

Case Western Reserve University  
**The American Political System**  
POSC 109: (9862) – Fall 2012  
Class Meeting: Tuesday and Thursday, 2:45pm – 4:00pm, Sears #435  
Instructor: Mark Major  
Email: **Mark.Major@case.edu**  
Office Hours: Mather House #9 Tuesday and Thursday  
10am – 11:15am and 1:15pm – 2:15pm  
(It is best if you email me before your visit)

**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. There will also be four pop quizzes/assignments. I will count the top three scores. 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. Exam #1 will be held in class **Thursday, October 11<sup>th</sup>** and Exam #2 will be held in class **Tuesday, December 11<sup>th</sup>**. Please plan accordingly.

C. Policy Analysis Paper – 30 pts.

Detailed instructions are forthcoming.

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 Tuesday, December 11<sup>th</sup>.

**Book Requirement:**

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

Tuesday, August 28<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, Aug. 30<sup>th</sup>

1) Introduction and Syllabus

## **Foundations of American Political Development**

Tuesday, September 4<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, Sept. 6<sup>th</sup>

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](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"

5) \*Robert Dahl, "Introduction: Fundamental Questions"

## **Foundations (cont'd)**

Tuesday, Sept. 11<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, Sept. 13<sup>th</sup>

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) \*Dahl, "Ch. 2: What the Framers Couldn't Know"

4) Richard Beeman, "Establishing Government Under the Constitution, 1789-1801"

## **Political Economic Structure**

Tuesday, Sept. 18<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, Sept. 20<sup>th</sup>

1) Ira Katznelson, Mark Kesselman, and Alan Draper, "Capitalism and Democracy"

2) Ira Katznelson, Mark Kesselman, and Alan Draper, "The History of American Political Economy"

3) Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle, "Ch. 3: The Constitutional Framework: Federalism and the Separation of Powers"

4) Lisa L. Miller, "The Representational Biases of Federalism"

## **Legislative**

Tuesday, Sept. 25<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, Sept. 27<sup>th</sup>

1) Mann and Ornstein, "The First Branch of Government: Theory and Practice"

2) \*Dahl, "Ch. 3: The Constitution as a Model"

3) Gordon S. Wood, "The Federalists and the Anti-Federalists on Representative Government"

4) Ross K. Baker, "Ch. 2: Politics of Scale: The Size Difference"

5) Richard Fox and Jennifer Lawless, "Gender and the Future of Electoral Politics"

*Recommended:* "The Unpolitical Animal: How Political Science Understands Voters" available online at

**[http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/08/30/040830crat\\_atlarge](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/08/30/040830crat_atlarge)**

## **Legislative (cont'd)**

Tuesday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>

Thursday, Oct. 4<sup>th</sup>

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"

4) Norman Ornstein and Thomas Mann, "When Congress Checks Out"

- 5) William Howell and Jon Pevehouse, "When Congress Stops Wars"
- 6) Jeffrey Tulis, "Impeachment in the Constitutional Order"

### **Exam #1**

Tuesday, Oct. 9<sup>th</sup> – Review session

Thursday, Oct. 11<sup>th</sup> – **Exam #1**

### **Executive**

Tuesday, Oct. 16<sup>th</sup> – Policy analysis topic due today

Thursday, Oct. 18<sup>th</sup> – No class

- 1) Sidney Milkis and Michael Nelson, "Creating the Presidency"
- 2) D. Jason Berggren, "Two Parties, Two Nominees, Two Paths to Winning a Presidential Nomination, 1972-2004"
- 3) \*Dahl, "Ch. 4: Electing the President"
- 4) Robert Dahl, "The Myth of the Presidential Mandate"
- 5) Rebecca Berg, "Few Voters Truly Up for Grabs, Research Suggests" available online at [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/17/us/politics/pursuing-the-elusive-swing-voter.html?\\_r=1&hp](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/17/us/politics/pursuing-the-elusive-swing-voter.html?_r=1&hp)
- 6) Stanley Renshon and Stephen Skowronek, "Resolved, psychological character is a powerful predictor of presidential performance"
- 7) Movie: *West Wing*

### **Executive (cont'd)**

Tuesday, Oct. 23<sup>rd</sup> – No class

Thursday, Oct. 25<sup>th</sup>

- 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](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) David Gray Adler, "Presidential Warmaking: The Clinton Legacy"
- 5) Charlie Savage, Ch. 5: "Behind Closed Doors: Secrecy I"
- 6) Movie: *Obama's Deal*

### **Judiciary**

Tuesday, Oct. 30<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, November 1<sup>st</sup>

- 1) Ross Baker, "It All Started With Marbury"
- 2) Richard Beeman, "Supreme Court Decisions That Have Shaped America's Constitutional History"
- 3) David Yalof "The Presidency and the Judiciary"
- 4) Sarah Binder, "Advice and Consent in the 'Slow' Senate"
- 5) Emily Bazelon, "Answer the Questions, Judge!" available online at <http://www.slate.com/id/2123413/>
- 6) Movie: *The Supreme Court: Home to America's Highest Court*

### **Judiciary (cont'd)**

Tuesday, Nov. 6<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, Nov. 8<sup>th</sup>

- 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?"
- 4) Keith E. Whittington, "Preserving the 'Dignity and Influence of the Court': Political Supports for Judicial Review in the United States"

5) Paul Frymer, “Acting When Elected Officials Won’t: Federal Courts and Civil Rights Enforcement in US Labor Unions, 1935-85”

### **Constitution reconsidered**

Tuesday, Nov. 13<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, Nov. 15<sup>th</sup>

- 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”

### **Social Movements, Interest Groups, and Lobbying**

Tuesday, Nov. 20<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, Nov. 22<sup>nd</sup> – No class

- 1) Ira Katznelson, Mark Kesselman, and Alan Draper, “Social Movements and Interest Groups”
- 2) James A. Thruer, “Obama’s Battle with Lobbyists”
- 3) Melinda Burns, “K Street and the Status Quo” available online at <http://www.miller-mccune.com/magazines/magazine-feature-story-magazines/k-street-and-the-status-quo-20015/>

### **News Media**

Tuesday, Nov. 27<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, Nov. 29<sup>th</sup>

- 1) W. Lance Bennett, “News Content: Four Information Biases that Matter”
- 2) 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”
- 3) Markus Prior, “News v. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout”
- 4) Paul Starr, “Goodbye to the Age of Newspapers (Hello to a New Era of Corruption)”
- 5) John Geer, “The News Media and the Rise of Negativity in Presidential Campaigns”
- 6) Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Bruce Hardy, “Civil Engaged Argument and Why It Matters”
- 7) Movie: *War Made Easy*

### **Parties**

Tuesday, December 4<sup>th</sup>

Thursday, Dec. 6<sup>th</sup> – Review session

- 1) James Reichley, “Intention of the Founders: A Polity without Parties”
- 2) Jo Freeman, “The Political Culture of the Democratic and Republican Parties” available online at <http://www.jofreeman.com/polparties/polculture.htm>
- 3) Paul Frymer, Ch. 2 “Competitive Parties and the ‘Invisibility’ of Captured Groups”
- 4) Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus, Ch. 2: “Constraints on Third Parties”
- 5) Sidney M. Milkis, “The President and Political Parties”
- 6) Charles Homans, “The Party of Obama” available online at <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2010/1001.homans.html>

### **Exam #2 and Policy Research Paper**

Tuesday, Dec. 11<sup>th</sup> – Exam #2 and Policy Research Paper and, if applicable, Civic Engagement Due