

Political Science 202: Introduction to American Politics

University of Washington
Lectures MWF at 11:30 in Smith 120

Spring 2008
Sections at various times

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The course web site, where you can find questions on the readings and other class materials, is located at: <http://courses.washington.edu/smithint/amgov.html> (Do not include a "www" before the address.)

Overview of Class:

This course will provide an introduction to the players and institutions of American politics. We will gain an understanding of the behavior of both governmental officials—elected and unelected—and extra-governmental actors such as the news media, interest groups, and political parties. Because this is a survey course, we will aim for breadth more so than depth in seeking to provide an overview of American politics. Among the questions considered are why the U.S. has only two major parties; why Congress tends to move slowly; how the electoral College works; why bureaucratic agencies use lots of formal rules; why the mass media cover certain stories and not others; and how polls attempt to measure public opinion. For most of these topics, what we cover would serve as a useful gateway to more specialized courses that would address them in greater detail.

Required Books and Readings:

The books required for this course are available from the University Book Store:

Samuel Kernell and Gary Jacobson. *The Logic of American Politics*, 3rd ed.
Thomas Volgy. *Politics in the Trenches: Citizens, Politicians, and the Fate of Democracy*.

Course Requirements:

The grading is based on two midterm exams, a final exam, and participation in sections. The final exam will cover the entire quarter. All exams will cover material from lectures and assigned readings.

Grading:

First exam: 25%
Second exam: 25%
Final exam: 40%
Section participation: 10%

Exams: The first exam will be given in class on April 25 and the second exam on May 16. The final exam will be given on Wednesday, June 11 from 2:30 to 4:20.

Class Schedule

(lectures in bold, sections in italics)

Part I. Introduction and Rules of the Game.

March 31 Introduction to the course.

April 1 Sections: Orientation to your discussion section. Foundations of American politics. Read Kernell and Jacobson chapter 1.

April 2 The Constitution: The factors shaping its design and ratification. Read Kernell and Jacobson chapter 2 and pp. 594-603.

April 3 Sections: Foundations of American politics; the Constitution.

April 4 The Constitution: The factors shaping its design and ratification.

April 7 Federalism: The distribution of powers between federal and state governments. Read Kernell and Jacobson chapter 3.

April 8 Sections: State and local government. Read Volgy chapters 1-5.

April 9 State and local government: policies for economic growth.

April 10 Sections: State and local government. Read Volgy chapters 6-9.

April 11 Civil rights: The historical roots of the civil rights movement. Read Kernell and Jacobson chapter 4.

April 14 Civil liberties: How the meaning of the Bill of Rights expanded over time. Read Kernell and Jacobson chapter 5.

April 15 Sections: Civil rights and civil liberties.

April 16 Film: *Of Civil Rights and Wrongs*.

April 17 Sections: Civil rights and civil liberties.

Part II. Policymakers: The Formal Institutions of Government

April 18 Congress: Kinds of representation. Read Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 6.

April 21 Congress: Why Americans usually like their own representatives but distrust Congress as an institution.

April 22 Sections: Congress.

April 23 Ballot initiatives: Do they strengthen or weaken democracy? Read John Maggs, "Ballot Boxing," from *National Journal*, July 1, 2000, beginning on p. 2144. See the course web page for information on accessing the article online.

April 24 Sections: Congress; exam review.

April 25 First exam.

April 28 The Presidency: Presidential leadership. Read Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 7.

April 29 Sections: The Presidency.

April 30 The Presidency: Presidential campaign ads.

May 1 Sections: The Presidency.

May 2 The bureaucracy: Understanding why government agencies use lots of rules and procedures to administer programs. Read Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 8.

May 5 The courts: a history of judicial review. Read Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 9.

May 6 Sections: The bureaucracy; the courts.

May 7 The courts: why justices make the decisions they do.

May 8 Sections: The courts.

Part III. Intermediaries: Connecting Citizens to Government

May 9 Public opinion: How polls work. Read Kernell and Jacobson chapter 10.

May 12 Public opinion: Interpreting public opinion polls.

May 13 Sections: Public opinion.

May 14 Voting, campaigns, and elections: Presidential caucuses and primaries. Read Kernell and Jacobson chapter 11.

May 15 Sections: voting, campaigns, and elections.

May 16 Second exam.

May 19 Voting, campaigns, and elections: The general election and the Electoral College.

May 20 Sections: voting, campaigns, and elections.

May 21 Voting, campaigns, and elections. Film: *Taking on the Kennedys*.

May 22 Sections: voting, campaigns, and elections.

May 23 The news media: How journalists determine what qualifies as news. Read Kernell and Jacobson chapter 14.

May 26 No class (Memorial Day).

May 27 Sections: The news media.

May 28 The news media: How journalists cover politics and elections.

May 29 Sections: The news media; political parties.

May 30 Political parties: The two-party system and the history of third parties. Read Kernell and Jacobson chapter 12.

June 2 Interest groups: their roles and functions in American politics. Read Kernell and Jacobson chapter 13.

June 3 Sections: Interest groups.

June 4 Interest groups: money in elections.

June 5 Sections: Interest groups; exam review.

June 6 Concluding thoughts on American politics.

Final Exam. Wednesday, June 11 from 2:30-4:20.