

POLS BC1001:01 Dynamics of American Politics

Barnard College, Spring 2007

Professor: [Raymond A. Smith](#)

Class Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:40-3:55pm

Office Hours: Thursdays 4:45-5:45pm, Rm. 405 Lehman Hall

E-mail address: ras33@columbia.edu

This course will provide a broad introduction to the basic issues and themes of American politics and government. Among the topics to be covered are the theory and practice of democracy, the Constitutional underpinnings of the US government, types of political participation, the institutions of government (especially Congress, the Presidency, the federal bureaucracy, and the courts), and civil liberties and civil rights. The course will draw examples from current events, particularly the unfolding 2004 presidential election, so students are encouraged and expected to keep up with major developments in the news.

Course requirements:

If at any time you have a problem with a deadline, a course requirement, or anything else that may affect your participation in the course, please speak to me as soon as possible. I will work with you to resolve any problems, but I can't do so unless I know about them in a timely manner.

Exams: There will be two in-class exams, one at midterm and one at the end of the class, each worth 33% of the overall course grade. Exams will be based on course lectures and readings. More details on the exams will be provided in class.

Written Assignment: There will be one short paper due throughout the semester in which students will present 3-5 arguments in support of either the "pro" or "con" side of a debate. Written assignments will require research outside the course readings and lectures, and must include citations from at least one academic political science journal. The assignment, which should be approximately 7 typed, double-spaced pages, will serve as the basis of debates to be held in class. The written assignment will be worth 34% of the overall course grade, including participation in the in-class debate. More details on the written assignment and debates will be provided in class.

Required readings:

The following five required books have been ordered at Labyrinth Bookstore:

- *American Government: Power and Purpose* by Theodore Lowi & Benjamin Ginsburg.
- *America the Unusual* by John Kingdon.
- *Where Have All the Voters Gone?* by Martin Wattenberg.
- *Congress: The Electoral Connection* by David Mayhew.
- *The Enduring Debate* by David Canon, Ed.

Each week, suggestions for further reading are also listed for those who wish to pursue a particular subject in greater depth (which is particularly recommended for those intending to be political science majors). These readings have not been ordered for purchase nor specifically

been placed on reserve for this course, but they should be readily available within the Columbia library system.

In addition, you are encouraged to read the coverage of American politics and government in the *New York Times*, particularly the Sunday “Week in Review” section. From time to time, newspaper articles or other additional readings may be assigned.

Course Calendar

Week of January 15: Introduction to American Politics

Required reading:

- Lowi : Ch. 1; Appendix: Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution;

Week of January 22: The Founding

Required reading:

- Lowi: Ch. 2 Appendix: Articles of Confederation (esp. Articles I-III; skim rest), US Constitution (full text including the 27 Amendments)
- Kingdon: 1-2
- Canon: Article 8 (“Federalist 15” by Hamilton), Article 9 (“Federalist 51” by Madison)

Suggested further reading:

- Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Yale U Press), esp. Ch. 1, 3, 5

Week of January 29: The Constitutional Framework

Required reading:

- Lowi: Ch. 3
- Kingdon: 3-5
- Canon: Article 13 (Peterson, “The Price of Federalism”); Excerpts from *McCullough v. Maryland* and *United States v. Lopez* (in the Canon Appendix)

Suggested further reading:

- Robert Dahl, *How Democratic is the US Constitution?* (Yale U Press)

Written Assignment 1: “The US should adopt a parliamentary system of government.”
Students in groups A (pro side) & B (con side) will prepare this question and debate in class on Tuesday., February. 6.

