

POSC 109
THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM
FALL 2012
(July 31 Version; Subject to Minor Changes)

Monday/Wednesday/Friday
9:30 a.m. – 10:20 a.m.
Sears 356
Office Hours MW 1:00 – 2:30 p.m.

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The purpose of this course is to provide a sophisticated overview of American political institutions. It is my version of an introductory American Government, or American Politics, course. Government and politics are not exactly the same topic, and the goal of the course is to help you learn about both.

Most such courses use a textbook, simply to make sure not too much important material is left out of an overview. In addition, textbooks offer themes that can be applied across the different institutions and processes of politics and government. The textbook by Bianco and Canon that I have assigned for this class does a pretty good job of that, but you will not be surprised to find that I, like any other professor, have my own ideas and *occasionally* will “teach against the text.” I also do research and analysis on some of the topics of this course. Therefore I have created a somewhat parallel text, consisting of articles I have written in the past or chapters I have devised specifically for this course. It provides further analysis of some topics covered in the textbook, and coverage of some aspects of American politics that do not receive as much attention in the textbook. Last but not least, I am assigning a few further readings that I believe are especially instructive and useful.

In order to understand the behavior and outputs of the American political system, you need to understand both the interests and attitudes represented in politics, and the opportunities and constraints created by structure. The American political system is an **interaction between political structures (“the system”) and political beliefs**. The rules for making decisions (the system) structure whose beliefs affect what the government does, how much. The structures also influence beliefs, because they help determine which ideas get attention and they also affect beliefs about government itself. A system designed to frustrate action may frustrate citizens as well. But beliefs also influence structure, because one thing that political combatants do is try to change the rules to favor their sides. The Constitution itself is an example of that kind of politics.

In the study of politics there are no natural laws. There are general patterns, more like probability statements, which can be applied (somewhat) to understand particular cases. So the main task of a course is to give students the understanding that they can use to try to make sense of particular cases. Throughout this class, I will refer to two particular cases on which I do most of my own work: “health care reform” and the federal budget. I put the first of these in quotes because it means so many different things to different people that it is safest to refer to it as something people say, rather than something with a clear meaning. We will see that there are probably reasons to put “federal budget” in quotation marks also. You will be required to do your own case study of the relationship between politics and

government, by writing a paper about some federal agency or program that is large enough to receive significant attention within the federal budget process. I explain that paper more in the section below about course assignments.

In addition, we will think together throughout this course about a broader theme: how well the U.S. political system manages and structures conflict, and with what effects. Political systems exist to take the conflict that naturally exists in society and channel it in a constructive way. By “constructive” I mean a way that enables people to live together in complex societies in a way that meets some standard of decency and justice. This is made more difficult, naturally, by the fact that people disagree about what those standards might be. But in healthy systems the vast majority of people think the result meets their personal standards, even if they have different standards. We might call that compromise.

Yet systems break. Officially, the U.S. political system has continued since 1787. Unofficially, it collapsed in 1861 and had to be re-founded, with similar institutions but different meanings, after an extremely bloody war. Since then the U.S. has seemed much more stable than most other advanced industrial nations. It survived the Great Depression, in particular, without turning towards either fascism or communism.

Much of U.S. political science especially in the 1950s and 1960s, therefore, sought to identify the sources of stability that limited conflict in U.S. politics. Somehow, Americans managed to compromise and live together. Yet that may be coming to an end. Earlier this year two of the most senior “establishment” talking heads about U.S. politics, Tom Mann and Norm Ornstein, published a book titled, *It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided With the New Politics of Extremism*. Therefore one goal of this course is to build towards reading Mann and Ornstein's book, so that you will understand why they see the system as having changed in fundamental and scary ways; how that fits with standard interpretations of U.S. politics; and so whether the current situation is as worrisome as they believe.

COURSE READING MATERIAL

You should obtain two books for this course::

William T. Bianco and David T. Canon. *American Politics Today (2nd ed) Core Edition*. (That's the somewhat less expensive and bulky version). W.W. Norton: 2011.

Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, *It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided With the New Politics of Extremism*. Basic Books, 2012.

Other required readings will be posted on the course blackboard site. A few readings might be available on public websites. If there is student interest, I will prepare a reader consisting of the readings of which I am author or co-author.

GRADED ASSIGNMENTS

This course will have two kinds of written assignments.

