

Syllabus
Introduction to American Politics (PLSC 1000-1)
Professor Seth Masket
Fall 2006

Contact Info:

e-mail: smasket@du.edu

Phone: x12718

Office Hours: Fridays 9AM – 12PM

Purpose

The purpose of this class is to teach you about the institutions, practices, and history of politics and government in the United States. This course will cover a great deal of ground, as we will discuss the Constitution, the three branches of the federal government, interest groups, public opinion, campaigns, elections, and parties. For each subject, we will examine some of the leading perspectives in political science, and we will incorporate current events and our personal experiences, as well.

The main textbook for this course, Kernell and Jacobson's *The Logic of American Politics*, takes a novel approach to the study of American politics. It frames the course in terms of understanding collective action problems. A collective action problem exists when people would be better off if they cooperated, but they can't help acting in their own interests, even if that makes everyone worse off. Over time, we have developed institutions to solve some collective action problems. The book, along with the course, investigates the kinds of collective action problems we have faced in our history, the solutions we've come up with to address them, and the success we've had in resolving them.

You are expected to attend all lectures. You are responsible for all the materials covered in the readings *and* in class.

Work

Your grade in this class will consist of your performance on four different items:

1. A *midterm*, to be held in class on Wednesday, October 11th. This will consist of both short answers and an essay.
2. A *final*, to be held on Monday, November 20th, in class. This will consist of both short answers and several essays, and will cover material from the entire course.
3. A *research paper* in which you examine two collective action problems in American politics. This will be closely tied to the course's service learning requirement (more on that below.) I will provide details on the research assignment by the 3rd week of class. A 6-8 page paper detailing your findings is due Monday, November 13th, at the beginning of class.
4. *Class participation*. We will have a variety of different exercises during class that will give you many opportunities to voice your opinions about current events and the course materials. In addition, you are expected to use the discussion board functions on the campus Blackboard web site to maintain an ongoing dialogue

outside of class (see the last page for instructions). In particular, you will need to post a brief “reaction” to the course materials on the discussion board after every Monday class so that your thoughts can be incorporated into Wednesday’s class. These reactions will be due each Tuesday by 5PM. You are also encouraged to comment on other people’s reactions.

The grading will be weighted as follows:

- Midterm – 25%
- Final – 35%
- Research paper – 35%
- Participation – 5%

Service Learning

This course has a service learning requirement. Specifically, all students will be required to participate in community efforts to register voters and boost voter turnout in the November elections. There will be two specific components to this:

1. Everyone will do at least a two-hour shift with a campus-wide effort to register voters. This will be completed by the fourth week of class. (The deadline for voters to register is October 6th.) We will receive instructions and training on this effort in class on Wednesday, September 13th.
2. Everyone will do at least a two-hour shift on or immediately prior to Election Day (November 7) to encourage voter turnout. There are campus organizations that are eager for our participation in this. If students wish, they may fulfill this commitment by working with a political campaign or party – I will make information available about that.

Etiquette

Although I will spend some of our class time lecturing, we will have many dialogues, both in class and on-line. In these discussions, you are encouraged to use your personal experiences and perspectives, as well as your understanding of the course material and current events. Direct personal attacks against others in the class are not permitted. Insulting anyone one inside or outside the class on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, party affiliation, or national background is not permitted. Violations of these rules will be reflected in your grade and, if they continue, may result in disciplinary action by the University.

Contacting Me

I frequently check e-mail (smasket@du.edu), so that is usually the best way to get in touch with me. I can also be reached on my office phone (x12718). I will also have regular office hours on Fridays from 9AM to 12PM. If you want to get in touch with me about something that is of interest to the whole class (I made a typo in an assignment, for example), it would be better to use the class discussion board. If you need me to get back to you within the same day, definitely contact me before 9PM. I can’t promise I’ll look at e-mail after that.

I recommend that you check your e-mail at least once a day. I'll occasionally send out information relevant to our course that way.

Students with Special Needs

Please contact me as soon as possible if you have a documented learning disability or other condition that requires accommodations, such as a separate testing room or extra time on exams.

Syllabus

Required Texts

Kernell and Jacobson, *The Logic of American Politics* (CQ Press, 2005)

Woll, *American Government: Readings and Cases*, 16th ed. (Pearson Longman, 2006)

Other than the Kernell/Jacobson chapters and those readings marked as “on-line” (available on the course website), all readings can be found in the Woll book.

Week 1 – Introduction: The Logic of American Politics (Sept. 11, 13)

Topics: Collective action, the prisoner’s dilemma, institutional design, public and private goods, principals and agents.

