

POSC109 THE US POLITICAL SYSTEM

Spring Semester 2015

Thwing 302

TTh 1:15-2:30pm

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COURSE OUTLINE AND REQUIREMENTS

POSC109, The US Political System, is an introduction to the US political system, with a focus on national governing institutions, constitutional constraints, and the impacts of mass participation and electoral democracy. The course focuses on the political and economic development and national construction of the United States. In so doing, this course considers fundamental national values such as liberty, equality, racism, and democracy, in terms of the impact of these values upon the construction of the nation and of their negotiation in practice across two centuries.

The course is divided into three major sections. The first focuses on civil society and the state, the mechanisms of national government elaborated in the Constitution and their relationship to the economic system, and constitutional citizen rights and liberties. In the second section of the course, we examine the relationship between state and citizen, and the ways in which political power achieves expression in a democratic state. We will consider public opinion, the role of the media, the formation of interest groups and political parties, and the means by which citizens organize to have an influence on governing officials. The third section of the course is devoted to an investigation of the three major branches of national government: the Congress, the Presidency, and the federal court system. The course concludes with a consideration of governance and democracy in contemporary U.S. politics.

Evaluation of student performance in this course will be based on the following criteria. First, students will complete two in-class examinations, the first of which accounts for 20 percent and the second of which accounts for 25 percent of the final course grade. Second, students will complete a final examination, which accounts for 30 percent of the course grade.

Third, students will complete a critical analysis paper, worth 15 percent of the final course grade. This paper requires students to read a scholarly political science article and to analyze it, using political science tools and insights concerning US national politics.

Finally, each student is expected to attend class and to be prepared for each class meeting by having read, in advance, the materials assigned for that day. Students should be prepared to discuss the material in detail in class every day. In addition, all students are expected to participate and to present themselves in class in a professional manner. Professionalism refers to adherence to standards of behavior and performance expected from political scientists. This includes, but is not limited to, courteous behavior in

class; attention to and respect for other speakers; engagement with the work at hand; and, of course, adherence to university standards of academic integrity. Informed class participation and professionalism are requirements of the course, and account for the remaining 10 percent of the final course grade.

Due dates for examinations and the short critical paper are indicated in the schedule, below. Please note that students are required to attend all classes and to complete all course assignments. Note as well that students are expected to be present in class for all scheduled exams, including the final examination.

Two book are required for this course, listed below, and are available for purchase in the University Bookstore (and elsewhere):

Theodore Lowi, Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere,
American Government: Power and Purpose (core 13th ed.)
Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry R. Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus*

Additional readings support the required books; these are extensive and provide a deeper understanding and analysis of facets of the US national political system. Additional readings are identified in the Schedule of Readings and Assignments, below, and are available through electronic journals on the Kelvin Smith Library website (<http://library.case.edu/ksl/>), or on the course Blackboard site.

Students are encouraged to read a daily national newspaper (e.g. the *Financial Times*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*).

There are also several excellent political science blogs that include a focus on US politics, such as *Mischiefs of Faction* (<http://mischiefsoffaction.blogspot.com/>), as well as the *Scholars' Strategy Network* (<http://www.scholarsstrategynetwork.org/>). Students may wish to read some of these blogs from time to time, for timely political science analysis and news related to US national politics.

Standards of professionalism and academic integrity are integral components of this course. Students are reminded that they are obliged to understand, to uphold, and to comply with the Academic Integrity Policy of the University. A copy of the Code may be found online at <http://students.case.edu/groups/aiboard/policy.html>.

Students who do not understand the Academic Integrity Policy after having read it should make an appointment to see me to discuss it; indeed, I welcome this discussion and encourage students to see me in advance of any assignment about which they have doubts or questions. It is a course requirement that students read the University's Academic Integrity Policy.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

January 13 **Introduction to the Course**

READ: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapter 1

January 15 READ: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapter 2 and the *Constitution of the United States*; the *Declaration of Independence* (http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html); and Schlozman, Verba and Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus*, Chapter 1.

January 20 **Civil Society and the State**

READ: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapter 3

January 22 **Liberty, Equality, and the Political Construction of State Institutions**

READ: George H. Sabine, “The Two Democratic Traditions,” *The Philosophical Review*, 61 (4), October 1952: 451-474 [available online through JSTOR]; and Schlozman, Verba and Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus*, Chapter 2.

REVIEW: *The Constitution of the United States*

January 27 READ: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapters 4 and 5

January 29 **Federalism and the Fragmentation of Political Powers**

READ: James Madison, *Federalist Paper #10*, in Lowi et al., *American Government*; and Lisa L. Miller, “The Representational Biases of Federalism: Scope and Bias in the Political Process, Revisited,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 5 (2), June 2007: 305-321 [available through e-journals].

REVIEW: *The Constitution of the United States*

RECOMMENDED: Richard Simeon and Beryl A. Radin, “Reflections on Comparing Federalisms: Canada and the United States,” *Publius*, 40 (3), 2010: 357-365 [available through e-journals].

February 3 **Politics and the National Economy**

READ: Schlozman, Verba and Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus*, Chapter 3; Jeffrey A. Winters and Benjamin I. Page, "Oligarchy in the United States?," *Perspectives on Politics*, 7 (4), 2009: 731-751 [available through e-journals].

February 5 DISCUSSION

February 10 **FIRST EXAMINATION**

February 12 **Democracy and Political Participation: Public Opinion, Social Movements, and Interest Groups**

READ: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapter 10; Keith G. Bentele and Erin E. O'Brien, "Jim Crow 2.0? Why States Consider and Adopt Restrictive Voting Access Policies," *Perspectives on Politics*, 11 (4), December 2013: 1088-1116 (available through e-journals).

