

POSC 10: American Politics¹

Summer 2013

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Office Hours: M & W 12 – 1pm (or by appointment)

Course Info: MW: 1:10 – 4:00pm, BOYHL 1471 (Boyce Hall)

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Section Info: R 11:10 – 1:00pm

Course Overview

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to American political institutions and processes. There are two central themes to the course. First, we will focus on how individuals participate in politics, and how they form preferences and opinions about policies and politicians. As we do this, we will cover such topics as public opinion research, political parties, elections, and interest groups. Second, we will focus on how institutions shape individual preferences into specific policy outcomes. Here we will cover federalism and the separation of powers, Congress, the president, the bureaucracy, and the federal courts. The course should give you both a good grasp of how the U.S. national government functions, and also an appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of our democratic system. In addition to these substantive topics, this course also will introduce you to some theories and methods that will help you as you begin to take advanced courses in the political science department, including improving your capacity to analyze data and evidence, crafting a documented argument, and becoming familiar with basic theories of institutions and politics.

Required Course Texts

You are responsible for completing each reading by the time we meet. That is, you must have read the materials for Day 2 by the start of your lecture or section on Day 2 (whichever is first).

There are TWO sources of required reading for this course:

- 1) “LGSA” - *American Government: Power and Purpose*. 12th core ed. Lowi, Ginsberg, Shepsle and Ansolobehere.²
- 2) “Kollman Reader” - *Readings in American Politics: Analysis and Perspectives*. 2nd ed.

Older editions (within reason, i.e. LGSA 11th CORE edition) should work too but be aware of different chapter ordering; read by chapter subject NOT number.

¹ **Disclaimer:** The instructor reserves the right to alter the contents, requirements, grading and/or scheduling as he sees fit in order to best fulfill the objectives of the course. Any changes to the syllabus will be announced in class.

² **Textbook website:** <http://wwnorton.com/college/polisci/american-government12/core/> - home to practice quizzes, chapter outlines, and more. This is a great resource, so use it!

iLearn & Email

I often use both *iLearn & R'Mail* to communicate so you MUST frequent both to stay up to date, failing to do either of these is **not** an acceptable excuse.

Ideological Diversity

You will not be graded according to whether you share the political opinions or ideologies of the instructor or authors of the assigned texts. I do ask that you be open-minded and respectful, both of your fellow students and instructor and of diversity of opinion. I hope that you will view this diversity as valuable for your learning. As Stuart Mill once wrote: "All silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility." In this course, no one is infallible.

Grade Breakdown

1) Discussion	10%
2) Quizzes	30%
3) Paper	30%
4) Final Exam	30%

Discussion (10%)

You must attend section regularly and should be prepared to participate. The focus here will be on the Kollman readings, though fundamentals from LGSA will naturally come up. Take advantage of this smaller classroom setting to engage with the course material and ideas therein.

Quizzes (30%)

Eight quizzes will be given throughout the quarter. There will be no make-ups unless extenuating circumstances make it *impossible* for you to attend class that day. Quizzes will be based on a combination of the required readings for that day and material already covered in lecture. Your success on quizzes will be, to a large degree, contingent upon you doing ALL the assigned readings before you come to lecture. Each quiz will feature 1-2 questions more than will be graded. This builds in a "buffer" which is tantamount to dropping your lowest quiz grade at the end of the quarter.

Paper (30%)

You will write one 4-5 page (12-point font, Times New Roman, 1 in. margins, double-spaced) paper. Late papers will be penalized a letter grade per day late; a detailed rubric to follow. You will submit the paper to Safe Assign on iLearn as well as turn in a hard copy (emailed copies will NOT be accepted). Plagiarism and cheating will result in a loss of credit on the spoiled assignment and all cases will be referred to the Student Judicial Affairs Office.

Essay Option 1: In this class we have discussed how institutions shape the incentives and actions of political actors. One major institution under the U.S. Constitution is the separation of powers. Using the definition of the institution principle in the LGSA textbook and at least three readings from the Kollman reader, show how the separation of powers shapes the actions of political actors (legislators, presidents, bureaucrats and/or judges) and how it affects the kinds of policies produced. To address this topic well, you should find some specific way that the institution principle works in similar ways across the three branches.

