

PSC 121
AMERICAN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Fall 2009
MW, 10:35-11:30am + weekly discussion section
Maxwell Auditorium

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Teaching Assistant	Sections	E-mail	Office	Office Hours
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COURSE OVERVIEW AND GOALS

This course provides a survey of the political processes and institutions of American government. I know what you might be thinking—that sounds boring. Let me assure you, this course will be anything but. The bulk of American political history has been characterized by drama and conflict, and our investigation of American politics will include a focus on topics like September 11, the civil rights movement, the 2008 presidential election, and the debates over health care and gay marriage, to name just a few. Controversial, always; boring, never. Each of these political issues and events—and most others—can be seen most clearly through the lens of the historical and institutional development of the American political system. Our lectures, readings, and discussions will touch on the Constitution, the presidency, the judiciary, political parties, voting, and public opinion, among other topics. In all of this, our focus will be on how the basic features of American government illuminate the stories and events that appear in the news every day, be it the war on terrorism, the 2008 financial crisis, or even the price of milk at Wegman's.

Ultimately, this course has three goals:

- To provide you with a basic understanding of the United States' political development and institutions
- To help you understand why our government works the way it does
- To help you become a savvy analyst of government and politics, and a thoughtful consumer of political news

READINGS

This course has one assigned textbook. In the course schedule below, you are expected to complete the reading before the class for which it is assigned. You are also responsible for keeping up with the news.

Textbook

Samuel Kernell, Gary C. Jacobson, and Thad Kousser. 2009. *The Logic of American Politics*, 4th Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press. (Available at the SU Bookstore, and noted as “KJK” in the course schedule below.)

The Newspaper

It should come as no surprise in a political science course that you are expected to keep up with the news. Our discussions in lecture and the weekly sections will frequently touch on current events, so it is imperative that you keep apprised of major political goings-on. Reading a newspaper is the best way to do this. Not only will this often bring course material to life, but it will undoubtedly make the class more interesting. (As a non-trivial side benefit, being a news junkie invariably gives you interesting things to talk about at parties, especially when you find yourself in a conversation that has lapsed into awkward silence.)

You are free to read (in print or online) any paper(s) of your choosing, with the following limitation: You need to choose a news source that includes frequent coverage of national politics. For that reason, *The Daily Orange*, fine publication that it is, does not count. The following are a few suggestions, any of which are excellent sources of political news:

The New York Times: www.nyt.com

The Wall Street Journal www.wsj.com (requires paid online subscription)

The Los Angeles Times www.latimes.com

The Washington Post www.washingtonpost.com

WEEKLY DISCUSSION SECTIONS

The weekly discussion sections are purposefully named—they are intended to be opportunities for you to discuss material from the week’s lectures and readings in more depth than can normally be reached in a class of 150. They also serve as a forum for you to ask questions of the teaching assistants, and to give them an opportunity to elaborate on the week’s topic(s). A portion of almost every section will deal with current events that pertain to something we’ve talked about in lecture.

As noted below, 15% of your grade will be based on your participation in these sessions. Here’s how that will work: Five times throughout the semester, an unannounced quiz—some people like to call these pop quizzes—will be given in your discussion section. If you are in class to take the quiz, you will earn 10 points simply for being present. Each of the 10 questions on the quiz, drawn from the week’s readings and recent news events, will be worth one (1) point. Thus, if you make a perfect score on the quiz, you will earn 20 points (10 points for attending + 10 correct answers = 20 points). If you are absent, you will get a 0. At the end of the semester, your quiz scores (which total 100 points possible) will be translated into the 15% of your grade for “participation.” This setup is designed to reward students who regularly attend discussion section and keep up with the reading. You should aim to be one of those.

Your discussion leader will say more about the format of the sections during your first session on September 3/4.

EVALUATION

Your grade in this class will be based on three exams, a short paper, and your participation in weekly discussion sections. The breakdown is as follows:

- Participation (section attendance and quizzes): 15%
- Exam 1 (October 5): 20%

- Exam 2 (November 4): 25%
- Short paper (due November 18): 15%
- Exam 3 (December 14): 25%

At the end of the semester, your grade will be assigned based on the following scale:

A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D (60-69), and F (0-59). (Note that there are no +/- grades in the D or F range.)

Exam Format

The three exams will consist of both multiple choice questions and short answer identifications. The multiple-choice questions will be straightforward, with four answers to choose from. For the short answer portion of the exam, you will be expected to identify several terms and explain, in a few sentences, why they are important. If you expect to miss an exam, it is your responsibility to let me or your discussion section leader know (in person or via e-mail) *immediately*. **Makeup exams will be given only in extreme circumstances**, such as the death of an immediate family member. We will be the final arbiters of what meets the definition of “extreme.”

Short paper

On November 2, we will hand out an assignment that will ask you to write a short (4-5-page) essay about a topic that we have covered in class. The paper will be due two weeks later, on **November 18**. We will say more about the specifics of the writing assignment as the semester proceeds.

SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Thinking about cheating? Don't do it. The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Each student is strongly encouraged to participate in class discussions. In any classroom situation that involves discussion and critical thinking, particularly about political ideas, there are bound to be many differing viewpoints. Students may not only disagree with each other at times, but the students and instructor may also find that they have disparate views on sensitive and volatile topics. It is my hope that these differences will enhance class discussion and create an atmosphere where all of us will be encouraged to think and learn from each other. Therefore, be assured that students' grades will not be affected by any beliefs or ideas expressed in class or in assignments. Rather, we will all respect the views of others when expressed in classroom discussions.

ACCOMMODATIONS

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services(ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please

contact ODS as soon as possible. You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs, although I cannot arrange for disability-related accommodations.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

It is the policy of Syracuse University that no student should be refused admission or be expelled because he or she is unable to participate in any examination, study, or work requirement because of his or her religious holy day requirements. An opportunity will be provided to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may have been missed because of an absence due to a religious observance *providing that I have been notified in writing one week before the absence*. No fees will be charged to the student for the costs incurred by the University for such makeup work. In effecting this policy, the University agrees that no adverse or prejudicial effect should result to any student who avails herself or himself of its provisions.

THOSE INDISPENSABLE CELL PHONES

I love technology (though not as much as Napoleon Dynamite's brother, Kip). And while I'm as big a fan as anyone of hearing Cage the Elephant's "Ain't No Rest for the Wicked" as a ringtone, the fact is that cell phones are a distraction. As a courtesy to me and your classmates, please turn off yours before entering class. If you don't, the rule is this: If your phone rings in class, I get to answer it and talk to whomever is on the line—whether it's your mother, brother, or that person you met at Chuck's last night. So leave it on at your own peril.

I hope it also goes without saying that texting during class is prohibited. It's distracting to me and to your fellow classmates. If I see you texting in the auditorium, I will, in the middle of lecture, use my most parental, nagging, irritating voice to call you out and ask you to leave the class for the day. Sounds like a bad scene. Let's avoid it.

COURSE SCHEDULE (*Note: This is subject to change as the semester proceeds.*)

August 31: Course introduction: Hello, how are you?

Part I: The Foundations of American Government and Politics

(August 31 – October 12)

September 2: What is government, and why do we even have it?

*KJK: Ch. 1 ("The Logic of American Politics," pp. 2-43)

September 7: Labor Day—No class

September 9: What is government, and why do we even have it? (cont.)

*KJK: Ch. 1 ("The Logic of American Politics," pp. 2-43)

September 14, 16: Big jobs: The founding of the United States and the writing of the Constitution

*KJK: Ch. 2 ("The Constitution," pp. 44-93)

*KJK: *Federalist 10 & 51* (pp. 746-752)

September 21: Eid Ul-Fitr—No class

September 23: Federalism: You're not the boss of me! Oh, wait. Yes, you are.

*KJK: Ch. 3 ("Federalism," pp. 94-137)

September 28: Yom Kippur—No class

September 30: Federalism: You're not the boss of me! Oh, wait. Yes, you are. (cont.)

*KJK: Ch. 3 ("Federalism," pp. 94-137)

October 5: **Exam 1**

October 7, 12: Civil rights and civil liberties: What they are and why they matter

*KJK: Chs. 4-5 ("Civil Rights" and "Civil Liberties," pp. 138-245)

Part II: The Formal Institutions of American Government

(October 14 – November 2)

October 14, 19: Congress: Making laws, getting elected, and re-elected, and re-elected, and ...

*KJK: Ch. 6 ("Congress," pp. 246-313)

October 21, 26: The Presidency: It ain't your great-great-great-great grandfather's chief executive

*KJK: Ch. 7 ("The Presidency," pp. 314-361)

October 28, November 2: The Courts: Judges, judging, and politics (heaven forbid!)

*KJK: Ch. 9 ("The Federal Judiciary," pp. 412-457)

*Federalist No. 78 [Online at: http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fed_78.html]

**Paper assignment handed out November 2

November 4: **Exam 2**

NO DISCUSSION SECTIONS NOVEMBER 5/6

Part III: The Linkages between Government and the Public

(November 9 – December 9)

November 9, 11: Political parties and interest groups: Carrying the public's views to the government

*KJK: Ch. 12 ("Political Parties," pp. 556-607)

*KJK: Ch. 13 ("Interest Groups," pp. 608-649)

November 16: The Media: Our (smudged?) window into the world of politics

*KJK: Ch. 14 ("The News Media," pp. 650-695)

November 18, 23: Public opinion: What Americans think and why it (sometimes) matters

*KJK: Ch. 10 ("Public Opinion," pp. 458-507)

**Paper due November 18

November 25: Thanksgiving holiday (Stuff yourself!)—No class

NO DISCUSSION SECTIONS NOVEMBER 26/27

November 30, December 2: Political participation: Voter turnout, trends, and more

*KJK: Ch. 14 ("Voting, Campaigns, and Elections," pp. 508-523 [including box on "Motor Voter"])

December 7, 9: Campaigns and voting: How candidates campaign, and how voters decide

*KJK: Ch. 14 ("Voting, Campaigns, and Elections," pp. 522-554)

December 14: **Exam 3**