

**Political Science 002**  
Introduction to American Politics  
Fall 2008  
TTh, 2:20-3:10 pm, Fungler 103

Professor John Sides  
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Wednesdays, 2-4:30 pm, and by appt.  
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This course provides an introduction and overview of the American political system. We will investigate three major topics:

- the ideas, values, and traditions that undergird this system
- the “inputs” from citizens and voters that make this system democratic
- the institutions that compose this system—namely, the major branches of government

Given that this is a presidential campaign is currently underway, I think it only appropriate to focus attention on the second of these topics. We will spend a disproportionate amount of time discussing public opinion, the media, voting behavior, and elections.

My goals for this course are three. First, I hope that the material covered will help make you a more knowledgeable and therefore better citizen. Second, I hope that you will form a more nuanced opinion of the American political system, including both its strengths and weaknesses. It is not my goal to make you love politics, or hate politics for that matter. Neither love nor hate is particularly healthy, as there are aspects of American political life that are arguably good, and some that are arguably bad.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I hope to show you that political science offers interesting ideas and concepts that can be applied in many situations. These include politics outside the United States and politics as we encounter it in our daily lives, whether among friends or in institutions like communities of faith, fraternities and sororities, and extracurricular organizations. “Politics” don’t just happen in capitals. They happen everywhere, all the time. Thus, political science has a lot to teach us.

**Required texts.** It goes without saying that doing the assigned reading is vital. There are two required texts, which are available for purchase at the GW Bookstore:

- Samuel Kernell and Gary C. Jacobson. 2006. *The Logic of American Politics* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly Press. (Hereafter known as “KJ.”)
- Samuel Kernell and Steven S. Smith, editors. 2007. *Principles and Practice of American Politics: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly Press. (Hereafter known as “PP.”)

It is important that you get the **third** edition of each book. Other readings can be found on the Blackboard page for this course. In addition, you should follow current events with some diligence, preferably via a major newspaper.

**Class meetings.** Our time in class is short. Thus, I will always start on time and you should arrive on time. Latecomers will not be penalized but I will be thinking unpleasant thoughts about you when you slink in at 2:30. While we are in class, it is also important that you avoid distracting yourself and those around you by surfing the Internet on your laptop, checking and writing email, text-messaging, doing the *Hatchet* crossword puzzle, etc. This is a large class, but you might be surprised at how much I can see, and although I do not enjoy interrupting class to crack down on these behaviors, I am more than willing to do so. Finally, while much of class time will consist of my lecturing, I am happy to answer your questions at any point.

**Discussion sections.** In addition to our two weekly meetings, you must attend your assigned discussion section. Each week, the teaching fellows will be covering additional material, providing useful reviews, and dispensing advice about assignments. They will also be keeping track of attendance in discussion sections. Every time that you are absent, your participation grade will be lowered by 5 points. Thus, perfect attendance earns you a 100 for attendance, a single absence earns you a 95, etc. Attendance is worth 10% of your overall course grade.

**Course assignments.** The course assignments include two papers and three exams. The first paper is a brief expository essay in which you will address a basic concept of American politics. The second is a policy memo in which you will provide the sort of brief direct advice that you might provide as a professional staff assistant employed by the national government. A more detailed assignment sheet for the two writing assignments will be provided in your discussion sections.

The three examinations will oblige you to be responsible for material presented in the books and in lectures for the portion of the course immediately preceding the examination. These exams will be written exams that combine multiple choice questions, short answers, and essays. The third exam will be held on the assigned final exam date, but it is **not** cumulative. The first exam is weighted slightly less than the other two, which helps ensure that an unsatisfactory grade on the first exam will be less consequential.

Some key dates:

Thursday, September 25	Paper #1 due
Thursday, October 2	Exam #1
Tuesday, November 4	Exam #2
Thursday, November 20	Paper #2 due
TBD	Exam #3

**Course grades.** Your grade in the course will be a weighted average of the components of the course:

Attendance	10%
Paper #1	10%
Paper #2	10%
Exam #1	20%
Exam #2	25%
Exam #3	25%

I will grade on the following scale: A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D (60-69), and F (0-59). Note that there are no +/- grades in the D or F range.

Here are several important details of my policy on course grades:

- If you have questions about the grade you received on an assignment, I encourage you to talk first to your TF. If you have further questions, I am happy to help and to suggest ways that you can do better.
- If you do not think that the grade you received reflects the quality of your work, you may ask for the assignment to be graded again. To do so, submit a formal appeal in writing, explaining why you think the grade you received is not a fair reflection of the quality of your work. A different TF will then grade the

assignment. This second grade, whether higher or lower, will become your grade on the assignment. If you feel that this grade does not reflect the quality of your work, you may submit a second written appeal to me. My grade, whether higher or lower, will then become your final grade on this assignment.