Essay Option 2: It is well known that citizens in a democracy are "rationally ignorant,"

or have low levels of information about politics and policy. Using at least three readings from the Kollman reader, discuss three ways citizens can participate in politics in a meaningful way, even when they are “rationally ignorant.”

Essay Option 3: A topic of your own choosing that: 1) relates to a chapter and/or a series of Kollman readings covered in this class, and 2) that you have an original take on/can develop a worthy topic sentence that won't result in a simple summarizing of the readings. I want YOUR creative and thoughtful analysis, not a regurgitation of several other scholars. Do you have a “fight to pick” with a Founder? Then this may be the option for you. This option comes with the extra task of visiting office hours (no email approval) to clear the paper topic at a minimum of 1 week prior to the due date.

Final Exam (30%)

There will be a multiple-choice final exam during the regularly scheduled finals time of Friday August 30th 3:30 – 5:30pm. Makeup exams will generally not be allowed, though I will consider extreme medical emergencies with complete original documentation and advance notice.

Grade Scale

A+ = 100 – 97%	B- = 83.9 – 80%	D = 66.9 – 64%
A = 96.9 – 94%	C+ = 79.9 – 77%	D- = 63.9 – 60%
A- = 93.9 – 90%	C = 76.9 – 74%	F = 59.9% and Below
B+ = 89.9 – 87%	C- = 73.9 – 70	
B = 86.9 – 84%	D+ = 69.9 – 67	

Lecture & Reading Schedule

WEEK 1

Day 1 – Monday July 29th – Introductions & Course Overview

- LGSA Ch. 1
- Lupia & McCubbins, “*The Democratic Dilemma.*”³
- Hardin, “*The Tragedy of the Commons.*”

Day 2 – Wednesday July 31st – The Constitution & Federalist Papers [Quiz 1]

- LGSA Ch. 2
- *The U.S. Constitution* (appendix of LGSA)
- *Federalist no. 10 & no. 51* (appendix of LGSA)

WEEK 2

Citizens: How do they think, what do they know, and how do they participate?

Day 3 – Monday August 5th – Public Opinion [Quiz 2]

- LGSA Ch. 10 [Public Opinion]
- Campbell et al., “*The American Voter.*”
- Iyengar, “*Media Politics: A Citizen’s Guide.*”

³ All non-LGSA readings in Kollman Reader

Day 4 – Wednesday August 7th – Political Parties [Quiz 3]

- LGSA Ch. 12 [Political Parties]
- Aldrich, “*Why Parties?*”

WEEK 3

Day 5 – Monday August 12th – Elections & Paper Writing Tips [Quiz 4]

- LGSA Ch. 11 [Elections]
- Rosenstone & Hansen, “*Mobilization, Participation, and American Democracy.*”

Day 6 – Wednesday August 14th – Interest Groups [Quiz 5]

- LGSA Ch. 13 [Groups & Interests]
- Kollman, “*Outside Lobbying.*”

Optional Resources:

- Open Secrets Website (tracks donations) <http://www.opensecrets.org/>
- Explore the Fairvote.org website at <http://www.fairvote.org/irv/>

WEEK 4

Institutions: How do they translate preferences into outcomes?

Day 7 – Monday August 19th – Federalism [PAPER DUE] [Quiz 6]

- LGSA Ch. 3 [Federalism]
- Mayhew, “*Congress: The Electoral Connection.*”

Day 8 – Wednesday August 21st – Congress & The Presidency [Quiz 7]

- LGSA Ch. 6 [Congress] & Ch. 7 [Presidency]
- Howell, “*Power without Persuasion.*”

WEEK 5

Day 9 – Monday August 26th – The Bureaucracy & Federal Courts [Quiz 8]

- LGSA Ch. 8 [Bureaucracy] & Ch. 9 [Federal Courts]
- McCubbins and Schwartz, “*Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms.*”

Day 10 – Wednesday August 28th – Final Review & a Political Documentary

- 4 film choices: *The War Room, Journeys with George, Street Fight, Please Vote for Me*

Day 11 – Friday August 30th 3:30 – 5:30pm – FINAL EXAM

- **BRING A SCANTRON**