The first will be a series of **response papers** about aspects of the reading. We will do these papers instead of having exams. There will be **four papers**. Each of the first three papers will count for 10 percent of your grade. Each of those should be between 900 and 1200 words long. The fourth and final paper will count for 20 percent of your grade. It should be between 1500 and 2000 words long. The papers total, therefore, will count for **fifty percent of your final grade**.

The second will be a **research paper, which you will complete in three stages** through the course of the class. Your task will be to study a national government program or agency and report about what the agency or program does, the degree of agreement or disagreement about funding it, and how outcomes are affected by each of the various aspects of the political process. Throughout this class, I will use the federal budget process to illustrate aspects of the political system – such as public opinion, interest groups, congressional procedures, party divisions, presidential leadership, and so on. Your report should do something similar – though you may find that some aspects of the process have little effect on your case. The project will count, overall, for **forty percent of your final grade**. Each of the first two stages will count for 10 percent of the grade; the final paper will count for 20 percent.

The final ten percent of your grade will be determined by class participation. The participation portion of the grade is meant to reward contributions to discussion and encourage class attendance. “Contributions” can easily include good questions, not just answers. Nor are students expected to hit the mark in everything they say – that’s my job, and even I may not manage it!

I understand that conflicts arise which may make it sensible not to attend class. For example, there may be religious obligations, which I understand fully because I am Jewish and both Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur conflict with this class this semester. I apologize for the fact that I will miss class on those days. Professor Buchler will teach on Sept 17; I am not sure about Sept 26. I also know that I need to be at a conferences on Aug 31 and Sept 21, so will miss those classes. I think I can’t cover August 31 because most of the rest of the department will be at the same conference (the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association). In addition to my regular office hours, I will schedule some extra time during which students who would like to come and talk about the readings assigned on days when I must miss class can come do so.

Students who need to miss class due to such conflicts – e.g. religion, sports teams, or conflict with other work – should let me know, in writing, and with documentation where appropriate. So, for example, if you have a team that is traveling, it is normal for coaches to provide notes explaining the fact. Conflict with other work does not mean, “I was behind in another class that I think is more important.” Managing your time so that doesn’t happen is part of your job. There are occasional situations, however, when a student needs to travel for research or a presentation, just like professors do. I would not want to interfere with that kind of opportunity. Please also inform me if you are ill. If you are sick enough to have to inform me that you missed class due to illness more than twice in a row, you should go to the health service, get looked at, and then bring me a note from them.

Although there are legitimate reasons to miss class, it's best to miss as little as possible. I will take attendance, and if a student misses more than nine sessions of class without proper explanation that can be a reason to reduce the participation grade.

No person can lose points by participating in class – unless they are abusive or disruptive. The participation portion could only lower your grade, compared to your performance on written work, if your attendance is poor. If your participation is good, that can be a reason to raise your average from your written work a bit, and so (sometimes) over the borderline between two letter grades.

Assignments for Essays

Essay 1, Sept 12. Do the five main sources in the reading so far – Madison, Schattschneider, Truman, the textbook, and the not-quite-textbook – view conflict the same way? Discuss two or three similarities or differences among the readings.

Essay 2, Oct 15. What should the role of parties be in American politics? Some things you might consider are:

What is the alternative to having decisions made in part as a conflict between parties? So, what would “nonpartisan” decision-making look like?

What is the relationship between the parties and the public? Do parties help represent public sentiment, misrepresent public sentiment, or is the question misguided?

If there is a problem, is it that parties are too strong, or that the particular form of the party system in the United States is in some way harmful?

Are you sure your complaint is not just that your side isn't winning?

Essay 3, Nov 9. The election on Tuesday had some effect on the partisan control of the House, Senate, and Presidency. How is that likely to affect policies about the federal budget? In answering this question it would be helpful to know something about the budget positions of the two parties and the campaigns. But you also should think about how presidents and the party balance in Congress influence budget decisions made by Congress.

Essay 4, Dec 7. Mann and Ornstein argue that the U.S. political system is in grave danger. Identify the key portions of their argument. How does their discussion fit with other arguments about the political system and conflict in this course? Do you share their fear or not? Explain your reasoning.

Research Paper

The purpose of this project is to learn about a program or agency (so something about what government does) as well as how the decisions are made that determine what, and how much, it does. I expect most students will choose an agency (e.g. NASA) rather than a program (e.g. earth observation spacecraft). There are some situations, however, where a program is so distinctive (such as Medicare, or the Medicare Prescription Drug Program) that it can be studied separately. Another way to put this is, there are situations where the program, not the agency, is the focus of attention. You have surely heard of Medicare, but have you ever heard of the CMS?

