

Georgetown University
Government 008, Section 6
US Political Systems

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In this course we will examine US political institutions and processes. Many of you have studied this basic material before, but in this class we explore American politics through several sets of contrasting frameworks.

*First, we will compare the theory and practice of American politics. In theory, the US Senate is an institution that deliberates and consults, in practice several important pieces of legislation in the past few years were drafted by the majority party without any input by the minority. We will also sometimes consider the contrast between the normative ideal and the empirical reality of American politics - how do we think that politics *should* work, and how *does* it work.

*Second, we will compare explanations for politics offered by Washington insiders with those of political scientists. Washington insiders frequently stress the intrigue and personalities of politics. Political scientists acknowledge the importance of individuals, but seek to explain politics through broader generalizations.

*Finally, we will use the knowledge that many of us have gained by following American politics for several years, but also examine the US political system in comparative politics. Many elements of US politics are fairly unique, and others have been copied in part by other countries. How do American political parties differ from those in Europe? How do Bush's powers differ from those of Putin in Russia, Museveni in Uganda, or Fox in Mexico?

Throughout the course I will invite you to consider the politics of the possible. Current institutional arrangements need not last forever, current political practice can change if we make it change. What institutions need reform? How might we improve the working of the system?

We will pay special attention to politics as it unfolds this semester. During the term the Senate will consider President Bush's nominee to the U.S. Supreme Court, and it is likely that a new justice will sit on the Court in the fall. Congress may consider Bush's proposal to create private Social Security accounts. The government will consider problems of mounting debt, rising oil prices, the ongoing struggle in Iraq, and other issues. Bush is now a second term president, with the lowest popularity at the start of this class of any president at this time in a 2nd term except for Richard Nixon. He will try to regain the initiative, while others in his party and the Democrats begin to line up to run for president in 2008.

Grades

Grades will be based on the following:

2 of 3 Online Midterms	20%
In Class Midterm Exam	20%
In Class Final Exam	20%
Paper	20%
Blogs	20%



On-line midterms will be based primarily on class readings. In-class midterms will be based on readings and lecture material.

You will write in a political blog at least three days each week. In your blog, you should post some reflections concerning American politics. Your reflections can be based on the readings, the course discussions, current events, whatever is connected to American politics. The purpose of this blog is to get you to think and write regularly about politics; to make it part of your (almost) daily routine. I especially recommend that you incorporate the knowledge and insights from the class into your blog. Did the course material help you understand something better? Did what you see on TV not match up with what you've read? Shauna, Carin and I will be reading your blogs and sometimes posting. I encourage you to read what the other students are saying, too, and to write responses to their postings. Your blogs will be evaluated on consistency and thoughtfulness.

At least one blog should include a link to a resource - a newspaper article, web site, or other source. Details about where you'll post your blogs will be distributed in class. I will also post resources that might spur conversation. For example, in the discussion on the Constitution, I will post links to the U.S. Constitution, and to the European Union Constitution. By reading the US Constitution and browsing the European Constitution you can get a feel for just how brief and general ours is. Would we do this differently if we were starting over today?



Books:

The following texts are available for purchase at the bookstore.

Kernell and Jacobson, *The Logic of American Politics*

Kernell and Jacobson, *Principles and Practice of American Politics*

Dahl, *On Democracy*

Manuel and Camissa, *Checks and Balances?*

In addition, students should keep up with current politics and current events. The Washington Post is a great newspaper, and is delivered cheaply to dorms and apartments. You can read it and other national quality newspapers online. The Washington Times is a conservative paper, not quite in the same league as the Post, but it does have a distinctive perspective. Some national news sites have good politics coverage. We will discuss current political issues in class, usually at the start of class.

We will have guest speakers at various points in the term. I will try to announce them at least a week in advance, and they will be posted on Blackboard. You are allowed to ask hard questions of speakers, but do so politely. Speakers are not paid, so next year's class will depend on your good manners.

