Department of Political Science

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 1:30-2:30pm

Course Website: <http://courseweb.pitt.edu> (on Blackboard, use your Pitt e-mail login)

Teaching Asst.: Daniel J. Tully (daniel.j.tully@gmail.com)

Office Hours: Thursdays 11:00am-1:00pm, Einstein's Bagels (Posvar Hall, 2nd Floor)

I. Course Description

This course provides students with an introduction to American political institutions and public policy formation. No prerequisite classes or prior knowledge are required to enroll. The course is divided into three sections. In the first section, we examine the history of the formation of American government and the theoretical explanations for the existence of government. In the second section, we examine the institutions of government, such as the U.S. Congress, the Supreme Court, and the Presidency. In the third section, we explore the behaviors associated with government and the mechanisms by which political behaviors are expressed (e.g., voting, public opinion, interest groups, political parties, etc.). Students will read a general textbook of American politics and a supplemental book about theory and strategies. Students will be challenged to demonstrate an understanding of political theory by applying their knowledge to current political events.

II. Course Goals

This course is designed to meet three primary objectives. First, I hope to stimulate your **curiosity** about government and politics and provide you with a life-long desire to be an informed, critical and active citizen. Second, I hope students will develop a base level of **knowledge** and understanding about the institutions that form our government, the incentives of political actors, and the interactions between the two. Third, I have designed the course in a way that will help students improve their individual research, writing, reading, and analytical **skills**.

III. Course Requirements and Graded Evaluation

There are five graded requirements for this course, described below. Grades will be calculated on a non-curved typical A-F scale where,

97-100	A+	87-89	B+	77-79	C+	67-69	D+	< 60	F
93-96	A	83-86	B	73-76	C	63-66	D		
90-92	A-	80-82	B-	70-72	C-	60-62	D-		

Short Essays (30%) Students will write 2 or 3 essays of 300-600 words each on a topic of their choosing. Students may write up to three papers, but only the papers with the two highest scores will be included in the calculation for students' final grades (each paper will therefore make-up 15% of the final grade). The papers are due on the following dates: **Wednesday, October 7; Monday, November 9; Wednesday, December 2.** In each essay, students will find a current event that describes the existence of a public good that has resulted in a collective action problem. Students' essays will (a) identify the public good, (b) describe how the public good results in a collective action problem (c) identify a government institution that has been developed to solve the problem, and (d) evaluate whether or not the government institution successfully provides the public good. Arguments should have 2 to 4 premises and a clear conclusion. To the extent that students use research to back their claims, they must create a bibliography formatted in APSA style (see handout and resources on Blackboard).

Midterm Exam (30%) This will be an in-class exam covering material from the first portion of the course. The exam will include multiple choice and short answer questions (closed book, closed-note) based on material presented in class and in the readings. The exam will be in-class on **Monday, October 26.** This is the ONLY day to take the exam. If you do not come to class on this day or you arrive after the first person to complete the exam has finished, you will not be allowed to take the exam.

Final Exam (40%) This will be an in-class exam covering material from the entire course (comprehensive), though concentrating on material from the last half of the course (Institutions). The exam will include multiple choice and short answer questions (closed book, closed-note) based on material presented in class and in the readings. The exam will be in-class on **Thursday, December 17 at 10:00am – 11:50am.** This time has been designated by the University and cannot be changed; it is the ONLY date and time to take the exam. If you do not come to class on this day or you arrive after the first person to complete the exam has finished, you will not be allowed to take the exam.

IV. Missing and Late Work

If you are aware that you will miss an exam or assignment due date you must notify the instructor *at least two days* prior to the due date or exam date. Make-up exams are conducted at the instructor's discretion and are granted only in extraordinary circumstances. Make-up exams will be closed-book essay exams. Late assignments will have scores reduced by 5 percent for each day the assignment is late. I will waive the score reduction for a verified illness (bring a doctor's note) or a verified family emergency (you must provide documentation).

V. Following Political Developments in the Media

Students are encouraged to follow current political events. A familiarity with current happenings around you will facilitate your ability to understand the material. Along with any local papers you may read, I recommend that you read *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* or *The Washington Post* with frequency. You can sign up to receive daily e-mail news updates from the *New York Times* or *The Washington Post* on their websites. Additionally, you may want to examine news-magazines for more in-depth coverage of particular issues and events. *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* and *National Journal* are two particularly informative periodicals. Other options include *Time*, *Newsweek*, or *The Economist*. You can also subscribe

to podcasts where you can listen to headlines from these news sources. Finally, I strongly encourage students to listen to NPR at 90.5 (WDUQ), where “Morning Edition” (5am-9am) and “All Things Considered” (4pm-6pm) provide excellent current events information.

