

Case Western Reserve University
POSC 109: The American Political System
Spring 2013
Monday, Wednesday, Friday in Clark Hall #302
3:00pm – 3:50pm
Instructor: Mark Major
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Office Hours: By Appointment (Mather #09)

Course Description: The aim of this course is to understand the nuts and bolts of the US national political structure including federalism, the executive, legislative and judiciary. We will also examine relations between formal and informal institutions, organizations, and actors that inform, and is informed by, the American political system. More importantly, the goal is to understand why these specific arrangements exist as they do. Politics is fundamentally about power and this course will critically examine the distribution of power in the American political system.

Course Requirements:

A. Class participation – 10 pts.

It is extremely important to be prepared for class. The quality of the course is dependent on the quality of your preparation and engagement. You are expected to complete the assigned readings and take part in class discussions. Attendance is expected. I reserve the right to call on you to lead class discussion. In addition to class discussion, you are required to bring a news item to every class that is relevant to the American political system and report on it every Friday. If you wish not to print an article, then you may email it to me but it must be before class no later than 2:30pm. *I will not accept late submissions.* Please note: Much of the class discussions will be informal and heated as we will be engaging topics that affect our daily lives. However, this exempts no one (instructor included) from civility. Also, please turn off your cell phones/electronic devices before entering class and please refrain from texting. If you use a computer then please refrain from browsing the Internet as it is distracting to your classmates.

B. Two Exams – 50pts. (Each exam worth 25 pts.)

Exams will consist of short answer questions and multiple-choice. Exam #1 will be held in class **Friday, March 8th** and Exam #2 will be held in class **Friday, May 3rd**. Please plan accordingly.

C. Policy Analysis Paper – 30 pts. Detailed instructions are forthcoming on Blackboard.

D. Civic Engagement – 10 pts.

Political participation is habit forming so start young! You are required to participate in the political system (local/state/national) *that goes beyond the act of voting*. To receive full credit, you must submit a one to two-page summary of your participation. This write-up must include a description of the event/act/issue, why you chose this particular form of participation, and any background information on the policy issues, political institutions, and political actors that were involved in the group/event/letter. The paper is due anytime during the semester but no later than Friday, May 3rd.

Book Requirement:

Robert A. Dahl, *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* 2nd ed. (Yale University Press, 2003). However, this is not the sole reading requirement. Additional readings are found on Blackboard: blackboard.case.edu

Highly Recommended: Daily reading (with the exception of Sunday- too expensive) of one of the following: *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*. Also highly recommended is *The Onion*.

Schedule

Introduction

WEEK 1 (JAN MON 14, WED 16, FRI 18)

- 1) Introduction and Syllabus

Foundations of American Political Development

WEEK 2 (MON 21-*NO CLASS*, WED 23, FRI 25)

- 1) Alpheus T. Mason, "America's Political Heritage: Revolution and Free Government"
- 2) "Declaration of Independence" available online at http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html
- 3) Richard Beeman, "The Revolutionary Origins of the American Constitution"
- 4) Richard Beeman, "America Struggles to Achieve Independence, Liberty, and Union"

Foundations (cont'd)

WEEK 3 (MON 28, WED 30, FEB FRI 1)

- 1) Richard Beeman, "The Constitutional Convention of 1787: A Revolution in Government"
- 2) Richard Beeman, "The Contest Over Ratification: America's First National Referendum"
- 3) *Robert Dahl, "Introduction: Fundamental Questions"

Federalism

WEEK 4 (MON 4, WED 6, FRI 8)

- 1) Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle, "Ch. 3: The Constitutional Framework: Federalism and the Separation of Powers"
- 2) Lisa L. Miller, "The Representational Biases of Federalism"
- 3) *Dahl, "Ch. 2: What the Framers Couldn't Know"

Legislative

WEEK 5 (MON 11, WED 13, FRI 15)