There will be two preliminary stages of this project, due on October 1 and November 5. The final version of the paper is due on December 17. The final paper should be between 2500 and 3500 words long. Further guidance is in the appendix, after the schedule of course readings.

COURSE PROCEDURES AND EXPECTATIONS

All written assignments will be penalized half a grade for each day they are late. Students who have a reason for delay that could be anticipated in advance must inform me in advance, if they wish to seek an exception to the penalty. Students who face unanticipated emergencies must document the emergency and inform me as soon as possible, if they wish to seek an exception. I will judge each case on its merits.

You must document all sources you use in writing your papers according to an accepted style guide. A good standard approach is in the Chicago Manual of Style (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), but any standard format will be fine for this class. Plagiarism of any form will be punished by referral to the appropriate university judicial proceedings, as well as by a failing grade in the assignment on which the plagiarism occurs. Plagiarism includes, according to the MLA Handbook (New York: MLA, 1988), two related activities: repeating “as your own someone else’s sentences, more or less verbatim,” and “paraphrasing another person’s argument as your own, and presenting another’s line of thinking as though it were your own.” Proper citation of sources will allow you to incorporate others’ analyses without committing plagiarism.

POSC 109 Fall 2012, Professor White **SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS**

PART I: Structures of Conflict

- August 27 **Introduction to the class.**
- August 29 **Analytic approaches.**
Joseph White with Christine Day and Charles Kegley, “Politics and Government”
- August 31 **No Class** – Professor White must attend American Political Science Association Conference
- Sept 3 **No Class** – Labor Day
- Sept 5 **Political Conflict and Cleavages**
Readings from E.E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People* (1960)
Preface, pp. vii-viii; Chapter 1, “The Contagiousness of Conflict,” pp. 1-19; Chapter 4, “The Displacement of Conflicts,” pages pp. 62-77.
Federalist Papers 10 and 51, pp. A16-A19 of Bianco and Canon
- Sept 7 **Foundations and Conflict**
Bianco and Canon Chapter 2, “The Constitution and the Founding”

- Sept 10 **Stability, Fragility, and Opposing Interests**
David B. Truman, "Group Politics and Representative Democracy," pp. 501-535 from *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion* (originally published 1951).
- Sept 12 **First Essay Due in Class**
Topic: Do the five main sources in the reading so far – Madison, Schattschneider, Truman, the textbook, and the not-quite-textbook – view conflict the same way? Discuss two or three similarities or differences among the readings.
- Sept 14 **The Federal Budget: Rules and Pressures**
Joseph White and Aaron Wildavsky, "Madisonian Budgeting, or Why the Process Is So Complicated," Chapter 1 in White and Wildavsky, *The Deficit and the Public Interest: The Search for Responsible Budgeting in the 1980s* (pp 1-17). Please note that some of the facts in this chapter are out of date, but the history and logic are as correct as they were when written.
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Policy Basics: Introduction to the Federal Budget Process." At <http://www.cbpp.org/files/3-7-03bud.pdf> (7pp)

PART II. Beliefs and Organized Beliefs

- Sept 17 **Public Opinion**
Bianco and Canon, Chapter 5, pp. 140-181.
Note: This is Rosh Hashanah, so Professor Buchler will be the instructor for this class. As he is the department's expert on public opinion, and teaching the public opinion course this semester, I am very glad he can fill in. If you must miss the class due to the religious holiday, please inform me in advance.

**Constitution Day Program on Intellectual Property Issues 4:30 today, Moot Court Room,
School of Law**

- Sept 19 **Ideological Divisions in American Politics**
Joseph White, "The Politics of Belief and U.S. Health Care Reform"
- Sept 21 **Elites, the Budget, and the Rules of the Game**
Joseph White and Aaron Wildavsky, "Public Authority and the Public Interest: What the 1980s Budget Battles Tell Us about the American State" *Journal of Theoretical Politics* (1:1) January, 1989. On Blackboard
More recent examples of commentary about the deficit from the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget and others; such as
http://crfb.org/sites/default/files/What_Needs_to_Come_Out_of_Debt_Ceiling_Negotiations.pdf
(cites to be supplied closer to the day of class)
Note: I will be delivering a paper overseas, so we may have a guest lecturer, or no class session.

