

Political Science 358: Political Strategy

Spring 2015

Professor Justin Buchler

[Justin.Buchler@case.edu](mailto:Justin.Buchler@case.edu)

220 Mather House

368-2646

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 2-3 or any time my door is open

**Description**

The objective of this course is to provide a general overview of strategic behavior in politics. In one sense, this is a “how-to” course that covers a broad range of political activities, but the primary objective is to link practical issues with theories of politics in order to help you understand why events happen the way they do. The focus of the course will be on strategy in American politics, but the general concepts and methods will be applicable to a wide range of situations. Also note that the approach of this course is completely divorced from all normative concerns: for the purposes of this course, “good” and “evil” do not exist-- only success or failure. Readings will range from classics like Machiavelli’s The Prince to modern studies of Congress, the Presidency and interest groups.

**Requirements**

This course will cover one book per week. Most of these books use a series of narratives in order to make their points, but a few are long, and a few are difficult. However, at the end of each topic, I will give you some direction about the next week’s discussion in order to guide your reading, which should improve the quality of our discussions and make your lives a bit easier. I expect you to do the readings, and 25% of your course grade will be based on participation in class discussions.

This is a seminar. Each Monday, we will begin class by having each student raise a comment, question, or issue about the readings. The rest of the class will be given the opportunity to respond, and we will move on.

Wednesday sessions will be based around student presentations. Beginning on 2/4, Wednesday sessions will proceed as follows. First, at least one student will make a roughly 10 minute presentation. Consider the following suggestions for the direction your presentations may take: 1) Provide additional comments supporting an important claim from the week’s course materials. 2) Provide a *counterargument* to an important claim from the week’s course materials. 3) Provide either modern or historical context to understand some aspect of the week’s materials. These are merely broad suggestions, though, and as long as a presentation is directly related to the topic of the week and makes a coherent point, that will be fine. Please look over the syllabus and decide which topics are of most interest to you. Each student will make 3 presentations throughout the semester, and students will sign up for dates in advance. Presentations will be factored into course participation grades.

The remaining 75% will be based on a series of three papers (25% each). Each paper will be a critique of a political figure’s behavior in a specific instance *within the previous month*. Each paper will have two sections: (1) a brief summary of what the political figure did, and (2) an

argument about whether or not the figure's tactics were appropriate, and why. At some point in this second section, you must apply concepts from the course. The first section can be as long as is necessary. The second section must be no longer than 1000 words.

These papers will be due on 2/25, 3/25 and 4/27.

### **Attendance**

Attendance is required. You may miss three sessions. Each absence beyond that will result in a three percentage point deduction from your course grade. That does not mean three absences plus doctor's notes or whatever else seems reasonable to you. That means three total. At some point, you may be tempted to ask the following: "I have to miss class on \_\_ because \_\_\_\_. Will that count as one of my excused absences?" The answer is "yes." There is no need to ask. Attendance and participation are critical.

You are also expected to show up on time. I find it distracting and disrespectful when students walk in after class has begun. You may show up late once during the semester. Each time you show up late beyond that, one percentage point will be deducted from your course grade. The objective is not to punish you for being late. The objective is to get you to show up on time. If you have a class on the other side of campus just before our class, you need to speak with me about it at the beginning of the semester.

### **Classroom rules**

1: Check your ideology at the door. The classroom is not the place to preach. It is a place to keep an open mind.

2: Be respectful. Show up on time, pay attention, participate, and TURN OFF YOUR IPHONES/WHATEVER-OTHER-GIZMOS-THERE-ARE. If you fall asleep in class, five percentage points will be deducted from your course grade. You don't get any free passes on this. Drinking heavily caffeinated beverages during class is perfectly acceptable. (I can't teach an early class without coffee). If you don't think you can stay awake, it is also acceptable to say you aren't feeling well, and ask to be excused. Doing so will not count against your permitted absences.

### **I: Broad Theories**

In this section of the class, we will read some classics. These books address broad concepts and general types of strategies that will guide our analysis throughout the rest of the course.

1/12-1/14 INTRODUCTION

1/19 NO CLASS: MLK DAY

1/21 The Nature of Political Conflict  
Schattschneider, "The Contagiousness of Conflict," Chapter 1 from *A Semisovereign People*  
On Blackboard



#### **IV: How to manipulate officials-- circumventing democracy and other fun games**

In this section, we will explore the strategies interest groups use in order to affect policy. Influence for interest groups has two components: getting one's foot in the door, and then convincing office-holders to behave a certain way. Both of those components rely on the strategic use of information, and the book in this section presents one of the most prominent theories on the use of information by interest groups. Most people have extremely distorted views about the actual influence that interest groups have, and the way that they exert influence. We will approach this topic with an emphasis on what political scientists say about what really happens.

- 4/13            Information, Part I  
                  Hansen, Gaining Access
- 4/15            NO CLASS- PROFESSOR AT CONFERENCE
- 4/20-4/24     Information, Part II  
                  Wright, Interest Groups and Congress

#### **V: Wrap-up**

- 4/27            Concluding comments