

Political Science 220-0
American Government and Politics

Spring 2006
2:00 - 3:20 T-TH
107 Harris Hall

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General Synopsis:

While this course provides an introduction to American politics, it will go beyond a simple survey of the civics, law, and history of the American political system. Although we will examine each of these topics in due course, our focus will be on understanding the *science* of politics. We will examine how various agents and institutions inside and outside of government interact with each other. More specifically, we will emphasize goal-directed behavior on the part of political agents, who operate within an institutional setting and an historical context. That is, voters, representatives, judges, interest groups, etc. all behave purposively; each of these actors has certain goals to achieve through the political process, and each pursues strategies that they believe will lead to their desired policy outcomes. Often, however, the goals of these various actors will conflict, and power struggles will emerge. How is our system structured to keep these struggles from over-escalating and prevent any single group from wielding too much control?

Among the topics to be discussed include: (1) the Constitution (why was it constructed as it was?; how has it changed over time?); (2) Federalism (how do state, local, and federal governing authorities interact and coexist?); (3) individual rights and liberties (how are they protected and guaranteed, and from whom?); (4) institutions (how do the President, Congress, and Supreme Court make decisions?; how do they interact with each other?); (5) public opinion (does the public provide clear signals to representatives?; if not, how is policymaking affected?); and (6) voting behavior (how do citizens arrive at their vote choices?; is it “rational” to vote?)

Required Texts:

- (1) Theodore J. Lowi, Benjamin Ginsberg, and Kenneth A. Shepsle. 2004. *American Government: Power and Purpose*, 8th (Core) Edition. New York: Norton. ISBN 0-393-92729-6
- (2) John T. Rourke. 2006. *You Decide! 2006: Current Debates in American Politics*. New York: McGraw Hill. ISBN: 0-321-41108-0
- (3) Thomas Frank. 2005. *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*. New York: Owl Books. ISBN: 0-8050-7774-X
- (4) Morris P. Fiorina. 2006. *Culture War?: The Myth of a Polarized Electorate*, Second Edition. New York: Pearson Longman. ISBN: 0-321-36606.9

Class Format:

The class will be mainly lecture, but I happily encourage discussion. I will cover the main points of each chapter, integrate theoretical and empirical material from other sources, and highlight useful examples from the news.

In addition to the T-TH lecture, students will attend discussion sections, which meet on Thursday and Friday of each week. Below is a list of the section numbers, times, and classroom locations.

Section 60	TH 5:00 - 5:50	Kresge 4410
Section 61	TH 5:00 - 5:50	Kresge 4420
Section 62	TH 3:30 - 4:20	University 112
Section 63	F 10:00 - 10:50	Kresge 4420
Section 64	F 11:00 - 11:50	Kresge 4420
Section 65	F 1:00 - 1:50	Annenberg 29
Section 66	TH 3:30 - 4:20	University 218
Section 67	F 10:00 - 10:50	Annenberg 32
Section 68	F 11:00 - 11:50	Annenberg 32

Attendance:

Attendance in my class is not mandatory. No grades will be lowered for missing classes. Thus, it will be left to you whether or not to attend. However, there are clear incentives to attend: exam questions will be structured in part around lectures and classroom discussion, as well as course readings. Attendance policies in discussion sections will be left up to the individual TAs.

Grading:

The final course grade will be based upon two in-class, closed-book exams — one midterm and one final — and a discussion-section grade. The midterm exam is worth 30%, the final exam is worth 50%, and the discussion-section grade is worth 20%. The final exam will be cumulative, but will emphasize the material after the midterm. Each exam will include both a standard component (multiple choice/true-false questions) and a written component (short answers). Make-up exams will be given only upon receipt of a note from the Dean. Grading policies in discussion sections will be left up to the individual TAs.

I will follow a strict scoring system in tallying the final grade:

A-range: 90-100 percent
B-range: 80-89 percent
C-range: 70-79 percent
D-range: 60-69 percent
F-range: below 60 percent

If there is a dispute regarding a grade on an exam or written assignment, I will reassess the grade under three conditions:

- (1) The request for a grade reexamination is timely (immediately following receipt of the grade).
- (2) The issue is first discussed with the relevant TA.
- (3) The entire exam is subject to re-grading, not just the section under dispute. Thus, it is possible that a lower grade could eventually result.