Readings:

- Kernell/Jacobson, chapter 1
- Locke, *Second Treatise, Of Civil Government*
- The Constitution of the United States (in Kernell/Jacobson, pp. 552-61, or on-line)
- Colbert, “Of Course Your Vote Counts!” (on-line)

On Sept. 13th, we will be trained in voter registration for the service learning aspect of the course.

Week 2 – The Founders and the Constitution (Sept. 18, 20)

Topics: Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, Checks and balances, popular sovereignty, the Great Compromise, separation of powers, federalism, nationalization.

Readings:

- Kernell/Jacobson, chapters 2 and 3
- *The Federalist*, 47, 48, 51

Special Event: Constitution Day on Sept. 20th. We will attend a talk at 4PM regarding the constitutionality of the treatment of prisoners at Guantánamo.

Week 3 – The Congress (Sept. 25, 27)

Topics: Representation, redistricting and gerrymandering, incumbency advantage, leadership structure, the committee system, how a bill becomes a law.

Readings:

- Kernell/Jacobson, chapter 6
- Fiorina, “Rise of the Washington Establishment”
- Fenno, “Home Style and Washington Career”

Week 4 - The Presidency (Oct. 2, 4)

Topics: Various roles of the president, growth of presidential power over time, the cabinet, going public, presidential rhetoric, the president's staff.

Readings:

- Kernell/Jacobson, chapter 7
- Rossiter, "The Presidency – Focus of Leadership"
- Barber, "Presidential Character"

Week 5 – Supreme Court (Oct. 9)

Topics: Judicial review, structure of federal judiciary, Supreme Court history, justice confirmation process, judicial activism, abortion politics

Readings:

- Kernell/Jacobson, chapter 9
- Kinsley, "What Abortion Debate?" (on-line)
- *The Federalist*, No. 78
- *Bush v. Gore* (on-line)

MIDTERM IN CLASS WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 11TH

Week 6 – Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (Oct 16, 18)

Topics: Rights and liberties, recognition of rights of ethnic/racial groups, the Bill of Rights, due process, equal protection, freedom of speech, religious freedom, privacy.

Readings:

- Kernell/Jacobson, chapters 4 and 5
- Holmes, "The Need to Maintain a Free Marketplace of Ideas"
- *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*

Oct. 16th – in class training for get out the vote efforts for service learning.

Week 7 – Interest Groups (Oct. 23, 25)

Topics: Lobbying, grassroots and astroturf, "demosclerosis," political action committees (PACs), "special interests."

- Kernell/Jacobson, chapter 13
- *The Federalist*, No. 10
- Berry, "Madison's Dilemma"
- Truman, "The Governmental Process"
- Lowi, "The End of Liberalism: The Indictment"

Week 8 – Public Opinion and Campaigns (Oct. 30, Nov. 1)

Topics: Voters and nonvoters, ideologues and the undecided, polling, nonattitudes, framing, cues, the powers and limits of campaigns, turnout, how voters decide, campaign spending, positive and negative advertising, the Electoral College

Readings:

- Kernell/Jacobson, chapters 10 and 11
- Key, “The Responsible Electorate”
- Polsby, “Presidential Elections”

Week 9 – The Media (Nov. 6, 8)

Readings: Television versus newspapers, bias, reporters versus editors, sound bites, images versus text, the White House Press Corps. Also, big election discussion on Wednesday!

- Kernell/Jacobson, chapter 14
- Cook, “Media Power and Congressional Power”

Week 10 – The Parties (Nov. 13, 15)

Topics: Who controls the party, nominations and the united front, partisanship among voters and elites, partisanship versus ideology, factions versus parties, third parties, party system history, party decline and resurgence

Readings:

- Kernell/Jacobson, chapter 12
- Schattschneider, “Party Government”
- *California Democratic Party et al. v. Jones et al.*
- American Political Science Association, “Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System”

Research paper due Monday, November 13th

Final in class, Monday, November 20th, 1 – 3 PM.

Using Blackboard for Class Discussions

- Go to the Blackboard web page (<http://blackboard.du.edu/>). Enter your student ID number and password. These are the same ones that you would use to log in to DU WebCentral. (You can also log in to Blackboard through WebCentral by clicking on the “courses” tab and then clicking on the Blackboard link on the left side.)
- Under the “My Courses” header, you should see a listing for “PLSC-1000 Intro to American Politics.” Click on the course name. (NOTE: If you do *not* see that course name, e-mail me at smasket@du.edu and let me know).
- On the left side of the screen are several topics. Click on “Discussion boards.”
- Click on the folder corresponding to the current week/topic.
- To start a new post, click “Add a New Thread” and start writing. Give your post a fitting subject name. When done, click “submit.”
- To comment on someone else’s post, click on the subject name of that post.