Topics and Readings (We will cover this material in order, but some topics will end up taking more than a week, and some less)

A.) The Context of American Politics

- 1.) Studying American Politics Kernell, Ch 1, Reader, Section 1
- 2.) The Constitutional Design Kernell, Ch 2, Reader, Section 2
Dahl, Ch 10
- 3.) Federalism Kernell, Ch 3, Reader, Section 3
- 4.) Democracy Dahl (entire)

B.) Inputs to the Political System

- 5.) Public Opinion Kernell, Ch 10, Reader, Section 10
- 6.) Voting and Elections Kernell, Ch 11, Reader, Section 11
- 7.) Political Parties Kernell, Ch 12, Reader, Section 12
- 8.) Interest groups Kernell, Ch 13, Reader, Section 13, review Section 1, 1
- 9.) Media Kernell, Ch 14, Reader, Section 14

III.) American National Institutions

- 10.) Presidency Kernell, Ch 7, Reader Section 7
- 11.) Bureaucracy Kernell, Ch 8, Reader, Section 8
- 12.) Congress Kernell, Ch 6, Reader, Section 6

- 13.) Judiciary Kernell, Ch 9, Reader Section 9
14.) Considering Alternatives Manuel and Camissa (entire)

IV.) Public Policy

- 15) Gay Rights PDF files will be available on blackboard.
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The Paper

You can choose between two paper assignments. Papers should be approximately 10 double spaced pages long. They are due on different dates.

Paper 1: Elections paper. Focus on a Senate race from the 2004 election cycle. Discuss the candidates, and how they became the party nominees. Discuss their issue positions, their support from interest groups, the financing of their campaigns. Explain the election outcome. You should interview someone involved with one of the campaigns - perhaps someone from a party committee, an interest, or a consultant: Due October 13, by end of class time.

Paper 2: You are to write about a major piece of legislation that passed at least one chamber of Congress any time in the past 4 years. You should explain where the idea for the legislation came from, who was promoting it, which interest groups supported and opposed it, how it was changed in the legislative process, and why it finally passed or failed to pass. You should interview someone involved with this bill - an interest group representative or congressional staffer, for example. Or, you should write about a case decided by the Supreme Court in the past 3 years. You should talk about why the issue was considered by the Court, how it changes existing law, and what the likely areas of future jurisprudence in this general topic area would be. You should interview someone involved in the case, perhaps an interest group that filed an Amicus brief, or an attorney who worked for one of the sides. Due November 17, by end of class time.

More information on the paper assignment will be distributed later in the class.

One of our goals in this class is to help you develop your research skills. We hope you will view the assignments we give you as opportunities to explore the rich resources of the field of political science, and the University and library more generally. At the same time, it is essential that you respect and abide by the rules of the University Honor Code in regards to your research. Academic integrity is of utmost importance to us, and we will take very seriously any infraction of the Honor Code (<http://honor.georgetown.edu/pledge.htm>). We expect you to be familiar with this Code, and to correctly cite all sources you use in completing an assignment for this class. To assure that all students are familiar with the rules about plagiarism, citing works, and finding research resources, we are requiring all students in Govt-008 to take the "Scholarly Research and Academic Integrity" tutorial, available through Student Access+ (all freshmen and transfer students are required to take this tutorial already; for this class, all students will take it). You will have until classtime on

September 20th to take the tutorial; after this date, we will probably have a short in-class pop quiz that will be quite easy if you've taken the whole tutorial. The tutorial may be taken all at once, or done in sections and saved to your account in Student Access+. It will take at least half an hour to work your way through, but will be worth the effort to learn about the resources available for your research and to learn how to avoid careless mistakes that could amount to plagiarism. If you have questions about this assignment, please email either of your TAs.

Community-Based Learning Credit Program

Political activity comes in many forms: voting, writing elected officials, campaigning, protests...and also community service. Through community service you can better learn the needs of vulnerable populations, participate in local activism, or engage in policy advocacy.

The CBLC Program allows undergraduate students, in cooperation with their professor, to receive an additional credit hour in one of their classes by fulfilling certain requirements in community service. To satisfy the first and most important requirement, students must thoughtfully integrate their work in the community with their work in your class. Second, they perform at least 40 hours of community-based service, in cooperation with a community organization. Third, they write three essays reflecting on the links between their community-based work and the academic course for which it is being done. Finally, they participate in three discussion sessions coordinated by the Center for Social Justice. Before the end of the semester, the Center provides participating faculty with copies of their students' essays and a statement about the completion of the requirements.

If you have questions about the program, please contact the Service-Learning Coordinator, Jean Manney at x7-2607 or at jmm268@georgetown.edu. If you want to enroll in the CBLC program, please complete the application form available at the Center's office in Poulton Hall and on line at <http://socialjustice.georgetown.edu/teaching/cblcstudents.html>. The final deadline for submitting applications is about a week after classes begin, so you must act swiftly. I encourage you to take part in this program.