INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS

Fall 2009
Marquette University

Professor: Stephen Engel (stephen.engel@marquette.edu)
Office: William Wehr Building Room 415

9:00—9:50 AM (MWF)
David Straz Hall 502

Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays (4:00-5:30 PM), Tuesdays (10:00-Noon), and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
In this class, students will investigate various aspects of American political institutional development and political behavior. How have institutions changed over time, how have Americans’ political behavior, engagement, and efficacy changed over time, and what do these changes tell us about the sustainability of the Founders’ democratic experiment? The course provides a detailed introduction to concepts underlying the subfield of American politics. It surveys common themes, topics, and methods used in this field. It covers a broad range of materials with diverse writing styles and methodologies, and it requires students to think and write critically about the topics discussed.

We begin the course by examining the principles and documents that form the foundation of the government of the United States. Next, we extend our focus by evaluating the major institutions that constitute the federal system. This examination will concentrate on the separation of powers, the three federal branches (the presidency, Congress, and the judiciary), the bureaucracy, and political parties. We then examine political behavior including voting behavior, political efficacy, social movement and interest group development, and public opinion. Finally, we will bring institutional and behavior concepts together by looking at governance in action, particularly in the areas of legal rights construction and public policy development.

By focusing on political structure, changing dynamics of political leadership, and evolution of political participation in the United States, we will ultimately be able to analyze a range of questions: What is the general nature of the American political system—is it open and responsive to all or is it restricted to those who have certain material, educational, or other resources? Is democracy a quest for inclusion or exclusion? How has our definition of citizenship changed over time, and has this change influenced our notions of political participation? How well does government—both state and federal—respond to policy needs and crises? What reforms could be undertaken to make our governing system more responsive?

The course book can be purchased at BookMarq. All other readings will be available for download on the D2L class web site.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**
Grades will be based on exams, participation, and structured in-class debates. There are two exams: an in-class midterm and an in-class final.

Depending on the final size of the class, students will team up to lead 1 of 6 possible debates. On “debate days”, two groups of at least 2 students each will present one side of a contentious argument. Each group will prepare a 5 to 7 minute presentation representing not only the best cases for their side of argument but also engaging the possible flaws of the other side. This presentation should be turned in to the professor as a no more than a 4-5 page paper. The paper itself should not be read during the debate. Each group will be offered 3 minutes to respond to the other side before discussion is opened to the rest of the class.

All class members are expected to ask questions of the debaters. Each student not debating will prepare 2 questions to ask the debaters and submit these questions to me at the end of the debate. These questions will be considered part of students’ participation/attendance grade.

**GRADING:**
- Participation/Attendance: 15%
- Group Debate/Presentation: 20%
- Midterm Exam: 30%
- Comprehensive Final Exam: 35%

**“REQUIRED” VERSUS “RECOMMENDED” READINGS:**
The syllabus is divided into required and recommended readings. You are responsible for knowing the information covered in the required readings. Any information in the required readings or presented at lecture is fair game for exams. Recommended readings are included on the syllabus to encourage you to deepen your understanding of a particular topic. If you are interested in reading them, please see me.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY:**
Academic honesty is expected. Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated. If you have questions, see [http://www.marquette.edu/wac/plagiarism/AvoidingPlagiarism2.shtml](http://www.marquette.edu/wac/plagiarism/AvoidingPlagiarism2.shtml) or see me.

**LATE POLICY:**
Each day an assignment is turned in late, it will be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade if permission of instructor for an extension has not been attained before the due date.
PART I: FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

TOPIC 1. RULES OF THE GAME: THE PURPOSE OF GOVERNMENT

M, 8/31: Welcome and Course Overview

W, 9/2: Evaluating Politics
Kernell and Jacobson, Chapter 1

Recommended:
Thomas Hobbes. 1651. Leviathan: “Of the Natural Condition of Mankind as Concerning Their Felicity and Misery,” “Of the First and Second Natural Laws, and of Contracts,” and “Of the Causes, Generation, and Definition of a Commonwealth”
John Locke. 1690. Second Treatise of Government (Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5)