Sept 24` **The Puzzling Role of Experts**
John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (2nd ed., 1995 & 2003): Chapter 6, “The Policy Primeval Soup,” pp. 116-144.

Sept 26 **Experts and Representation**
Joseph White, “The Politics of Ideas and the Politics of Representation: Elites, Expertise, Public Opinion and Health Policy.”
Note: This is Yom Kippur, so there will be either a guest speaker or no class session

Sept 28 **The Media**
Bianco and Canon Chapter 6, “The Media,” pp. 182-215

Oct 1 **Political Parties (1)**
Bianco and Canon, Chapter 7, pp. 216-256.

First Stage of Project Due: Identification of Agency and Report on Availability of Data

Oct 3 **Political Parties (2)**
Joseph White write-up, “Textbook Political Parties.”

Special Event, October 4, Jeffrey Cohen, Professor and Chair, Department of Political Science, Fordham University: The Presidency in a Partisan Era. 4:30 p.m.

Oct 5 **The Party Platforms**
Democratic and Republican party platforms. Available on the web.

Special Event, Friday Public Affairs Lunch, 12:30 p.m.: Jeffrey Cohen on Presidents and the Media

Oct 8 **Interest Groups**
Bianco and Canon, Chapter 9, pp. 306-341.

PART III: Decision-Making Processes

Oct 10 **Elections**
Bianco and Canon, Chapter 8, pp. 257-272

Oct 12 **Elections, continued**
Bianco and Canon, Chapter 8, pp. 272-305

Oct 15 **Second Essay Due in Class**
Topic: What should the role of parties be in American politics?

Oct 17 **Congress (1)**
Bianco and Canon, Chapter 10, pp. 342-385.

- Oct 19 **Congress (2)**
Continued discussion
- Oct 22 FALL BREAK**
- Oct 24 **Congress (3)**
White, “Textbook Congress”
- Oct 26 **Overview of the Presidency (1)**
White, “Textbook Presidency.”

**Special Event: Friday Public Affairs Lunch and Tribute to the Late Professor Alexander P. Lamis
Professor Frances E. Lee, University of Maryland: “Insecure Majorities: Congress and the
Permanent Campaign”**

- Oct 29 **Overview of the Presidency (2)**
Bianco and Canon, Chapter 11, pp. 386-417
- Oct 31 **The Presidential Budget**
White, “The President’s Budget vs. Congressional Budgeting: Institutionalizing the
Adversarial Presidency?” Chapter 10 in James A. Thurber ed., *Rivals for Power:
Presidential Congressional Relations 4th ed.* New York: Rowman and Littlefield 2009.
- Nov 2 **The Once or Future Administration and the Budget**
White, “From Ambition to Desperation on the Budget.” Chapter 11 in James A. Thurber
ed., *Obama in Office: The First Two Years.* Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2011

**Special Event: Political Science Department Election Forecasts. Friday Public Affairs Lunch
Discussion, Kelvin Smith Library Dampeer Room, November 2, 12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.**

- Nov 5 ***Second Stage of Project Due***
Class discussion about projects

**November 6: Political Science Department Election Night Party (or Wake, Depending on Your
View of the Results, if There are Results). Mather House 100, beginning 8 p.m..**

- Nov 7 **What Just Happened? Post-Election Discussion**
- Nov 9 ***Third Essay Due in Class***
Topic: The election on Tuesday had some effect on the partisan control of the House,
Senate, and Presidency. How is that likely to affect policies about the federal budget?
- Nov 12 **The Courts (1)**
Bianco and Canon, Chapter 13, pp. 452-494.

- Nov 14 **The Courts (2)**
White, “Textbook Judiciary.”
- Nov 16 **The Courts (3)**
(Continued)
- Nov 19 **Federalism**
Bianco and Canon, Chapter 3, pp. 62-97
- Nov 21 **Review Discussion**
- Nov 26 **Discussion of Mann and Ornstein *It’s Even Worse Than It Looks***
Students should at a minimum have completed reading Part 1 of the book.
- Nov 28 **Further Discussion of Mann and Ornstein**
Students certainly should have completed reading the book.
- Nov 30 **Civil Rights**
Bianco and Canon, Chapter 14, pp. 496-539
- Dec 3 **The Bureaucracy**
Bianco and Canon, Chapter 12, pp. 418-50.
- Dec 5 **Further Discussion on Bureaucracy**
We will talk mostly, I hope, about your agencies or programs
- Dec 7 ***Final Essay Due in Class***
Topic: Mann and Ornstein argue that the U.S. political system is in grave danger. Identify the key portions of their argument. How does their discussion fit with other arguments about the political system and conflict in this course? Do you share their fear or not? Explain your reasoning.
Closing Discussion: Who Governs?