Professor Victor’s Top 5 News Websites

Name	URL	Description
<i>New York Times</i>	http://www.nytimes.com	General national news and current events.
<i>Washington Post</i>	http://www.washingtonpost.com	General national news, with a concentration on events in Washington, D.C.
CNN	http://www.cnn.com	General national news
Congressional Quarterly Politics	http://www.cqpolitics.com	News about Congress, events on Capitol Hill, and government.
National Journal	http://www.nationaljournal.com	News about Congress, elections, and important people in government.

VI. Student Responsibilities

A. *Class Attendance and Participation.* Learning is an *active*, rather than *passive*, exercise. Accordingly, every student is expected to attend class as well as be prepared to ask questions about and comment on the readings. You need to complete the daily reading assignment *prior* to the class meeting. You will be much more successful in this class if you attend regularly, take notes, pay attention, and participate.

B. *Readings.* As is the case with attendance, keeping pace with the reading is essential to succeeding in this class. It is *your* responsibility to obtain copies of the readings prior to the date we will discuss them in class. I will do everything I can to make this task easier for you. You will be much more successful in this course if you complete the assigned readings and take notes on them.

C. *Cheating, Plagiarism, and Academic Integrity.* Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity (available at: <http://www.pitt.edu/~provost/ai1.html>). Any student engaged in any academic misconduct *will receive an F on the offending exam or assignment.* Egregious violations will result in an F grade for the course and will be reported to the appropriate Dean’s office. These violations include cheating on an exam, using someone else’s work as your own, and plagiarizing the written word. Plagiarism (using someone else’s words or ideas without providing credit or citation) is a serious offense. *If you have any questions at all about what constitutes cheating, plagiarism, or academic misconduct, please ask the instructor.*

D. *Students with Disabilities.* If you have a disability for which your are or may be requesting an accommodation, please let me (the instructor) know and contact the Office of

Disability Resources and Service, 216 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890/(412) 383-7355 (TTY) as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course. All discussions with me regarding disabilities are confidential.

VII. Teaching Strategy

While lectures are important because they help to distribute necessary information and facts, they are not usually the most effective way to learn information. For this reason, we will do a variety of activities in the classroom. Students will be expected to participate in class discussions and work together in critical thinking groups. We may watch a film and engage in interactive activities in the classroom. I hope that the variety of educational stimuli will help students to absorb more information. However, a certain amount of lecturing is necessary.

VIII. Reading Assignments

The reading assignments are chosen to buttress and expand on the analytic foundation laid in class. **Please notify the instructor about problems obtaining the readings as soon as possible.** The following materials are required and can be found at the campus Book Center. You are strongly encouraged to obtain copies of these texts and read them; doing so is critical to success in this course. There are two required books for this course:

Bianco, William T. 2001. *American Politics: Strategy and Choice*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

Lowi, Theodore J, Benjamin Ginsberg and Kenneth A. Shepsle. 2008. *American Government: Power and Purpose*, FULL 10th ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

IX. Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

Mon., Aug. 31 Introduction to the Course (1)

RULES OF THE GAME: THE FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

Wed., Sept. 2 Why Government? (2)
Readings: Lowi, et al., Chapter 1 (“The Five Principles of Politics”)
 Bianco, Chapter 1 (pp. 3-15)

Concentration *Define government and politics.*
Questions: *What are the two elements of every government?*
 What are the three primary purposes of government?
 What is a collective action problem?

Wed., Sept. 9 The Constitution (3)
Readings: Lowi, et al., Chapter 2 (“Constructing a Government”)
 Lowi, et al., The Constitution of the United States of America (see
 Appendix)

Concentration *What was America’s first constitution called?*

Questions: *Why did the Articles of Confederation fail?*
What were some of the compromises reached in the drafting of the Constitution?
How was the Constitution the solution to a collective action problem?