F, 9/4: NO CLASS—Professor at 2009 APSA Conference

M, 9/7: NO CLASS—Labor Day Holiday

TOPIC 2. THE REVOLUTIONARY FOUNDING AND THE CONSTITUTION

W, 9/9: The Founding
Kernell and Jacobson, Chapter 2 (45-61)
The Declaration of Independence (D2L)
The Articles of Confederation (D2L)

F, 9/11: The Constitution (In-Class Debate assignments distributed)
Kernell and Jacobson, Chapter 2 (61-93)
The Constitution (D2L)

Recommended:
First Essay of Brutus

M, 9/14: Federalism
Kernell and Jacobson, Chapter 3
Federalist 10, 46, 51 (D2L)

Recommended:
Federalist 16, 17, 39

**TOPIC 3. POLITICAL CULTURE AND RELIGION**

**W, 9/16:**  
*Political Culture*  
Alexis de Tocqueville. 1835. *Democracy in America: Volume 1* (Chapters 2-4) *(D2L)*  

**Recommended:**  

**F, 9/18:**  
*Religion and American Politics*  
John Wise. 1717. “Democracy is Founded in Scripture.” *(D2L)*  
Alexis de Tocqueville. 1840. *Democracy in America: Volume 2.* (Chapters 5-7) *(D2L)*  

**Recommended:**  

**M, 9/21:**  
Debate/Discussion 1:  
“The Phrase ‘Under God’ In the Pledge of Allegiance: Violation of the First Amendment or Acceptable Expression” (Rourke, *You Decide!* 32-47)

**PART II: AMERICAN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**

**TOPIC 4. CONGRESS**

**W, 9/23:**  
*Congress: The Electoral Connection*  
Kernell and Jacobson, Chapter 6

F, 9/25:  Congress: The Members
Morris Fiorina. 1977. Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press (Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5) (D2L)
Richard Fenno. 1978. Homestyle: House Members in the Districts. Little Brown (Chapters 1 and 5) (D2L)

M, 9/28:  Discussion/Debate 2:
“Congressional Term Limits: Promoting Choice or Restricting Choice?” (Rourke, You Decide! 148-159)

**TOPIC 5. EXECUTIVE BRANCH: THE PRESIDENCY**

W, 9/30:  Presidency: Overview
Kernell and Jacobson, Chapter 7

Recommended:

F, 10/2:  Presidency: From Where Does the Power to Lead Come?

M, 10/5:  Presidency: Patterns over Time
Stephen Skowronek. 2008. The Presidency in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal. The University Press of Kansas (Chapter 3) (D2L)

**TOPIC 6. EXECUTIVE BRANCH: THE BUREAUCRACY**

W, 10/7:  The Development of the Executive Branch Bureaucracy
Kernell and Jacobson, Chapter 8
**TOPIC 7. THE JUDICIARY**

**F, 10/9:** The Judiciary  
Kernell and Jacobson, Chapter 9  
Federalist 78 (D2L)  
Alexander Bickel. 1962. The Least Dangerous Branch. New Haven: Yale University Press (Chapter 1). (D2L)

**M, 10/12:** Debate/Discussion 3:  
“Deciding the Constitution’s Meaning: Rely on the Original Authors or Interpret in Light of Modern Circumstances? (Rourke, You Decide! 2-15)

**Recommended:**  

**W, 10/14:** Midterm review

**F, 10/16:** Midterm Exam

**PART III: AMERICAN POLITICAL BEHAVIOR**

**TOPIC 8. PUBLIC OPINION**

**M, 10/19:** What is Public Opinion?  
Kernell and Jacobson, Chapter 10

**Recommended:**  

**TOPIC 9. VOTING BEHAVIOR AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

**W, 10/21:** Voting and Elections  
Kernell and Jacobson, Chapter 11

**F, 10/23:** FALL BREAK—NO CLASS

**M, 10/26:** Political Participation and Identity  
Political Participation.” American Political Science Review 95: 589-602. (D2L)