Dec 17

Final Version of Research Paper due to Professor White by Noon. Hardcopy can be delivered to him in his office, Mather House 113; handed to the departmental administrative staff in Mather House 111; or left in his box in Mather House 110. Electronic copies can be e-mailed to joseph.white@case.edu

APPENDIX: Further Guidance on Research Papers

Choosing a topic

The agency must be one that is large enough (e.g. NASA) or controversial enough, (e.g. the National Endowment for the Humanities) to receive noticeable attention in the federal budget process. You might already know that you are interested in some program or agency. In that case, you just need to check to make sure that it is one on which you will be able to find information (next step).

If you do not have that kind of idea (or your ideas don't work out), you can go looking for topics in a variety of ways. One would be to look at the President's Budget, otherwise known as the *Budget of the United States Government*. You can find it at

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2013/assets/budget.pdf>

It organizes proposals by department and major agency. You probably don't want to do an entire department, but you could look within one of the departments to find an interesting agency. You could also look at the proposals that President Obama emphasized in the introductory chapters to find programs that sound interesting and are likely to be controversial.

Another approach would be to go to articles about the federal budget and appropriations processes in *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*. "CQ" over the course of the year tracks the progress of each of the twelve annual appropriations bills, reporting on the main controversies. It also reports on the politics of budget resolutions and reconciliation legislation. You would not have to look at many issues of CQ in order to run across budget stories, and they will mention particular agencies or programs. You can find CQ on the Kelvin Smith Library website in the "research databases" section. You could also walk into the library, go to the reference section, and take a year's edition of the *CQ Almanac* off the shelf. The Almanac is a summary of what happened each year, basically condensing what CQ covered over the previous 52 weeks, with an emphasis on how it all turned out and what the biggest fights were about. So you could just browse in the almanac. Finally, you could look at the two parties' 2012 election platforms. If an agency or program is explicitly mentioned, it might be worth a further look.

Gathering information

The idea is to find a topic that will enable you to get a sense of the range of questions that can be asked about things government does. These questions range from who they serve (and who wants to serve that constituency) and disagreements about whether something is an appropriate activity for government, to matters of administrative efficiency and effectiveness. But these are not necessarily separate questions, as you will find if you look at student loan programs. Democrats think it is more effective and efficient to have the government loan the money directly, rather than guarantee profits to private financial institutions; Republicans disagree. So who benefits and what government should do can involve judgments of what is most efficient.

You need a topic on which you can get budget information. As we will discuss in our coverage of the budget, there are two kinds of programs: entitlements and discretionary spending. For entitlement programs, you may find information on the agency website, or in the President's budget, or reports from

the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), or by searching for the program on FDsys, or from CQ. Most programs are discretionary, and receive their funding through the annual appropriations process, which is run (if it is functioning at all) by the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations. So for discretionary spending programs the best sources of information are the budget proposals made by the agencies, and the hearings held by the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations. If you choose a program you need to know the agency that administers it. So you will be able to look up an agency and see if it posts its budget proposal, sometimes known as “committee justifications” or “CJs”, on its website. If it receives an annual appropriation, you should also check to see if the House (most likely) or Senate has considered it in an appropriations committee hearing.

The ideal topic would be an agency or program within an agency for which there are hearings in the House both for Fiscal Year 2011 (so under the Democrats) and fiscal year 2012 (so under the Republicans). That would enable you to see both similarities (there should be some) and differences. Appropriations hearings, like most congressional hearings, are normally conducted by subcommittees. Both House and Senate Appropriations have 12 subcommittees, with parallel jurisdictions. But the House holds a lot more hearings.

You can find appropriations hearings by going to the Government Printing Office (GPO) website called FDsys: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/> . Then:

In the “Featured Collections” tab on the right, click on “Congressional Committee Hearings.”

On the next page, in the second paragraph of text, click on “congressional committee browse page.”

Then click on the committee you choose (presumably House or Senate Appropriations, though there might be separate hearings for entitlement programs).

On the next page, click “Committee Hearings Before Subcommittees.”