REVIEW: James Madison, *Federalist Paper #10*, in Lowi et al., *American Government*

DISCUSSION: Are Madison's concerns about the mischiefs of faction relevant in contemporary US politics?

February 17 READ: Schlozman, Verba and Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus*, Chapters 5 and 9

February 19 **Structures of Participation and Representation: Interest Groups and Political Movements**

READ: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapter 13

February 24 READ: Dara Z. Strolovitch, "Do Interest Groups Represent the Disadvantaged? Advocacy at the Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender," *Journal of Politics*, 68 (4), 2006: 893-908 [available through e-journals]; and Schlozman, Verba and Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus*, Chapter 14

RECOMMENDED: Schlozman, Verba and Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus*, Chapter 11

February 26 **Structures of Participation and Representation: Political Parties and Elections**

READ: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapters 11 and 12

March 3 READ: John Aldrich, “The Invisible Primary and Its Effects on Democratic Choice,” *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 42 (1), January 2009: 33-38; Todd Donovan and Rob Hunsaker, “Beyond Expectations: Effects of Early Elections in the US Presidential Nomination Contests,” *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 42 (1), January 2009: 45-52 [available through e-journals].

March 5 DISCUSSION

SHORT CRITICAL PAPERS DUE IN CLASS

March 9-13 SPRING BREAK

March 17 **Congress: Legislating, Representing, Deliberating**

READ: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapter 6

REVIEW: The Constitution of the United States

March 19 READ: Jamie L. Carson et al., “The Electoral Costs of Party Loyalty in Congress,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 54 (3), July 2010: 598-616; and David R. Jones, “Partisan Polarization and Congressional Accountability in House Elections,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 54 (2), April 2010: 323-337 [both available through e-journals].

March 24 READ: Kathryn Pearson, “Demographic Change and the Future of Congress,” *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 43 (2), April 2010: 235-238 [available through e-journals].

March 24 **Congressional Legislation, Congressional Gridlock**

READ: Sarah Binder, “The Dynamics of Legislative Gridlock, 1947-1996,” *American Political Science Review*, 93 (3), September 1999: 519-533 [available through e-journals]; and Alessandra Cassella et al., “A Transparent Filibuster Reform” (<http://www.politico.com/story/2013/07/opinion-filibuster-reform-94567.html>).

DISCUSSION: **Should the filibuster be abolished?**

March 31 **SECOND EXAMINATION**

April 2 **Presidential Elections: Campaign Finance and Media**

READ: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapter 14; Audrey A. Haynes and Brian Pitts, "Making an Impression: New Media in the 2008 Presidential Nomination Campaigns," *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 42 (1), January 2009: 53-58 [available through e-journals].

RECOMMENDED: Gabriel S. Lenz and Chappell Lawson, "Looking the Part: Television Leads Less Informed Citizens to Vote Based on Candidates' Appearance," *American Journal of Political Science*, 55 (3), July 2011: 574-589 [available through e-journals].

April 7 **The Presidency and Executive Powers**

READ: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapter 7

REVIEW: The Constitution of the United States

April 9 **Executive Power and Executive Orders**

READ: Kenneth R. Mayer, "Executive Orders and Presidential Power," *Journal of Politics*, 61 (2), May, 1999: 445-466; David P. Auerswald and Peter F. Cowhey, "Ballotbox Diplomacy: The War Powers Resolution and the Use of Force," *International Studies Quarterly*, 41 (3), September 1997 [available online at JSTOR]; and *The War Powers Resolution* [available at http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/warpower.asp] and *Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002* [available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-107publ243/html/PLAW-107publ243.htm>]

RECOMMENDED: Charlie Savage, "Clock Ticking on War Powers Resolution," *New York Times*, April 1, 2011, at <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/04/01/clock-ticking-on-war-powers-resolution/>

DISCUSSION: **Do executive orders exceed presidential authority?**

April 14 **The Supreme Court and the Federal Court System: “Equal Justice Under Law”**

READ: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapter 9

REVIEW: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapters 4 and 5

April 16 *The Supreme Court: Home to America’s Highest Court* (<http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/297213-1>) [PROFESSOR ATTENDING MIDWEST POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION MEETINGS]

April 21 READ: Peter Enns and Patrick Wohlfarther, “The Swing Justice,” *Journal of Politics*, forthcoming [http://falcon.arts.cornell.edu/pe52/SwingJustice_JOP_Fin.pdf]; Linda Greenhouse, “Justices on the Job,” July 24, 2013 (http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/07/24/justices-on-the-job/?_r=0); and Jonathan Bernstein, “Ruth Bader Ginsburg Must Go,” *Salon*, March 30, 2013 (http://www.salon.com/2013/03/30/ruth_bader_ginsburg_must_go/).

DISCUSSION: **Should Supreme Court Justices be term-limited?**

April 23 **Conclusion to the Course: How Democratic Is the US Political System?**

READ: Robert Dahl, *How Democratic Is the American Constitution?*, Chapters 1, 2, and 3 [available on Blackboard].

RECOMMENDED: Jeffrey A. Winters and Benjamin I. Page, “Oligarchy in the United States?,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 7 (4), 2009: 731-751 [available through e-journals]; and Schlozman, Verba and Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus*, Chapter 18.

DISCUSSION: **Does the US need a new constitutional convention?**

FINAL EXAMINATION: MONDAY, MAY 4, 12:30PM - 3:30PM