Week of February 5: Public Opinion and Political Values

Hard copy of written assignment #1 due in class from students in groups A and B, who will conduct a debate in class

Required reading:

- Lowi: Ch. 9, 13
- Canon: Article 44 (Gallup, “Polling the Public”), Article 45 (Morin, “Choice Words

Suggested further reading:

- Carrol J. Glynn et al., *Public Opinion* (Westview Press), esp. Ch. 1, 3-6

Week of February 12: Political Participation and Interest Group Politics

Required reading:

- Lowi: Ch. 12
- Canon: Article 60 (Olson, “The Logic of Collective Action”); Article 63 (Madison, Federalist 10)

Suggested further reading:

- Terry Moe, *The Organization of Interests* (U Chicago Press), esp. Intro, Ch. 1-3

Week of February 19: Political Parties

Required reading:

- Lowi: Ch. 11
- Wattenberg: 1-4
- Canon: Article 55 (Fiorina “The Decline of Collective Responsibility”), Article 56 (American Political Science Association, “Report on the Committee on Political Parties)

Suggested further reading:

- James Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System* (Brookings Institution), esp. Ch. 1-3

Week of February 26: Voters and Voting

Required reading:

- Wattenberg: 5-8
- Canon: Article 50 (Key, “The Voice of the People”)

Suggested further reading:

- Richard Niemi and Herbert Weisberg, “The Study of Voting and Elections” -- Article 2 in *Controversies in Voting Behavior* (CQ Press); also browse other articles in this volume, especially section introductions

Written Assignment 2: “The US electoral system should be reformed to allow more meaningful participation by minorities and minor political parties.”

Students in groups C (pro side) & D (con side) will prepare this question and debate in class on Tuesday, March 8.

Week of March 5: The Electoral Process

****Hard copy of written assignment #2 due in class from students in groups C and D, who will conduct a debate in class****

Required reading:

- Lowi: Ch. 10

Week of March 12: Spring Break – No class meetings

Week of March 19: The Legislative Branch, Part I: The Structures and Institutions of Congress

Exam #1 to be held in class on Tuesday, March 20

Required reading:

- Lowi: Ch. 5; Appendix: US Constitution, Article I

Suggested further reading:

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

Week of March 26: The Legislative Branch, Part II: Politics and Policymaking in Congress

Required reading:

- Mayhew: *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (Part I; skim Part II; do not bother with reading the footnotes)

Suggested further reading:

- R. Douglas Arnold, *The Logic of Congressional Action* (Yale U Press), esp. Ch. 1,4-6

Week of April 2: The Executive Branch, Part I: The “Powers” and “Power” of the Presidency

Required reading:

- Lowi: Ch. 6; Appendix: The U.S. Constitution, Article II
- Canon: Article 29 (Neustadt, “The Power to Persuade”)

Suggested further reading:

- Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make* (Harvard U Press), esp. Ch. 1-3

Written Assignment 3: “Over the last 50 years, the Presidency has grown too powerful and should be reined in.”

Students in groups E (con side) & F (pro side) will prepare this question and debate in class on Tuesday, April 12.

Week of April 9: The Executive Branch, Part II: The Federal Bureaucracy

****Hard copy of written assignment #3 due in class from students in groups E and F, who will conduct a debate in class****

Required reading:

- Lowi: Chapter 7
- Canon: Article 35 (James Q. Wilson, “Bureaucracy”)

Suggested further reading:

- Robert Higgs, *Crisis and Leviathan: Critical Episodes in the Growth of American Government* (Oxford U Press), esp. Ch. 1, 4

Week of April 16: The Judicial Branch

Required reading:

- Lowi: Ch. 8, Appendix: The U.S. Constitution Article III
- Canon: Article 39 (Hamilton, Federalist 78), Article 40 (O’Brien, “The Court in American Life”); *Marbury v. Madison* excerpt (in Appendix)

Suggested further reading:

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

Written Assignment 4: “Activist judges are subverting the Constitution.”

Students in groups G (con side) & H (pro side) will prepare this question and debate in class on Tuesday, April 26.

Week of April 25: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

****Hard copy of written assignment #4 due in class from students in groups G and H, who will conduct a debate in class****

Required reading:

- Lowi: Ch. 4
- Canon: Article 19 (King, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”), Excerpt from *Brown v. Board of Education* and the text of Constitutional amendments 1-10 and 14 (in Appendix)