

**Seminar in American Politics**  
**POS 6045**  
**Fall 2015**

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Office Hours Wednesday 11:15-1:15, Friday 10:15-11:15 and by appointment

**Course description:**

This seminar in American political institutions is designed to provide an introduction to the field. The course is concerned with the design of American national institutions and their interaction with one another, and with the effects of American institutions on policy outcomes. We will cover some of the major literature, but far from everything, in a wide range of sub-fields. These sub-fields include--but are not limited to--Congress, the Presidency, the bureaucracy, and the Court. In addition to studying these institutions, we will also study parties and interest groups.

The format of the class includes a mixture of lecture, discussion, and student presentations. Students are expected to attend all classes and hand in papers on time.

**Books required for purchase are listed below (available at UF bookstore). There will also be a coursepack of readings available at Bookit, 1250 West University Ave, ph 352 371 9970.**

- \* Kent Weaver and Bert Rockman, eds. Do Institutions Matter? (Brookings: 1993)
- \* David Mayhew, Congress: The Electoral Connection (Yale University Press: 2004)
- \* Gerald Rosenberg, The Hollow Hope (University of Chicago: 1993)
- \* Sarah Binder, Stalemate (Brookings: 2003)
- \* Michael Nelson, ed. The Presidency and the Political System, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (CQ Press, 2009)
- \* Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder, News That Matters (University of Chicago: 2010)

In addition to these books and the coursepack, some journal articles will be available through the University of Florida library website ([www.uflib.edu](http://www.uflib.edu)).

**Course requirements**

5 critical essays (5-7 pages each) = 40% of grade. Paper topics are at the END OF THE SYLLABUS. You will choose the weeks/topics. Each paper is due by email by 9 a.m on the morning class meets, as a Microsoft Word attachment. Also please bring a hard copy to class.

1 research proposal (details forthcoming) of roughly 10-15 pages = 30% of grade.

Class participation = 30%. This includes THREE presentations on required readings, of about 20 minutes each. You should come prepared to summarize the important findings and implications and raise some questions for discussion. Your presentations should not simply regurgitate what an author says; they should be critical assessments of the author's arguments.

### **Session I: Introduction and Course Overview (August 24)**

### **Session II: Institutions I (August 31)**

#### Questions to think about while reading

**Why study American political institutions? What is the institutional perspective and what does it replace? What are the different variants of institutionalism? What are the problems that critics perceive with an institutional perspective, in particular with rational choice institutionalism? Is a cultural explanation of American politics better than an institutionalist one for explaining policy outcomes? What does Steinmo say are the limits of a cultural approach to understanding American politics and policy,**

#### READINGS

- \* David Brian Robertson, "The Return to History and the New Institutionalism in Political Science," Social Science History 17:1 (1993): 1-36 (UF Library Website)
  - \* James March and Johan Olsen, "The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life," American Political Science Review 78 (1984): 734-749 (UF Library Website)
  - \* Theda Skocpol, "Why I am a Historical Institutionalist," Polity, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Autumn 1995), pp. 103-106 (UF Library Website)
  - \* Paul Pierson, "Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics," American Political Science Review, Vol. 94, No.2 (June 2002), pp. 251-167 (on J-STOR through the UF Library Webpage)
  - \* Kenneth Shepsle, "Studying Institutions: Some Lessons From the Rational Choice Approach," Journal of Theoretical Politics 1 (1989): 134-148 (COURSEPACK)
  - \* Robert Abelson, "The Secret Existence of Expressive Behavior" in Jeffrey Friedman, ed., The Rational Choice Controversy (Yale: 1996), pp. 25-36, 95-106 (COURSEPACK).
  - \* Stanley Kelly Jr., "The Promise and Limitations of Rational Choice Theory," in Jeffrey Friedman, ed., The Rational Choice Controversy (Yale: 1996) , pp. 95-106 (COURSEPACK).
  - \* Samuel Huntington, American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), Chapter 2 (TO BE HANDED OUT)
  - \* Rogers Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America." American Political Science Review, Vol. 87, No. 3 (September 1993), pp. 549-566 (UF Library website).
- (Recommended, NOT required, additional readings on culture:**  
Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition (Harcourt, 1991) and Symposia/Commentary on Hartz in Studies in American Political Development, October 2005, pp. 206-239 and in

Perspectives on Politics, March 2005, pp. 93-120; Alexis DeTocqueville, Democracy in America), James Morone, "Storybook Truths about America," Studies in American Political Development, October 2005, pp. 216-226.

## **NO CLASS SEPTEMBER 7: HOLIDAY**

### **Session III: Institutions II (September 14)**

#### Questions to think about while reading

**Which institutions make a difference and how do they make a difference?  
What is the impact of American political institutions on public policy outcomes?  
What is the impact in particular of the divided government that is a unique result of the American institutional design?**

#### READINGS

##### A. Institutions

\* Sven Steinmo, "American Exceptionalism Reconsidered," in L. Dodd and C. Jillson, eds., The Dynamics of American Politics (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 106-131 (COURSEPACK)

\* Weaver and Rockman, ed., pp. 1-41, 110-86, 237-301, 445-461 (REQUIRED TEXTBOOK).