- 1) *Dahl, "Ch. 3: The Constitution as a Model"
- 2) Gordon S. Wood, "The Federalists and the Anti-Federalists on Representative Government"
- 3) Ross K. Baker, "Ch. 2: Politics of Scale: The Size Difference"
- 4) Richard Fox and Jennifer Lawless, "Gender and the Future of Electoral Politics"

Legislative (cont'd)

WEEK 6 (MON 18, WED 20, FRI 22)

- 1) Jacob S. Hacker, "The Road to Somewhere: Why Health Reform Happened"
- 2) Gregory Koger, "The Filibuster Then and Now: Civil Rights in the 1960s and Financial Regulation, 2009-2010"
- 3) Nolan McCarty, "The Policy Effects of Political Polarization"

Legislative (Cont'd)

WEEK 7 (MON 25, WED 27, MARCH FRI 1)

- 1) APSA Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy "American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality" (2004)
- 2) Norman Ornstein and Thomas Mann, "When Congress Checks Out"
- 3) William Howell and Jon Pevehouse, "When Congress Stops Wars"

Exam #1

WEEK 8 (MON 4, WED 6, FRI 8)

Exam #1 on Friday, March 8th

WEEK 9 **SPRING BREAK**

Executive

WEEK 10 (MON 18, WED 20, FRI 22-**Policy Analysis Topic Due Today**)

- 1) D. Jason Berggren, "Two Parties, Two Nominees, Two Paths to Winning a Presidential Nomination, 1972-2004"
 - 2) *Dahl, "Ch. 4: Electing the President"
 - 3) Robert Dahl, "The Myth of the Presidential Mandate"
- Movie: *West Wing*

Executive (Cont'd)

WEEK 11 (MON 25, WED 27, FRI 29)

- 1) Sanford Levinson, "Poison Pen: The Case Against the Veto" *The New Republic* available online at http://www.utexas.edu/law/news/2006/tnr_100906.pdf
 - 2) William G. Howell, "Unilateral Powers: A Brief Overview"
 - 3) Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle, "The Executive Branch: Bureaucracy in a Democracy"
 - 4) Jeffrey Tulis, "Impeachment in the Constitutional Order"
- Movie: *Obama's Deal*

Judiciary

WEEK 12 (APRIL MON 1, WED 3, FRI 5)

- 1) Ross Baker, "It All Started With Marbury"
 - 2) Richard Beeman, "Supreme Court Decisions That Have Shaped America's Constitutional History"
 - 3) Sarah Binder, "Advice and Consent in the 'Slow' Senate"
- Movie: *The Supreme Court: Home to America's Highest Court*

Judiciary (cont'd)

WEEK 13 (MON 8, WED 10, FRI 12)

- 1) Geoffrey R. Stone "Our Fill-in-the-Blank Constitution" available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/14/opinion/14stone.html>
- 2) James Grant "The Rise of Juristocracy"
- 3) Annabelle Lever, "Democracy and Judicial Review: Are they Really Incompatible?"

Constitutional system reconsidered

WEEK 14 (MON 15, WED 17, FRI 19)

- 1) *Dahl, "Ch. 5: How Well Does the Constitutional System Perform?"
- 2) *Dahl, "Ch. 6: Why Not a More Democratic Constitution?"
- 3) *Dahl, "Ch. 7: Some Reflections on the Prospects for a More Democratic Constitution"
- 4) *Dahl, "Ch. 8: Further Reflections"

News Media

WEEK 15 (MON 22, WED 24, FRI 26)

- 1) Jeffrey Cohen, "If the News is So Bad, Why Are Presidential Polls So High? Presidents, the News Media, and the Mass Public in an Era of New Media"
 - 2) Markus Prior, "News v. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout"
 - 3) Paul Starr, "Goodbye to the Age of Newspapers (Hello to a New Era of Corruption)"
- Movie: *War Made Easy*

Exam #2

WEEK 16 (MON 29, MAY WED 1-**NO CLASS**, FRI 3-FINAL)

Exam #2 and Policy Research Paper and, if applicable, Civic Engagement Due Friday, May 3rd.