

Political Science 350: American Interest Groups

Winter 2005

Professor Mark Smith

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:00-11:00 and by appointment

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Course web site: courses.washington.edu/smithint/ (note: do not include a "www")

Overview of Course:

Interest groups are one of the most feared yet least understood parts of the American political system. Encompassing citizen groups, corporations, other business associations, unions, and professional associations, interest groups participate in every aspect of policy-making in the U.S. Many Americans fear that these "special interests" hold too much power at the expense of the general public. Such concerns have, in fact, been expressed in the U.S. since the nation's very inception over two centuries ago. Yet large numbers of Americans, eager to make their voices heard, continue to join interest groups to further their political aims. So how can we best understand the roles and impacts of interest groups? Why do they form and how do they survive? How much influence do they have in American politics? Are they a force for good or for ill? These are the kinds of questions that motivate the course.

The first part of the course will consider why interest groups either form and survive or fail to form and survive. We will examine who's in the group system and who's not--that is, what kinds of interests have successfully been able to mobilize and organize. Along the way, several factors that help explain group formation and growth will be studied. We will also examine why interest groups are more prevalent in the U.S. than in nearly any other country. The second component of the course explores the attempts, and evaluates the possible success, of interest groups as they attempt to influence government policy through such means as lobbying, organizing grassroots support, holding protests, and making campaign contributions. Along with examining the strategies of interest groups, we also evaluate their impacts and identify the conditions under which groups can succeed in achieving their goals.

The format of the course will be a combination of lectures and class discussion, with most class sessions emphasizing both components.

Required Readings:

There are no books for the course, but there will be a set of required readings. These readings will be acquired from two places. The first location is from electronic reserve, available from the University of Washington libraries (accessed by clicking "Course Reserves" under the "Services" section of the library's home page.) The bulk of the quarter's readings can be found there. The remaining readings will be acquired from the second location, the Kennedy School of Government's Case Program site. You can order the cases either to be distributed to you by hard copy (at \$2.95 apiece, plus \$15 for shipping and handling) or by electronic copy (at \$2.45 apiece.) You can find the KSG site at <http://www.ksgcase.harvard.edu>. Follow the instructions there to order the cases in the format you desire. Important note: when you get to the pricing section, there will be an option for either "academic" or "corporate". The default setting is for "corporate," which

costs about twice as much. Therefore, you should be sure to click it to “academic.” The cases you want to order are #s 492, 940.0, 1429, 1278, 758, 759, and 760.

Course Requirements:

All students are expected to have completed the assigned reading by the date indicated on the syllabus and to participate regularly in our discussions. The grading is based upon two exams and a paper assignment. Your benefits from the course and your ability to participate in class discussions depend heavily upon your timely completion of the readings.

Grading:

Exam #1:	30%
Exam #2:	30%
Paper assignment:	30%
Class participation:	10%

The two exams will take place in class on February 3 and March 10, respectively.

Class Schedule

- January 4 Introduction to the course. What interest groups are. The overlap between interest groups and social movements.
- January 6 Public perceptions of interest groups. American interest groups in comparative perspective.
Readings: (a) Anthony Nownes, *Pressure and Power: Organized Interests in American Politics*, chapter 1; (b) descriptions of various interest groups from their web sites—Concerned Women for America; Moveon.org; Human Rights Campaign; National Right to Life Committee; 1000 Friends of Washington; Association of Washington Business; Service Employees International Union; Cato Institute; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. For each group, read the information in the “About Us” section or its equivalent, and poke around the rest of the site.
- Part I: Why interest groups form and grow--or fail to form and grow.*
- January 11 Grievances as a cause of group formation and growth. Selective incentives as a cause of group formation and growth.
Readings: (a) James Madison, *The Federalist* #10; (b) Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, chapter 1
- January 13 External resources as a cause of group formation and growth.
Readings: (a) "Prohibition A: Enactment;" (b) Anthony Nownes and Grant Neeley, "Toward an Explanation for Public Interest Group Formation and Proliferation"

Class Discussion: Prohibition.

January 18 Internal resources as a cause of group formation and growth.
Readings: (a) "Bread for the World" [note: this case is not from KSG but rather can be found among the electronic reserve readings]; (b) Maureen Casamayou, "Collective Entrepreneurialism and Breast Cancer Advocacy."

Class Discussion: Bread for the World.

January 20 Film and class discussion: *At the River I Stand*.
Readings: Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*, chapter 3.

January 25 Testing the models of group formation and growth.
Readings: (a) Anthony Nownes, "The Population Ecology of Interest Group Formation: Mobilizing for Gay and Lesbian Rights in the United States, 1950-98"; (b) John Green, et al., "Less Than Conquerors: The Christian Right in State Republican Parties."

January 27 Guest speaker.

February 1 Mobilization and fundraising. Exam review.
Readings: (a) R. Kenneth Godwin, "Money, Technology, and Political Interests"; (b) solicitation letters at course web site.
Class Discussion: solicitation letters.

February 3 Exam #1.

Part II: The means of influence for interest groups.

February 8 Lobbying legislatures.
Readings: (a) David Lowery and Holly Brasher, *Organized Interests and American Government*, chapter 5; (b) John Wright, *Interest Groups and Congress*, chapter 4; (c) John Green and Nathan Bigelow, "The Christian Right Goes to Washington"

February 10 Lobbying the executive branch and the courts.
Readings: (a) Scott Ainsworth, *Analyzing Interest Groups*, chapter 7; (b) "Regulation of Mud Flaps"; (c) Hans Hacker, "Defending the Faithful: Conservative Christian Litigation in American Politics"
Class Discussion: Regulation of Mud Flaps.

February 15 Inside and outside lobbying.
Readings: (a) "Going Against the Grain: A 'Conservative' Think Tank in Massachusetts"; (b) "Catastrophic Health Insurance for the Elderly"; (c) William Browne, "Lobbying the Public: All-Directional Advocacy"

Class Discussion: Going Against the Grain: A "Conservative" Think Tank in Massachusetts.

Class Discussion: Catastrophic Health Insurance for the Elderly.

- February 17 Framing issues.
Readings: (a) "Interest Withholding Tax", parts A, B, and C; (b) John Tierney and William Frasure, "Culture Wars on the Frontier: Interests, Values, and Policy Narratives in Public Lands Politics"; (c) Beth L. Leech, et al., "Organized Interests and Issue Definition in Policy Debates".
Class Discussion: Interest Withholding Tax.
- February 22 Protests and demonstrations.
Film and class discussion, *30 Frames a Second: The WTO in Seattle*.
- February 24 Guest speaker.
- March 1 Money in elections.
Readings: M. Margaret Conway, Joanne Connor Green, and Marian Currinder, "Interest Group Money in Elections"
- March 3 Money in elections.
Readings: (a) Greg Gordon. "Cash, Campaigns--and Votes." *Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune*, October 1, 1996; (b) Frank Sorauf, "If It's Not Broken...Or Is It?", from *Inside Campaign Finance*
Class Discussion: both readings.
- March 8 Interest groups in the initiative process.
Ronald Libby, "The Animal Rights Campaign: Agribusiness and Animal Rights Groups" [note: this case is not from KSG but rather can be found among the electronic reserve readings]
Class Discussion: The Animal Rights Campaign: Agribusiness and Animal Rights Groups
- March 10 Exam #2.