

Political Science 358/458: Political Strategy, Fall 2007

Professor: Justin Buchler

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Office Hours: MWF 10:30-11:20 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 class, 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, and not only will you be required to participate in discussions, you will be required to lead discussions throughout the semester. Each time a book is introduced, the Monday session will be lead by one or more students (depending on the number of students enrolled). Students leading a discussion should come prepared with a few introductory comments, and a variety of questions for the class to debate. I will lead Wednesday discussions based on additional materials that I would like to cover. By 9 A.M. Friday mornings, students are required to email me additional discussion questions. I will lead Friday discussions and attempt to address the remaining issues that are of the greatest interest to the most students.

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 10/1, 11/5 and 12/7.

In addition to these requirements, graduate students will be required to complete an additional paper critiquing the argument of one of the books using some combination of alternatives found in the literature or collected data. For graduate students, this paper will count for 20% of the grade, as will each of the other components.

Attendance

Attendance is required. You may miss three sessions for any reason. Each absence beyond that will result in a two percentage point deduction from course participation grades. You are also expected to show up on time. One of my pet peeves is for students to walk in after the class has started. I find it distracting and disrespectful. 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

participation 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.

Falling asleep in class policy

My other pet peeve... There is NOTHING worse than falling asleep in class, and I have no tolerance at all for it. If I catch you sleeping, your course participation grade will be reduced by five points. You don't get any free passes on this. If you can't stay awake in class, don't come to class. Drinking heavily caffeinated beverages during class is perfectly acceptable. 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.

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 CELL PHONES.

I: Broad Theories

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

- 8/27 INTRODUCTION
- 8/29, 8/31 NO CLASS (I WILL BE AT A CONFERENCE)
- 9/3 NO CLASS-- LABOR DAY
- 9/5-9/7 The Classic...
Machiavelli, The Prince
- 9/10-9/14 Heresthetics-- strategic behavior in the modern era
Riker, The Art of Political Manipulation
- 9/17-9/21 Strategy in the international context
Schelling, The Strategy of Conflict

II: Winning elections-- how to manipulate the voters

Whether you want to run for office at some point (I know that describes some of you), become a political consultant, or just impress your friends with your punditry, this section will cover the fine art of gaming the system.

- 9/24-9/28 Presidential Elections
Jamieson, Packaging the Presidency
- 10/1-10/5 Congressional Elections
Kernell and Jacobson, Strategy and Choice in Congressional Elections
AVAILABLE ON-LINE

III: How to get what you want once in office

In this section, we will discuss the fine art of lying, cheating, and otherwise manipulating people into doing what you want in order to pass legislation. Since one's optimal strategy is dependent on position, we will discuss strategies for presidents, then strategies for members of

Congress. We will discuss how the rules and structure of government may be manipulated, how those rules may be changed for strategic purposes, and how the trade-off between short-term and long-term success can shape strategy.

- 10/8-10/12 Presidential policy-making I-- the traditional view
Neustadt, Presidential Power
- 10/15-10/19 Presidential policy-making II-- a brave, new world
Kernell, Going Public, chapters 1-3
- 10/22 FALL BREAK
- 10/24-10/26 Presidential policy-making III-- an unconventional strategy
Greenstein, The Hidden Hand Presidency
- 10/29-11/2 Congressional policy-making I-- the new rules of the game
Sinclair, Unorthodox Lawmaking, chapters 1-6
- 11/5-11/9 Congressional policy-making II-- the politics of stalemate
Gilmour, Strategic Disagreement

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.

- 11/12-11/16 Information, Part I
Hansen, Gaining Access
- 11/19-11/21 SPECIAL TOPIC: TBA
- 11/23 THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY
- 11/26-28 Information, Part II
Wright, Interest Groups and Congress
- 12/3-12/7 Wrap-up