

American Political Institutions

PS 9140

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Course Description

This course is designed to introduce graduate students to the principal political institutions in the United States and some of the major debates involved in the scholarly study of these bodies. We will focus on national-level institutions and more particularly on the Congress, the presidency, the Supreme Court, and the federal bureaucracy. Since we will cover a wide range of material, the course is designed more as a survey of the field than as an in-depth research seminar. As a result, we will be more interested in discussing classic texts and lasting themes relative to these institutions than in covering the most contemporary research in these areas. At the end of the semester, I expect students to be conversant in the principal literature on American political institutions and aware of some of the major debates in this field. Since I assume that most students in the class will not be majoring in American politics, grades will be based on examinations rather than on research papers.

Texts (all required)

In addition to periodic articles, our readings for the semester will come from seven books:

- Krehbiel, Keith. 1992. *Information and Legislative Organization*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Maltzman, Forrest, James F. Spriggs, II, and Paul J. Wahlbeck. 2000. *Crafting Law on the Supreme Court: The Collegial Game*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mayhew, David R. 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Neustadt, Richard E. 1990. *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. New York: Free Press.
- Segal, Jeffrey A. and Harold J. Spaeth. 2002. *The Supreme Court and the Attitudinal Model Revisited*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Skowronek, Stephen. 1997. *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wilson, James Q. 1989. *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*. New York: Basic Books.

Since it is impossible to conduct a graduate seminar with students who are unprepared, I expect everyone to have completed **all** the assigned readings prior to the beginning of class each week. Needless to say, both regular attendance and prompt arrival for the beginning of class are assumed.

Grading

Semester grades will be determined as follows:

Seminar participation = 20%
Short essays = 30%
Midterm examination = 25%
Final examination = 25%

I will judge your seminar participation by the quality and quantity of your contributions to class discussions. The contributions can be in the form of insightful questions, comments, critiques of the reading, responses to colleagues, *etc.* I reserve the right to stimulate class discussion by any means necessary.

You will write three short (4-5 page) essays on assigned topics over the course of the semester; each essay will be worth 10 percent of your final grade. Due dates for these essays are noted in the schedule below. At my discretion, you may be allowed to re-write some of the essays to improve your grades. These essays must be typed, double-spaced, use reasonable (*i.e.*, 10 to 12 point) fonts, and employ standard margins (*i.e.*, one inch on all sides). While you may discuss the general topics for the assignments with your colleagues in the class, essays are to represent your own *individual* efforts.

The midterm will be given in class on October 9th. The final examination will be given during the last scheduled seminar session on December 4th.

You may check your grades whenever you like via the Blackboard website (blackboard.missouri.edu).

Academic Misconduct

Academic misconduct — defined as appropriating the words, ideas, or work of others and using them as your own through cheating or plagiarism — is something that I will not tolerate. I will prosecute cases of suspected academic misconduct to the fullest extent of University policy, and that can mean expulsion from the University. I advise you to consult relevant sections of the *M Book* for further information.

Class Schedule and Assignments

Week 1 (August 21st) — Administrivia

Week 2 (August 28th) — Introduction: Separate Institutions Sharing Powers

Readings: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapters 13 and 14

(<http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/hobbes/leviathan-c.html#CHAPTER%20XIV>)

Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*, chapters 11-13

(<http://www.constitution.org/jl/2ndtreat.htm>)

Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, Book XI, chapter 6 “Of the

Constitution of England” (www.constitution.org/cm/sol.txt)

Federalist #10 (http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fed_10.html)

Federalist #51 (http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fed_51.html)

Week 3 (September 4th) — **No class – Labor Day**

- Week 4 (September 11th) — Congress I: Electoral Repercussions
 Readings: Polsby, “The Institutionalization of the U. S. House of Representatives.” *APSR* 1968 (available at www.jstor.org)
 Mayhew, all
- Week 5 (September 18th) — Congress II: Congress, Committees, and Information
 Readings: Krehbiel, all
 Overby and Kazez, “Outlying Committees in the Statehouse,” *JOP* 2000
- Week 6 (September 25th) — Congress III: Congress and the Roll of Political Parties
 Readings: Cooper and Brady, “Institutional Context and Leadership Style: The House from Cannon to Rayburn.” *APSR* 1981
 Krehbiel, “Where’s the Party?” *BJPS* 1993
 Krehbiel, “Paradoxes of Parties in Congress.” *LSQ* 1999
 Smith, “Positive Theories of Congressional Parties.” *LSQ* 2000
 Aldrich, Berger, and Rohde, “The Historical Variability in Conditional Party Government, 1877-1994” (on blackboard)
 Sinclair, “Do Parties Matter,” (on blackboard)
 Cox and McCubbins, “Agenda Power in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1877-1986” (on blackboard)
N.B.: First essay assignment made in class.
- Week 7 (October 2nd) — Presidency 1: Presidents and Presidential Power
 Readings: King, “The Methodology of Presidential Research”
 (<http://gking.harvard.edu/files/methpres.pdf>)
 Neustadt, all
N.B.: First essay assignment due in class.
- Week 8 (October 9th) — Presidency II: Leadership, Change, and Political Time
 Readings: Skowronek, pp. 1-285
- Week 9 (October 16th) — **Midterm Examination**
- Week 10 (October 23rd) — Presidency III: Leadership, Change, and Political Time, continued
 Readings: Skowronek, pp. 287-end
N.B.: Second essay assignment made in class.
- Week 11 (October 30th) — Supreme Court I: Preferences and Judicial Behavior
 Readings: Segal and Spaeth, all
N.B.: Second essay assignment due in class.
- Week 12 (November 6th) — Supreme Court II: Collegial Justice
 Readings: Maltzman, Spriggs, and Wahlbeck, all

Week 13 (November 13th) — Bureaucracy I: Organization

Readings: Wilson, chapters 1-9

N.B.: Third essay assignment made in class.

Week 14 (November 20th) — **No class — Thanksgiving Recess**

Week 15 (November 27th) — Bureaucracy II: Bureaucracy, Bureaucrats, Politics, and Politicians

Readings: Wilson, chapters 10-20

N.B.: Third essay assignment due in class.

Week 16 (December 4th) — **Final Examination**