In addition, if there is a dispute regarding a section grade, I will be happy to discuss the merits of the case. However, I will *not* undermine by TAs. I will *only* overrule a TA grade if there is *clear and indisputable* evidence.

Academic Integrity:

Northwestern University has detailed its policies on academic integrity in the *Student Handbook*. Students should acquaint themselves with policies concerning cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and academic interference. Any submission of work by a student in this course constitutes a certificate that the work complies with university policies on academic integrity. Violations could lead to automatic failure of the course or expulsion from the university.

Class Rules:

I only have a few class rules; however, I feel each is important:

- (1) Each person's opinion is valuable and should be respected. Please do not intimidate, patronize, or ridicule anyone else during the course of classroom discussion.
- (2) Do not make a habit of arriving late to class. Walking in after 2:00 will disrupt the lecture/discussion.
- (3) Should you miss class, you are responsible for acquiring class notes. Do not ask me for class notes. I encourage you to make note-sharing arrangements early in quarter with students sitting around you, should the need arise later.

Calendar of Events:

Below is a **tentative** schedule for the quarter. I reserve the right to alter the reading assignments and the midterm test date, depending on the progress of course. LGS refers to the Lowi-Ginsberg-Shepsle text, while Rourke refers to the Rourke reader.

My lectures will revolve around chapters in LGS, the Frank and Fiorina books, as well as additional outside materials. The readings from Rourke will be discussed in section.

Week 1 (3/28 and 3/30 lectures; 3/30, 3/31 discussion sections):

LGS: Chapter 1, Five Principles of Politics

Week 2 (4/4 and 4/6 lectures; 4/6, 4/7 discussion sections):

LGS: Chapter 2, Constructing a Government

Rourke: Issue 1, Constitution: Guns, Safety, and the Constitution's Meaning (pp. 2-14)

Week 3 (4/11 and 4/13 lectures; 4/13, 4/14 discussion sections):

LGS: Chapter 3, The Constitutional Framework: Federalism & the Separation of Powers

LGS: Chapter 4, The Constitutional Framework and the Individual (start)

Rourke: Issue 2, Federalism: Federal Regulation of Medical Marijuana (pp. 16-31)

Week 4 (4/18 and 4/20 lectures; 4/20, 4/21 discussion sections): NOTE: NO LECTURE on 4/20

LGS: Chapter 4, The Constitutional Framework and the Individual (finish)

Rourke: Issue 3, Civil Rights: Evaluating the "Right to an Abortion" Decision in *Roe v. Wade* (pp. 32-42)

Rourke: Issue 4, Civil Liberties: Current Separation of Church and State Doctrine (pp. 44-55)

Week 5 (4/25 and 4/27 lectures; 4/27, 4/28 discussion sections):

LGS: Chapter 9, Public Opinion
Rourke: Issue 6, Volunteer Border Patrol Groups

Week 6 (5/2 and 5/4 lectures; 5/4, 5/5 discussion sections):

MIDTERM EXAM: May 2
LGS: Chapter 10, Elections

Week 7 (5/9 and 5/11 lectures; 5/11, 5/12 discussion sections):

Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*

Critiques:

(1) Larry Bartels, "What's the Matter with *What's the Matter with Kansas?*"

<http://www.princeton.edu/~bartels/kansasqjps06.pdf>

(2) Jeffrey Stoncash, "Scaring the Democrats: What's the Matter with Thomas Frank's Argument?"

<http://www.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1096&context=forum>

Fiorina, *Culture War?*

Critiques:

(1) Stephen Ansolabehere, Jonathan Rodden, and James Snyder, Jr., "Purple America."

http://econ-www.mit.edu/faculty/download_pdf.php?id=1266

(2) Alan Abramowitz and Kyle Sanders, "Why Can't We All Just Get Along?: The Reality of a Polarized America"

<http://www.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1076&context=forum>

Week 8 (5/16 and 5/18 lectures; 5/18, 5/19 discussion sections):

LGS: Chapter 5, Congress
Rourke: Issue 11, Congress: Congressional Term Limits (pp. 138-149)

Week 9 (5/23 and 5/25 lectures; 5/25, 5/26 discussion sections):

LGS: Chapter 6, The Presidency
LGS: Chapter 7, The Federal Courts
Rourke: Issue 12, Presidency: Qualified to Be President (pp. 150-162)

Week 10 (Reading Week): NO CLASS

Week 11: FINAL EXAM: Thursday, June 8: 7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.