**TOPIC 10. POLITICAL PARTIES AND IDEOLOGICAL CHANGE**

**W, 10/28:** Political Parties  
Kernell and Jacobson, Chapter 12  
(Chapter 1) (D2L)

**Recommended:**  
“Toward a More Responsible Two Party System.” 1950. APSR 44: 1-36

**F, 10/30:** Electoral Realignments and Partisan Change  
Anna Greenberg, “The Obama Generation,” The Daily Beast. 26 April 2009 (D2L)

**TOPIC 10. SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND INTEREST GROUPS**

**M, 11/2:** Social Movements and Interest Groups (Part I)  
Kernell and Jacobson, Chapter 13  
Stephen M. Engel. 2001. The Unfinished Revolution. New York: Cambridge University Press (Chapter 1) (D2L)  

**Recommended:**  

**W, 11/4:** Social Movements and Interest Groups (Part II)  
Rhys Williams. 1995. “Constructing the Public Good: Social Movements and Cultural Resources.” Social Problems 42 (February), 124-44. (D2L)  
**TOPIC 12. MEDIA, CAMPAIGNS, AND ELECTIONS**

**F, 11/6:** *Framing News and Influencing Citizens*
Kernell and Jacobson, Chapter 14

**M, 11/9:** *Media and Election Campaigns*
James Fallows. 1996. “Why Americans Hate the Media,” *Atlantic Monthly*

**W, 11/11:** The War Room (viewing during class)

**F, 11/13:** Debate/Discussion 4:
New Media/Cable News/Talk Radio—Improving Political Discourse?
Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Joseph N. Capella. 2008. *Echo Chamber*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Chapters 1, 3, 5, 6) and

**PART IV: GOVERNMENT IN ACTION**

**TOPIC 13. CONSTRUCTING RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES AS AMERICAN POLITICS**

**M, 11/16:** *Civil Rights*
Kernell and Jacobson, Chapter 4
Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)
Brown v. Board of Education (1954)

**W, 11/18:** *Civil Liberties*
Kernell and Jacobson, Chapter 5

**F, 11/20:** *Does the Court Promote Social Change?*
Michael McCann, “Casual versus Constitutive Explanations (or, On the Difficulty of Being So Positive...),” *Law and Social Inquiry* 21 (Spring 1996) *(D2L)*
M, 11/23: Debate/Discussion 5:
"Granting Habeas Corpus Rights to Terrorist Suspects: Undermining National
Security or Providing Justice?" (Rourke, You Decide! 270-89)

W, 11/25: THANKSGIVING BREAK—NO CLASS
F, 11/27: THANKSGIVING BREAK—NO CLASS

**TOPIC 14. CONSTRUCTING PUBLIC POLICY**

M, 11/30: Policy (Part I): Opportunities and Barriers to Reform
Kernell and Jacobson, Chapter 15
Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones. 1993. Agendas and Instability in
American Politics. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (Chapter 1)
(D2L)

Recommended:
Little Brown (Chapters 1 and 8)

W, 12/2: Policy (Part II): Opportunities and Barriers to Reform
Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones. 1993. Agendas and Instability in
American Politics. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (Chapters 2
and 4) (D2L)
Came and Went.” Journal of Health Politics, Policy, and Law 21 (4)
647-96. (D2L)
Jacob Weisberg, "Health, American Style," Slate, 18 July 2009. (D2L)
Alec MacGillis, "Employers Are Far from Unified Against Overhaul,"
Washington Post, 23 July 2009. (D2L)

F, 12/4: Debate/Discussion 6:
Health Care Reform in the Age of Obama
“The Better Approach to Health Care Reform: Barack Obama’s or John
McCain’s?” (Rourke, You Decide! [Internet Resource])

M, 12/7: Spill-Over/Catch-Up Day

W, 12/9: Wrap-up and Final Exam Review

F, 12/11: NO CLASS—Professor at the Advanced Constitutional Law Conference at
Princeton University