\* Morris Fiorina, Divided Government (Allyn Bacon: 1996), Ch. 6 (COURSEPACK)

\* David Mayhew, "Divided We Govern," in Nivola and Rosenbloom, eds. Classic Readings in American Politics, ch. 25, pp. 298-213 (St. Martin's, 1998) (COURSEPACK)

\* Sarah Binder, Stalemate (Brookings, 2004), chs. 1-4 and 6 (REQUIRED TEXT)

### **Session IV: The Constitution and Institutional Design (September 21)**

#### Questions to think about while reading

**What were the founders most concerned about when they designed our political institutions? What did they seek to prevent and what did they seek to promote? What were the most important tensions in the constitutional debate? What were the important compromises and what factors made compromise possible?**

#### READINGS

\* Joseph Ellis, Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation (Alfred A. Knopf: 2000), Preface, pp. 3-19 (COURSEPACK)

\* The Federalist Papers, Clinton Rossiter, ed., Essays #10, 39, 51 (available on-line at <http://memory.loc.gov/const/fed/fedpapers.html>)

\* W.B. Allen and Gordon Lloyd, eds., The Essential Antifederalist (University Press of America: 1985), Federal Farmer Letters VII, VIII, and IX, and Brutus Essay II (available on-line at <http://www.constitution.org/afp/afp.htm>)

- \* Sheldon Wolin, "Montesquieu and Publius" in Presence of the Past (Johns Hopkins: 1989) (COURSEPACK)
  - \* Robert McGuire and Robert Ohsfeldt, "Public Choice Analysis and the Ratification of the Constitution," in Bernard Grofman and Donald Wittman, eds., The Federalist Papers and the New Institutionalism (Agathon: 1989), Chapter 12, pps. 175-204 (COURSEPACK)
  - \* David Robertson, "Madison's Opponents and Constitutional Design," American Political Science Review, Vol. 99, No. 2, March 2005, pp. 225-243 (UF Library Website)
  - \* Robert Dahl, How Democratic is the Constitution? (Yale: 2001) Chapter 2 (COURSEPACK)
- RECOMMENDED: Gordon Wood, Creation of the American Republic, pp. 519-565

### **Session V: Political Parties (September 28)**

Questions to think about while reading

**Why are parties important in American politics? What is the link between voter attitudes and parties, and between parties and policy change? Are parties on the rise or on the decline?**

#### READINGS

##### **A. The importance of parties and why they matter in American politics:**

- \* Walter Dean Burnham, Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics (Norton: 1970) ch. 1, pp. 1-10 (COURSEPACK)
- \* David Mayhew, 2000 working paper (OUTSIDE MY DOOR TO COPY)
- \* John Geer, "Critical Realignments and the Public Opinion Poll," Journal of Politics 1991, Vol. 2 (17): 3-18 (UF Library Website)

##### **B. Are parties rising or declining?**

- \* Martin Wattenberg, The Decline of American Political Parties, 1952-1992 (Harvard University Press: 1994), chapter 3 (COURSEPACK)
- \* Bruce Keith, Myth of the Independent Voter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), chs. 1 and 4, pp. 1-25, 60-75 (COURSEPACK)
- \* Edward L. Lascher and John L. Korey, "The Myth of the Independent Voter, California Style," California Journal of Politics and Policy, Vol. 3 (2011), Issue 11, Article 2ies
- \* Morris P. Fiorina, 1980, "Decline of Collective Responsibility," Daedalus (1980), Vol. 109, No. 3: 25-45 (COURSEPACK)
- \* James Reichley, "The Rise of National Parties" in John Chubb and Paul Peterson, eds., The New Direction in American Politics (Brookings, 1985) (COURSEPACK)
- \* Alan Abramowitz, "Partisan Nation: The Rise of Affective Partisanship in the American Electorate," in John C. Green, Daniel L. Coffey and David B. Cohen, eds., The State of Parties (Routledge: 2014), pp. 21-36 (TO BE HANDED OUT)
- \* John Aldrich, Why Parties? The Origins and Transformation of Political Parties in America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), chapter 1 (COURSEPACK)

### **Session VI: Congress I: The Electoral Connection (October 5)**

Questions to think about while reading

**How do we explain Congressional voting? What are the primary motivations that explain the behavior of members of Congress (not only voting behavior but also their choice of committees to serve on, etc.)? How does Congress address the task of institutional maintenance, according to Mayhew? What role do committees and parties play in organizing Congress? How important are parties in Congress and how do they exert their power? What are the sources and effects of polarization in Congress? What are the differences between the Senate and House in terms of polarization? How does Congress still gets things done – produce policy – in the face of partisan polarization?**

READINGS

- \* Mayhew, The Electoral Connection, Entire book (it is very readable though – no numbers and nicely flowing prose)
- \* Discussion of The Electoral Connection, PS: Political Science and Politics, Vol. 34, No. 2 (June 2001): 251-266), essays by Mayhew, Bond, Aldrich, Abramowitz, Hurley, Dodd, and concluding observations by Mayhew (COURSEPACK)
- \* Jamie L. Carson and Jeffery A. Jenkins, “Examining the Electoral Connection Across Time,” Annual Review of Political Science, Vol. 14 (June 2011), pp. 25-46 (UF Library Website)
- \* Richard Fenno, Congressmen in Committees, chapter 1 (COURSEPACK)
- \* John Kingdon, Congressmen’s Voting Decisions, pp. 3-25 (COURSEPACK)
- \* