

G 53.1300 American Political Institutions and Processes

NYU Dept. of Politics, Fall 2008

Professor: Raymond A. Smith

Thursdays 6:45-8:45

Office Hour: Before and after class by appointment

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This course offers a broad survey of American political institutions and processes, focusing on the most important and influential works in the study of the politics and government of the United States since World War II. The course is organized into three parts:

- Part I focuses on a brief overview of American political science since the 1950s, including the pluralist school, normative and empirical critiques of the pluralist school, and the development of rational choice perspectives. This part of the course emphasizes the reading and discussion of chapters and journal articles that have been particularly influential in the evolution of post-WWII American political science.
- Part II focuses on political behavior, including public opinion, interest group participation, and the electoral process. This part of the course emphasizes key debates about the role of these processes in American democracy and about the possibilities and limitations of participation in the US political system.
- Part III examines the branches of the federal government, including Congress, the Presidency, the federal bureaucracy and the judiciary. This part of the course reviews the literature about how each branch is shaped by institutional structures and processes on the one hand and by individual ambition and agency on the other.

Course Requirements

The principal requirements for this course are three take-home exams of one essay each. There will also be brief weekly written assignments and students will take turns presenting their analyses of course readings and helping to lead class discussion. The final grade will be calculated on the following basis: take-home exams – 75% (25% each); class assignments and participation – 25%. More information will be presented about the course requirements in class.

Course Readings

Since this course is a survey of the core works in American politics, there is a wide variety of readings, mostly book chapters or excerpts and journal articles. All readings should be completed *before* the class in which they are due and preferably in the order they are listed. Given this course's focus on the key works in the field, more recent scholarship will not be stressed. You are also encouraged to spend some time browsing recent issues of political science journals to acquaint yourself with current thinking in the field, and to use these in your research paper. A list of reputationally strong political science journals is attached to this syllabus.

All of the books and articles on this syllabus have been placed on reserve at Bobst Library. (The call numbers of all books are also listed below.) A limited number of key books from the first few weeks have been ordered at the NYU Bookstore. For those wishing to build a personal library of key classics in American politics, this list would be a good place to start. Core classics in the field below that are recommended for purchase have been marked by an asterisk. Books may be purchased or special ordered through the NYU Bookstore or other bookstores or ordered online. The Strand Bookstore (828 Broadway, several blocks north of the Politics Department) has a particularly deep backlist of books in the social sciences.

For those who may wish to brush up on particular factual details of American politics, the textbook *American Government: Power and Purpose* (Theodore Lowi, Benjamin Ginsburg and Kenneth Shepsle; CQ Press; Call#JK274.K43), which is used in my undergraduate class, is also reserve for this course at Bobst Library.

Course Schedule

This is the anticipated course schedule, but it maybe subject to minor revisions as the semester progresses. A limited number of additional readings may also be assigned.

September 4 Meeting: Introduction, Overview, and Organizational Meeting

Part I: A Brief Overview of Post-WWII American Political Science

September 11 Meeting – The Constitutional Order and the Legal-Formalist School

Review the text of the US Constitution, including the 27 Amendments

Clinton Rossiter, *The American Presidency* (Harcourt Brace, Call#JK516 .R6)

James Madison, Federalist 10, 51

(can be accessed at: <http://memory.loc.gov/const/fed/fedpapers.html>)

*Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (U of Chicago Press, Call # JC423.D25 1963), Ch. 1

David Truman, *The Governmental Process* (Greenwood Press, Call # JK1118.T7), Preface, Ch. 2, 3, 16

September 18 Meeting: Behavioralism, The Pluralist School, and its Critics

*Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (U of Chicago Press, Call # JC423.D25 1963), Ch. 3-5

Robert Dahl, *Who Governs?: Democracy and Power in an American City* (Yale University Press, Call# JS1195.2.D2) Ch. 1, 7, 8, 12, 19, 24, 27, 28

Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, "Two Faces of Power" (article on reserve)

E.E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Call# JK271.S23), Ch. 2, 3, 8

September 25 Meeting: Rational Choice Perspectives

Exam #1 distributed in class

*Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (HarperCollins, Call#JF1351.D65), Ch. 1,2,3,8

*Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Harvard University Press, Call#HM131.055 1971), Ch 1, 2

Donald P. Green and Ian Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory* (Yale University Press), Ch. 1,2,3,8