- If you do not complete an assignment, you will receive you a 0 for the assignment.
- I do not tolerate late assignments. I will lower your grade one-half of a letter grade for each day it is late. That is, if the assignment is due on Tuesday and you complete it on Wednesday, the highest grade you can make is a B+. If you complete it on Thursday, the highest grade you can make is a B-. And so forth.
- The only acceptable excuses for not completing an assignment on time are illness or family emergency. If either circumstance arises, I will give you extra time, but **only** if you (1) communicate with me **before** the assignment is due, and (2) provide documentation of the circumstance. You **must** do both of these things in order to avoid penalties for a late assignment. Judging from my own experiences and those of my colleagues, having a grandchild at GW is incredibly hazardous to your health. Thus, I must verify even deaths in the family. Better yet, you may communicate directly with the Dean of Students and that office can notify faculty of your absence.
- There are no opportunities to re-do assignments or to do extra-credit work in this course.
- I do not “curve” grades. At the end of the semester, I will calculate your grade as described above and then round to the nearest whole number (e.g., an 86.5 becomes an 87). That grade becomes your final grade. I will not increase any person’s grade solely to change their letter grade. So if you make an 89.4, you will make a B+, not an A-. No amount of pleading will change this outcome. Particularly common and ineffective are pleas claiming that your grade in this class will cause you to lose a scholarship, prevent you from attending the graduate or professional school of your choice, or lead to some other unfortunate, but unlikely, consequence.

**Academic dishonesty.** In the Code of Academic Integrity, the University defines academic dishonesty as “cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or extension on a test, quiz, or assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two different courses without the prior permission of faculty members. By accepting this syllabus and participating in the course, you have agreed to abide by this Code. Students who violate the Code are subject to disciplinary penalties, including failure on the assignment in question, failure in the course, and other penalties imposed by the University. See: <http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/index.html>

**Medical needs, illnesses, and other emergencies.** As noted above, if a medical need will result in your missing or completing assignments, please communicate with me. I am willing to be accommodating but communication and documentation is necessary.

**Special needs.** George Washington University provides appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. To determine if you qualify, contact the Disability Support Services at (202) 994-8250 (V/TDD). If they certify your needs, I will work with you to make arrangements.

**Religious holy day observance.** If an assignment or exam is due on a day when you are observing a religious holy day, I will work with you to find an acceptable alternative time to complete the assignment.

## Course Plan

### **PART 1: FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT**

<b>I. Introduction: A Vocabulary for Understanding Politics</b>	<b>Sept. 2, 4</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KJ, chapter 1.</li> </ul>	
<b>II. The Constitutional Settlement</b>	<b>Sept. 9, 11</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Constitution of the United States of America (in KJ, Appendix 3 pp. 594-603).</li> <li>• KJ, chapter 2.</li> <li>• PP, chapter 2 (Roche, <i>Federalist</i> 10 and 51, and Burns).</li> </ul>	
<b>III. Federalism</b>	<b>Sept. 16, 18</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KJ, chapter 3.</li> <li>• PP, chapter 3 (Buchanan and Kettl).</li> </ul>	
<b>IV. Developments in Equality</b>	<b>Sept. 23</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KJ, chapter 4.</li> <li>• PP, chapter 4 (Lee reading).</li> </ul>	
<b>PAPER #1 DUE IN CLASS</b>	<b>Sept. 25</b>
<b>V. Developments in Liberty</b>	<b>Sept. 25, 30</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KJ, chapter 5.</li> <li>• PP, chapter 5 (Rosenberg, Epstein et al., and the two Supreme Court cases).</li> </ul>	
<b>EXAM #1</b>	<b>Oct. 2</b>
<b>PART 2: INFLUENCING GOVERNMENT</b>	
<b>VI. Public Opinion</b>	<b>Oct. 7, 9</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KJ, chapter 10.</li> <li>• PP, chapter 10 (Asher and Fiorina readings).</li> </ul>	
<b>VII. The Media</b>	<b>Oct. 14, 16</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KJ, chapter 14.</li> </ul>	

- Sears, David O., and Richard Kosterman. 1994. "Political Persuasion." In Sharon Shavitt & Timothy C. Brock (eds.), *Persuasion: Psychological Insights and Perspectives*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon. pp. 251-278.
- Zaller, John. 2001. "Monica Lewinsky and the Mainsprings of American Politics." In W. Lance Bennett and Robert M. Entman (eds.), *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press. pp. 252-278.

### **VIII. Campaigns and Elections**

**Oct. 21, 23**

- KJ, chapter 11.
- PP, chapter 11 (Popkin reading) and chapter 12 (Bartels reading).
- Stimson, James. 2004. *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 4 ("The Great Horse Race: Finding Meaning in Presidential Campaigns").

### **IX. Political Parties**

**Oct. 28**

- KJ, chapter 12.
- PP, chapter 12 (Aldrich and Valley readings).

### **X. Interest Groups**

**Oct. 30**

- KJ, chapter 13.
- PP, chapter 13 (Schattschneider, Wright, and Vaida and Caruso readings).

### **EXAM #2 (& ELECTION DAY)**

**Nov. 4**

## **PART 3: INSTITUTIONAL CONFLICT & COOPERATION**

### **XI. The Congress**

**Nov. 6, 11, 13**

- KJ, chapter 6.
- PP, chapter 6 (Fenno, Mayhew, and Smith readings).

### **XII. The Presidency**

**Nov. 18, 20**

- KJ, chapter 7.
- PP, chapter 7 (Neustadt, Kernell, and Baum and Kernell readings).

### **PAPER #2 DUE IN CLASS**

**Nov. 20**

**XIII. The Bureaucracy****Nov. 25**

- KJ, chapter 8.
- PP, chapter 8 (Wilson, Moe, and Singer readings).

**XIV. The Judiciary****Dec. 1, 4**

- KJ, chapter 9.
- PP, chapter 9 (all readings).

**EXAM #3****TBD**