Next pick your fiscal year. Fiscal Year 2012 is spending from October 1, 2011 to Sept 30, 2012; so the hearings were earlier in 2011. Fiscal Year 2011 was October 1, 2010 through Sept 30, 2011; so the hearings were earlier in 2010.

Then choose the subcommittee that has jurisdiction over your program or agency, and start browsing the hearings to see if it was covered.

You also, of course, can find all sorts of information on the internet. The problem is figuring out which of this information is any good, or what it means. There are lots of “think tanks” and interest groups that advocate for or against programs. You can learn a lot about the politics of a program or agency by finding this kind of information. But it’s important to know, for example, that the Heritage Foundation is closely tied to the Republican Party; while the Campaign for America’s Future or Center on Budget and Policy Priorities are much more likely to get attention from the Democrats.

Another important source is the mainline press – *CQ* and the big national newspapers. You should certainly check the CQ database from 2010 on to see if the agency and program in which you are interested turn up. The three most important newspapers are the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*,

and *Washington Post*. If you go to the KSL website, you will see a tab for “research tools” on the left. If you click that tab, you will find an option for newspapers. Click on that and among your options will be Lexis/Nexis and *Wall Street Journal*. You can pick up the *Post* and *Times* through Lexis/Nexis. Select each of those newspapers separately within the list of sources Lexis/Nexis offers you. Within the “newspapers” option for “research tools,” the tab for the *Wall Street Journal* is tricky. When you click it, you actually will be sent to ProQuest, and you need to then go to the “W”s within ProQuest to find the *Journal*.

Once you are searching for stories within newspapers, you should try both the name of your program (say, “Food Stamps” or “Space Station”) and the name of your agency (say, “Food and Nutrition Service” or “NASA”). If you find a lot, this means you need some way to select. You could, of course, read all and make a judgment. In some case there will be too many for you to do that. If there are, say, 200 for your program/agency, here are some guidelines for selecting:

- * If it is listed as a blog story, it’s not as important as a print story.
- * If it’s in Section A or Page 1 of a section (and especially Page 1 of Section A!) it should have priority.
- * An editorial in the *Times*, *Post*, or *Journal* is important because it is a clear example of “elite media” purposeful attention to an issue.
- * Longer articles constitute more attention than shorter ones. Lexis/Nexis lists article length.

Last but not least, the most obvious thing to ask about a program or agency is if the parties are emphasizing it in the election campaign – especially if they take different positions. So you should look at the party platforms for reference to either the program, agency, or general policy area (e.g., “health care”). And you certainly can search the candidates’ websites!

Stages of the Project

Stage 1, Oct 1. This is a rather complex paper, and you could get into trouble if you wait too long to get started. So the first installment is due in class on October 1, at the beginning of sixth week.

Your paper should identify your program and agency, describe why you are interested in the topic, summarize what the program or agency appears to do, and report how long it has existed (not so easy to say in some cases; give the best account you can), and how and how much it is funded.

Your paper should also report on the availability of source materials – a preliminary biography. This should include whether you have been able to find the agency’s budget submissions (and the weblink); to what extent it is discussed in President Obama’s 2013 budget; whether you have found hearings (as well as the link and how extensive the hearing is); whether positions are taken in the party platforms or candidate websites; and what you have found in the elite press and from interest groups or think tanks.

Aside from enabling you to get started on the project, this stage will allow me (and you) to see if the project is do-able. The last thing we would want is for you to choose a topic and then not be able to get information. I want to be able to say, “hmm, maybe we should change this” at the beginning of October, if necessary, rather than in November.

Stage 2, Nov 5: This should be an overview of the controversies and conflicts that exist about this agency or program. You should find conflicts about the budget if they exist, but there may be other issues as well. If there is not much conflict that too is a story (but probably a shorter one). I suspect that some conflict can be found about almost anything. This report should be a minimum of 900 words, and as long as you believe is necessary to report what you have found.

Final Paper, December 17 at Noon. This paper should report the recent budgetary history of the agency or program, and describe and explain the political process that has shaped the funding. Among the things you might logically address are:

Is this agency or program a matter of partisan dispute?

Is there much controversy at all? If there is controversy, is it over basic or less fundamental aspects of the agency's mission? To what extent can it be viewed as based on specialized concerns, as opposed to general ideology?

Which seems more influential, the president or Congress? (Not so easy to tell, by the way)

Does public opinion matter?

Which interest groups appear to matter, how?

Your final paper should be between 2500 and 3500 words long.