Mon., Sept. 14 Pluralism and Preference Aggregation (4)
Readings: Lowi, et al., Federalist No. 10 (see Appendix)
 Lowi, et al., Federalist No. 51 (see Appendix)
 Bianco, Chapter 2 (pp. 16-35)

Concentration *In Federalist No. 10, what is Madison worried about?*
Questions: *Are Madison's suggestions for quelling the violence of factions reasonable? Why or Why not?*
How does Madison think we should control the effects of factions?
In Federalist No. 51, why does Madison think that government responsibilities should be divided?
What "evil" is Madison worried about? Why?
How does Madison think we can prevent tyranny of the majority?

Wed., Sept. 16 Federalism (5)
Readings: Lowi, et al., Chapter 3 ("The Constitutional Framework: Federalism and the Separation of Powers")

Concentration *What is federalism?*
Questions: *What were the circumstances in McCulloch v. Maryland?*
Name some national, state and concurrent powers.

**Mon., Sept. 21/
Wed., Sept. 23** Collective Action and Prisoners' Dilemmas (6)
Readings: Bianco, Chapter 3 (pp. 36-66)

Concentration *How can you find an equilibrium in a prisoners' dilemma?*
Questions: *How is a prisoners' dilemma a collective action problem?*
What are some solutions to a collective action problem?

Mon., Sept. 28 Civil Liberties (7)
Readings: Lowi, et al., Chapter 4 (pp. 118-133) ("The Constitutional Framework: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights")

Concentration *What is the difference between civil rights and civil liberties?*
Questions: *What liberties does each Amendment in the Bill of Rights protect?*
What legal test must the government satisfy to legally restrict

speech?

What legal standard is used to determine whether government has violated the religious establishment clause?

Can you recite the First Amendment?

Wed., Sept. 30

Readings:

Concentration Questions:

Civil Rights (8)

Lowi, et al., Chapter 4 (pp. 133-157) (“The Constitutional Framework: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights”)

Where in the Constitution does one find their right to “equal protection” under the law?

What were the Civil War Amendments?

What is the significance of Plessy v. Ferguson and Brown v. Board of Education?

Is affirmative action legal? What type?

What guarantees women a legal right to vote? When was this guarantee made?

Which classes of Americans still experience illegal discrimination? And legal discrimination?

INSTITUTIONS: RULES, POLITICIANS, AND GOVERNMENT

Mon., Oct. 5/

Wed., Oct. 7

Readings:

Concentration Questions:

Congress (9 &10)

Lowi, et al., Chapter 5 (“Congress”)

Bianco, Chapter 6 (pp. 121-146) (review pp. 30-33)

Writing Assignment #1 Due Wed., Oct. 7

What are the steps in the lawmaking process?

Where does one find the Rules Committee and what does it do?

What are some major differences between the House and Senate?

What is a filibuster?

What is a logroll?

What is a Gerrymander?

Tues., Oct. 13

(Note: Mon., Oct. 12 is Fall Break. Our class will meet on Tuesday this week only).

Readings:

Concentration Questions:

The Presidency (11)

Lowi, et al., Chapter 6 (“The Presidency as an Institution”)

What is the difference between being a head of state and a head of government?

Under what conditions can the President claim “executive privilege?”

What is an “executive order”? A “signing statement”? An “executive agreement?”

Does the President make the federal budget?

Can the President take the country to war?

Wed., Oct. 14

Readings:

The Bureaucracy (12)

Lowi, et al., Chapter 7 (“The Executive Branch”)

Bianco, Chapter 7 (pp. 147-173)

Concentration

Questions:

How many cabinet secretaries are there?

In which Department can one find the National Park Service? The Forestry Service?

What is the OMB?

What is a government corporation? What is an example of one?

By what means does Congress oversee the bureaucracy?

Who is the Secretary of Defense?

Mon., Oct. 19/

Wed., Oct. 21

Readings:

The Judiciary (13 & 14)

Lowi, et al., Chapter 8 (“The Federal Courts”)

Bianco, Chapter 8 (pp. 174-189)

Concentration

Questions:

What is the significance of Marbury v. Madison?

What Act of Congress created the federal judiciary system?

What are the rules of access a case must satisfy before the Supreme Court will hear it?

What is the “rule of four?”

What is the majority opinion?

By what means do interest groups attempt to influence the Court?

Who are the current justices serving on the Supreme Court?

Mon., Oct. 26

MIDTERM EXAM

PEOPLE AND POLITICS: VOTING, PARTICIPATION, AND GOVERNMENT

Wed., Oct. 28/

Mon., Nov. 2

Readings:

Public Opinion (15 & 16)

Lowi, et al., Chapter 9 (“Public Opinion”)

Concentration

Questions:

In polling, how can one obtain a representative sample?

