Political Science 122, Politics in America: Liberty and Equality  

SYLLABUS

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Political Science 122 offers an introduction to how political scientists study American politics. This is not a course in current events; rather, it is a course in which historical and contemporary political issues and problems of governance (empirical data) are discussed to illustrate hypotheses about how politics works (theory) and to further refine these hypotheses.

At the founding of this nation there existed tensions between liberty and equality that we will trace to modern debates about small government vs. big government and debates between conservatives and liberals. We will examine the role of individual citizens in democracy as the components of public opinion, as voters and non-voters, and as members of the interest groups and social movements that influence public policy. We will then examine the role of political parties in creating electoral accountability through the nomination and election of presidents and members of Congress. We will examine the impact that popular social movements have on parties and the politics of compromise and coalition. We will also look at the constitutionally designed sharing of powers between the Congress and the Presidency and discuss the deadlock of divided government and its numerous implications for American politics. Throughout, a prominent concern will be how incentives for individual and group behavior are shaped by institutional arrangements and how these rules of the game shape political outcomes.

There will be one in class midterm exam (25% total) and a final examination (50%). Class attendance, participation, writing assignments, and quizzes (together 25%) will also be part of the requirements of the course. Quizzes will be unannounced but will only ask the question(s) that the syllabus poses for each set of readings (i.e., the "Q:" questions). Missing a quiz earns an "F" except for excused absences. The lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

If you have questions about the readings, lecture material, or the writing assignments, please come to my office. My office is 417 Willis, office hours will be announced in the first week of class, no appointments are necessary during office hours. This is your time, just drop in. For meetings at other times, I am glad to make an appointment. My office phone is 646-4122, home phone until 9 p.m. only is 645-5666, and my e-mail is rkeiser@carleton.edu. I would like to receive an e-mail from every student in the first two weeks so that I can compile all of your addresses and send information to the entire class. Tell me something interesting about yourself, your family background, and your interests, political or otherwise.

The books for the course are:

Welch, et al., Understanding American Government (5th edition)

Ginsberg and Shefter, Politics By Other Means (revised and updated edition only!)

Readings labeled RR on the syllabus are on reserve at Gould Library.

Students are required to regularly read the national news section of the New York Times, (available at the bookstore, deeply discounted for this course) so that we can discuss today's political news, particularly presidential primary politics, within a context of historically-derived theory.


FRI: THE CONSTITUTION: Welch, et al., ch. 2 & Hudson, American Democracy in Peril, ch. 1 RR.
Q: What is the significance of Shays's Rebellion? What is Charles Beard's argument? How do these two strands connect to the ideas in Federalist #10? Define and differentiate the four theories of democracy.

MON2: PUBLIC OPINION AND PARTICIPATION: Welch, et al., ch. 4.

Q: What is the significance of the low level of public awareness about politics for the debate among the four theories of democracy? How does low public awareness impact Madison's solution in Federalist #10?

WED: ELECTIONS AND PARTICIPATION: Welch, et al., ch. 7.

Q: Who tends to participate least and why? What do some states have higher rates of turnout than others? How do we compare with Europe on electoral turnout?

FRI: Begin readings for Monday. We will continue our discussion from Wednesday.

MON3: INTEREST GROUPS: Welch, et al., ch. 5; Loomis and Cigler, Interest Group Politics, ch. 1RR. In Loomis and Cigler, pay close attention to the ideas of Truman (derived from Madison) and Olson.

Q: In contemporary US politics, are interest groups a functional substitute for the Madisonian prescription of faction checking faction for the protection of minority rights?

WED: MONEY AND POLITICS: Welch et al., ch. 9. Do moneyed interests and big business in particular have a privileged position in American politics?

FRI: MEDIA AND PARTIES: Welch et al., ch. 8 and 6.

Q: Are the media a countervailing force against the power of big business interests?

MON4: POLITICAL PARTIES: Downs, "The Statics and Dynamics of Party Ideologies," RR; Big Tent Readings, RR

Q: How does Downs' portrait of the electorate fit with our previous readings on the state of public opinion and level of public knowledge about issues? Think about four or five issues including both high and low profile ones. Do you think Downs' portrait is accurate?

Does the political party system, through the structure of competing big tents, make democracy representative, responsive and accountable?

WED: CONGRESS: Welch, Appendix D (Federalist #51); Sundquist, "Needed: A Political Theory for the New Era," RR.

FRI: Smith, The Power Game, chs. 17-18, RR.

Q: What is divided government? List the possible causes of divided government and explain the process by which each cause (independent variable) produces this outcome (dependent variable).

MON5: EXAMINATION

WED: Welch, ch. 10 and "Interest Groups, Congress and the Policy Process" packet, RR

Q: On average, how frequently do incumbent representatives and senators win reelection? Why are they so successful, what constitutes the incumbency advantage? Is this a good thing or not? Can incumbency be blamed for the divided government that characterized the 1970s and 1980s?
FRI: Review

MON6: MID TERM BREAK

WED: PRESIDENCY: Welch, chs. 3 and 11

FRI: Welch, ch. 12.


Q: Explain why after the McGovern-Fraser reforms it is only necessary to capture a wing of the tent (mobilize a plurality) rather than build a big tent coalition (mobilize a majority)? Why are Iowa and New Hampshire not wise places for the Democrats to hold their first 2 primaries? Can you make the argument that these reforms and their consequences are a cause of divided government and gridlock?

WED: Begin reading Friday's large assignment.

FRI: CONTEMPORARY PARTY SYSTEM: Rae, *Southern Democrats*, chs. 1 and 3 (Any student with a deep interest in current American political history is urged to read the entire book during the course of the term.); and Edsall and Edsall, "Race" RR; Schneider, "The New Shape of American Politics" RR (particularly pp. 44-52).

Q: What are the 4 factions of the Democratic party and their defining features? What does the author mean when he distinguishes between economic issues and social/cultural issues? Did the Democrats win the presidency when they lost only the Southern states from the New Deal coalition? What is the most simple way to delineate the difference between Rae's focus and the focus of the Edsalls?

MON8: Ginsberg & Shefter, *Politics by Other Means*, chs. 1-2

WED: Ginsberg & Shefter, *Politics by Other Means*, chs. 3-4

FRI: Ginsberg & Shefter, *Politics by Other Means*, chs. 5-6


Q: Who is the DLC? How do their opponents describe and criticize them? What role did Super Tuesday have in their grand strategy? Who does Schneider see as the beneficiary of the growth in the suburban electorate?

WED: Ceaser & Busch, *Upside Down*, ch. 3 RR

Q: Does the outcome of 1992 Super Tuesday prove that this latest reform has solved the Democrats' problems in presidential elections

FRI: Wilson, "Race Neutral Programs and the Democratic Party," RR; Cook, "Suburbia: Land of Varied Faces" RR.

Q: What strategy has Bill Clinton used to win suburban voters? Has he had coattails in suburbia, why or why not?

MON10: Caldwell, "The Southern Captivity of the GOP" RR and readings on the Christian Coalition

WED: "Future of American Politics" packet, RR

FRI: LAST CLASS