

POSC 020 - American Politics

Fall 2008

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417 Physics

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Office Hours: MW 4-5, T 10-noon, F 1-3



Course Objectives:

The course will both describe and analyze the American political system, with primary emphasis at the federal level. A particular concern will be the extent to which, and the ways in which, public opinion is translated into policy. That is to say, is the system actually “democratic” and if so how? Are there systematic distortions in the processes that translate public preferences into policy?

Texts:

James Q. Wilson and John J. DiIulio, *American Government* (10th Edition).

Charles Peters, *How Washington Really Works* (4th Edition).

Student Handbook for Wilson and DiIulio (optional)

Students should check Sweeney’s College Books for the best prices on textbooks.

Requirements:

Attendance is optional, although it will be extremely difficult to achieve a good grade without regular attendance. All readings are required. All are available on library reserve. Most will be made available in a xeroxed packet.

There will also be two videos on the issue of “global warming” shown in the evening. Attendance will be required, but an alternative will be available for students whose schedule does not allow them to show up at the required time.

Grading:

There will be eleven short objective quizzes during the term, which will test both assigned readings and class material. They will be announced in advance. There will be a mid-term exam, a second exam near the end of the semester and a final exam, all of which will include objective and essay portions. The grade will consist of the final (30%), exams (20% each) and the quizzes (30%).

Course Outline:

I. Introduction – Theories of American Politics

Wilson, Chap. 1

II. The Philosophy of the Founders

Wilson, Chap. 2

Federalist numbers 10 and 51 in Wilson, p. A21

The U.S. Constitution in Wilson, p. A4

Declaration of Independence, Wilson, p. A1

III. Public Opinion

Wilson, Chap. 7

Robert S. Erikson and Kent Tedin, *American Public Opinion* (7th Edition, Updated),
Chapter 2.

IV. The Media

Wilson, Chap. 12

Peters, Chap. 1

William Nesbitt, “How Three Newspapers Handled a Story,” Chapter 4 of
Interpreting the Newspaper in the Classroom.

David Shaw, “Are Media Biased on Abortion?,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, July 8, 1990
(in two parts).

“Roe Warriors: The Media’s Pro-Abortion Bias,” Media Research Center Special
Report.

Robert Lichter, “The Media’s Typical Homeless are Anything But,” *The Wall Street
Journal*, December 14, 1989.

S. Robert Lichter & Stanley Rothman, “Media and Business Elites,” *Public Opinion*,
October/November 1981.

Jeff Jacoby, “A war report discredited,” *Boston Globe*, January 13, 2008.

Jane Rosenzweig, “Can TV Improve Us?,” *Shepard Express Metro*, July 15, 1999.

Howard Fineman, “The ‘Media Party’ is Over,”

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6813945/>

“A Load of Hot Air” The BBC,

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4923504.stm>

V. Elections and Voter Behavior

Wilson, Chap. 10

John McAdams, “Public Opinion as a Constraint on Political Elites,” in John C.
Shea (ed.) *Arguments on American Politics*, pp. 71-91

VI. Interest Groups

Wilson, Chap. 11, 17

Peters, Chap. 2

S. Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman, "What Interests the Public and What Interests the Public Interests," *Public Opinion*, April/May 1983

S. L. Price, "The Indian Wars," *Sports Illustrated*, March 2, 2002.

Linda S. Lichter, "Who Speaks for Black America?" *Public Opinion*, August/September 1985.

VII. The Parties

Wilson, Chap. 9

Mike Royko, The Boss, in Peter Woll (ed.) *Behind the Scenes in American Government*

VIII. The Congress

Wilson, Chap. 13

Peters, Chap. 7

Morris Fiorina, "Big Government: A Congressman's Best Friend," *Washington Monthly*, March 1977.

Richard E. Cohan, et al., "The State of Congress," *National Journal*, January 10, 2004.

IX. Social Welfare Policy

Wilson, Chap. 19

Amy L. Sherman, "The Changing Face of Welfare," *Family*, Nov.-Dec. 1999

Christopher Jencks, "Liberal Lessons From Welfare Reform," *The American Prospect*, Summer 2002.

X. The Presidency

Wilson, Chap. 14

Peters, Chap. 8

Dinesh D'Souza, "How Reagan Reelected Clinton," *Forbes*, November 3, 1997.

Donald R. Wolfensberger, "The Return of the Imperial Presidency?," *The Wilson Quarterly*, Spring 2002.

XI. Bureaucracy

Wilson, Chap. 15

Peters, Chap. 3, 5, 6.

Leonard Reed, "The Budget Game," *Washington Monthly*, January 1979

Dave Barry, "America's Toilets -- they stink" (on reserve)

Robert Maranto, "Turkey Farm," *The Washington Monthly*, November 1999.

XII. Courts

Wilson, Chap. 16

William Ray Forrester, "Are We Ready for Truth in Judging?" *American Bar Association Journal*, September 27, 1977.

Antonin Scalia, "Vigilante Justices," *National Review*, February 10, 1997.

Stephen Markman, "Constitutional Myths and Realities," *Imprimis*, August 2005.

XIII. Conclusion

Wilson, Chap. 22

Peters, Chap. 9