What is measurement error?

What are some common beliefs among liberals? Conservatives?

What is an attitude and where does it come from?

*What is political socialization?
Do individuals tend to have consistent and stable opinions? If not,
how can we measure public opinion?
What types of issues do Americans tend to agree on?*

**Wed., Nov. 4/
Mon., Nov. 9**

Readings:

Elections, Voting and Campaigning (17 & 18)

Lowi, et al., Chapter 10 (“Elections”)

Bianco, Chapter 4 (pp. 67-90)

Writing Assignment #2 Due Mon., Nov. 9

*Concentration
Questions:*

*When were African Americans guaranteed suffrage?
What guaranteed 18-year-olds the right to vote?
Is it rational to vote? What is the “paradox of voting?”
How do citizens overcome the adverse selection problem?
What type of people are more likely to vote?
Has turnout decreased or increased in recent years? Why?
What is “rational ignorance?”
What is FECA? BRCA?
How much money can an individual legally give to a candidate for
office?*

**Wed., Nov. 11/
Mon., Nov. 16**

Readings:

Political Parties (19 & 20)

Lowi, et al., Chapter 11 (“Political Parties”)

Bianco, Chapter 5 (pp. 91-120)

*Concentration
Questions:*

*What is Duverger’s Law?
What are the five party systems? Which parties and features
characterize each system?
Which coalitions of voters do the modern Republican and
Democratic parties include?
What is the median voter theorem?*

**Wed., Nov. 18/
Mon., Nov. 23**

Readings:

Interest Groups (21 & 22)

Lowi, et al., Chapter 12 (“Groups and Interests”)

Review Bianco, Chapter 3 (pp. 36-66)

*Concentration
Questions:*

*Do interest groups tend to serve an inherently positive or negative
role in American politics?
Which characteristics describe groups that desire public goods?
And private goods?
How do groups overcome the collective action problem?
What is a PAC? Which characteristics describe most PACs?*

Wed., Nov. 25	Thanksgiving Recess. No Class.
Mon., Nov. 30	<u>Media and Politics</u> (23)
<i>Readings:</i>	Lowi, et al., Chapter 13 (“The Media”)
<i>Concentration Questions:</i>	<p><i>Which major events and technological advances significantly changed the way Americans learn about the nation/world in the 20th century?</i></p> <p><i>How can a consumer determine whether the news source to which they are paying attention is a reliable one?</i></p> <p><i>What is the best way to become/remain an informed citizen?</i></p> <p><i>What makes a good campaign advertisement?</i></p>
Wed., Dec. 2	<u>Public Policy: Economic Policy</u> (24)
<i>Readings:</i>	Lowi, et al., Chapter 14 (“Government in Action: Public Policy and the Economy”)
<i>Concentration Questions:</i>	<p>Writing Assignment #3 Due Wed., Dec. 2</p> <p><i>What is laissez-faire economics?</i></p> <p><i>Under what conditions does government regulate?</i></p> <p><i>Which characteristics describe an inefficient or failed market?</i></p> <p><i>What is the difference between fiscal and monetary policy?</i></p> <p><i>What tools does government have to stimulate a slowed economy?</i></p> <p><i>What is the “Fed” and what does it do?</i></p>
Mon., Dec. 7	<u>Public Policy: Social Policy</u> (25)
<i>Readings:</i>	Lowi, et al., Chapter 15 (“Government and Society”)
<i>Concentration Questions:</i>	<p><i>What trends describe poverty in America?</i></p> <p><i>What is TANF? EITC?</i></p> <p><i>How is Social Security funded?</i></p> <p><i>What is the difference between Medicare and Medicaid?</i></p>
Wed., Dec. 9	<u>Public Policy: Foreign Policy</u> (26)
<i>Readings:</i>	Lowi, et al., Chapter 16 (“Foreign Policy and Democracy”)
<i>Concentration Questions:</i>	<p><i>What started/ended the Cold War?</i></p> <p><i>What is the “Bush Doctrine?”</i></p> <p><i>What are the arguments for and against the claim that going to war in Iraq made the U.S. safer?</i></p> <p><i>What is the IMF? World Bank? United Nations?</i></p>
Thurs., Dec. 17	FINAL EXAM 10:00am – 11:50am