Rogers Smith, "Should We Make Political Science More of a Science or More about Politics?" from *PS: Political Science and Politics* (article on reserve)

Part II: Political Behavior

October 2 Meeting: Political Participation; Interest Groups

Exam #1 due in class

Robert Putnam, Excerpt from *Bowling Alone*, Article 3 in *Controversies in Voting Behavior* (CQ Press JF1001.C575 2001)

Steven Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, Excerpt from *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*, Article 4 in *Controversies in Voting Behavior* (CQ Press JF1001.C575 2001)

Terry Moe, *The Organization of Interests* (University of Chicago Press, Call#JF529.M59 1988), Introduction, Ch. 1, 2

Robert Salisbury, "An Exchange Theory of Interest Groups" (article on reserve)

October 9 Meeting: Public Opinion

Richard Niemi and Herbert Weisberg, "Does Political Information Matter?", Article 6 in *Controversies in Voting Behavior* (CQ Press JF1001.C575 2001)

Philip Converse, "The Stability of Belief Systems over Time," Chapter 6 in *Classics in Voting Behavior* (CQ Press, Call#JK1967.C41992)

Samuel Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter* (University of Chicago Press, Call#JK524.P64 1994), Ch. 1, 2

Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro, *The Rational Public* (University of Chicago, Call# JK2261.S9 1983), Ch. 1,2, 8,

October 16 Meeting: Political Parties, Voting and Elections

Exam #2 distributed in class

Richard Niemi and Herbert Weisberg, "The Study of Voting and Elections", Article 1 in *Controversies in Voting Behavior* (CQ Press JF1001.C575 2001)

Richard Niemi and Herbert Weisberg, "Is it Rational to Vote?", Article 1 in *Classics in Voting Behavior* (CQ Press JK1967.C4 1992)

John Aldrich, *Why Parties?* (University of Chicago Press, Call# JK2261.A46 1995), Ch. 1, 2

James Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System* (Brookings Institution, Call#JK2261.S9 1983), Ch. 1, 2, 3

V.O. Key, *The Responsible Electorate* (Harvard University Press, Call#JK524.K4), Ch. 1

Part III: Institutions of Government

October 23 Meeting: The Study of Institutions

Exam #2 due in class

Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons* (Cambridge U Press, 1990) Ch. 1, 3, 6

Kenneth Shepsle, "Studying Institutions: Some Lessons from the Rational Choice Approach" (article on reserve)

Kenneth Arrow, "The Economics of Agency" (article on reserve)

John W. Pratt and Richard J. Zeckhauser, "Principals and Agents: An Overview" (article on reserve)

October 30 Meeting: Congress, Part I

*David Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (Yale University Press, Call# JK1067.M3) (Part I)

R. Douglas Arnold, *The Logic of Congressional Action* (Yale University Press, Call#JK1067.A76 1990). Ch. 1, 4-6

Richard Fenno, *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts* (HarperCollins 1978), Ch. 1-2

November 6 Meeting: Congress, Part II

Matthew D. McCubbins, *Congress: Structure and Policy* (Cambridge University Press, Call# JK1061), Ch. 2, 3, 4

Gary W. Cox and Matthew McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House* (U of California Press, 1993), Introduction, Ch. 4-5

David Mayhew, *Divided We Govern*, (Yale University Press, JK2261.M36 1991), Ch. 1, 5, 6

November 13 Meeting: The Presidency

Exam #3 distributed in class

*Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (Free Press, Call# JK516.N4 1990), Ch. 3-5

Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make* (Harvard U Press, Call# JK511.S55), Ch 1-3

Terry Moe, "Presidents, Institutions, and Theory" (article on reserve)

November 20 Meeting: The Bureaucracy & the Judiciary

Robert Higgs, *Crisis and Leviathan: Critical Episodes in the Growth of American Government* (Oxford University Press, Call# JK411.H54 1987), Ch. 1, 6

Alexander Hamilton, Federalist 78
(can be accessed at: <http://memory.loc.gov/const/fed/fedpapers.html>)

David O' Brien, *Storm Center: The Supreme Court in American Life* (WW Norton, Call #KF8742.O27 1993), Ch. 1, 6

Gerald Rosenberg, *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring about Social Change?*
(University of Chicago Press, Call#KF8700.R66), Ch. 1, 12

November 27 – Thanksgiving Holiday, No Class Meeting

December 4 Meeting – Course Conclusion

Exam #3 due in class