

Dynamics of American Politics
POLS BC1001y
Spring 2006

Instructor: Prof. [Kimberley Johnson](#)

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Office Hours: Monday 3-5, and by appt.

Meeting: M/W 1:10-2:25 PM

Location: 328 Milbank Hall

Course Description

This course introduces students to the American political system. We will look at issues such as of democracy, civic culture and participation. These broad issues will then be explored through an examination of American political institutions. This course is intended to help students develop a context for understanding contemporary American politics. Why does there seem to be a persistent, if not growing, gap between our ideals and our institutions? Is American-style democracy a case of historical exceptionalism, or a vibrant and robust system that can serve as a model for other states? The second goal of the course is to help students understand the craft of political science. Why do political scientists ask the questions that they do, and how do they go about answering them? The attempt to address these and other questions is the foundations for course readings, lecture and discussion.

Course Readings

The following books are available at Columbia University Bookstore and are on reserve at Barnard Library. Where noted, other readings are available online.

Required

Robert Dahl, *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* (1st ed.)

Marc Landy and Sidney Milkis, *American Government: Balancing Democracy and Rights*

Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton*

Gerald Rosenberg, *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring about Social Change?*

Anne Serow & Everett Ladd, *Lanahan Readings in American Polity* (3rd ed) – not on Reserve!

Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*

Suggested (on-reserve)

Samuel Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*

John Aldrich, *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America*

Gary Cox & Mathew McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House*

Course Requirements

Students should complete required readings and attend class lectures. The mid-term and final exams will cover both the readings and the lectures. Two short writing assignments are also required.

Participation: Class participation is encouraged and required. The questions that we will be addressing are challenging ones that have engaged Americans and others for generations. There are no dumb questions in this class, but thoughtful answers from all of us.

Reading Assignments: Students are expected to read assignments prior to class. Class discussion will begin but not end with these readings.

Writing Assignments: Students will be required to submit two writing assignments during the semester.

In-class Debates: There will be two in-class debates during the semester. Attendance is required in order to complete the written assignments.

Exams: There will be a Final Exam that will cover the entire semester.

Course Grade:

Participation - 10%	Midterm	- 25%
In-class Debate/Writing Assignment - 20%	Final Exam	- 25%
In-class Debate/Writing Assignment - 20%		

Assignment due dates: All assignments are due *in-person* due at the beginning of class. Late assignments will be penalized one grade for each day they are late (including weekends). Exceptions to this policy must be cleared by the instructor at least 3 days prior to the due date.

Academic Honesty: The Barnard College Honor Code, approved by the student body in 1912, states:

We, the students of Barnard College, resolve to uphold the honor of the College by refraining from every form of dishonesty in our academic life. We consider it dishonest to ask for, give, or receive help in examinations or quizzes, to use any papers or books not authorized by the instructor in examinations, or to present oral work or written work which is not entirely our own, unless otherwise approved by the instructor. We consider it dishonest to remove without authorization, alter, or deface library and other academic materials. We pledge to do all that is in our power to create a spirit of honesty and honor for its own sake.

Students with Disabilities: Students with disabilities who will be taking this course and may need disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see me as soon as possible. Also, stop by the Office of Disability Services in 105 Hewitt to register for support services.

Course Schedule and Reading List

Course Introduction – January 18

I. Civic Engagement & Civic Culture

January 23, 25

McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, Chapter 1

Lanahan, Part 1

Readings from the *American Prospect*:

The Strange Disappearance of Civic America

<http://www.prospect.org/print/V7/24/putnam-r.html>

What If Civic Life Didn't Die?

- <http://www.prospect.org/print/V7/25/25-cnt1.html>

Unravelling From Above

- <http://www.prospect.org/print/V7/25/25-cnt2.html>

Couch-Potato Democracy?

- <http://www.prospect.org/print/V7/25/25-cnt3.html>

Religion and Social Capital

- <http://www.prospect.org/print/V8/32/greeley-a.html>

Robert Putnam Responds

- <http://www.prospect.org/print/V7/25/25-cnt4.html>

The Big Tilt: Participatory Inequality in America

- <http://www.prospect.org/print/V8/32/schlozman-k.html>

Associations Without Members

- <http://www.prospect.org/print/V10/45/skocpol-t.html>

Putnam's America

- <http://www.prospect.org/print/V11/16/wills-g.html>

II. Democracy and the Constitution

January 30, February 1

Robert Dahl, *How Democratic is the American Constitution?*

- Chapters: All

Lanahan, Part 2 & 3

Landy and Milkis, Chapters 2 & 3

February 6

In-Class Debate/ Writing Assignment #1 Assigned (Due February 13)

III. Participation, Information and Voting

February 8, 13, 15

McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, Chapters 2 & 3

Landy and Milkis, Chapter 12

Lanahan, Part 10 & 14

Suggested: Samuel Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter*, Chapters: 1-6, 10-11

IV. Bridging Participation and Governing

February 20, 22

McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, Chapters 4 & 5

Landy and Milkis, Chapter 11

Lanahan, Part 11, 12 & 13

Anna L. Harvey, "[The Political Consequences of Suffrage Exclusion: Organizations, Institutions, and the Electoral Mobilization of Women](#)," *Social Science History* 20 (1): 97-132 (access via JSTOR)

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0145-5532%28199621%2920%3A1%3C97%3ATPCOSE%3E2.0.CO%3B2-1>

Suggested: Aldrich, *Why Parties?* Chapters: 1, 3, 6-9

V. Congress: The First Branch

February 27, March 1, 6

Landy and Milkis, Chapter 7

Lanahan, Part 5

Suggested: Cox & McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan*, Introduction, 1-3, 5-6, 9-10, Conclusion

March 8 – Midterm

Spring Break

VI. Presidency

March 20, 22, 27

Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make*

- Chapters 1-3, 4 (Jefferson), 5 (Jackson), 7 (All), 8

Lanahan, Part 6 & 7

Landy and Milkis, Chapter 8

March 29

In-Class debate/Writing assignment #2 (Due April 5)

VII. Bureaucracy

April 3, 5

Michael Nelson, "A Short, Ironic History of American National Bureaucracy," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 3. (Aug., 1982), pp. 747-778.

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022-3816%28198208%2944%3A3%3C747%3AASIHQA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-0>

Landy and Milkis, Chapters 6 & 10

VIII. Courts

April 10, 12

Gerald Rosenberg, *The Hollow Hope*, Chapters: Introduction, 1, 3-5, 7-9, 11-12

Lanahan, Part 8

Landy and Milkis, Chapters 5 & 9

IX. Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

April 17, 19

Lanahan, Part 9

Landy and Milkis, Chapter 5

X. Ideas, Interests and Institutions: Stability/Change

April 24, 26

McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, Chapter 6, Epilogue

Landy and Milkis, Chapters 4, 13

May 1 - Overview of Class and Final Exam

May 8 (Monday) - Final Exam, 1:10 – 4

Instructions for Paper Assignments

All paper assignments should follow the following format:

- 1) Typed, doubled-spaced, ragged right margin with page numbers.
- 2) Title page with name, assignment number and course number.
- 3) Paper should be stapled, not clipped or bound.
- 4) Please use in-text references (e.g., Smith 1999:10). Please use footnotes, not endnotes for additional explanatory information.
- 5) References should be at the end of paper, listed alphabetically by author.
- 6) Proofread.

In general, if in doubt please refer to Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*, for guidance.

General Instructions:

Throughout your essay, you should develop and support your own position. This is not a research paper; references should be limited to the assigned readings and/or lecture as well as the text itself. What makes a strong essay? Clarity, Organization, Strength of Argument, Mechanics (COSAM). Each element is weighted equally in determining your overall grade.

In short, good answers should demonstrate the following qualities: 1) a clear, overarching argument; 2) a logical structure, 3) a good balance between generalization and specific evidence (from readings and from lectures), 4) proofread. All papers should be at least 3 pages but no more than 5 pages.

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Posted 19 January 2006 by
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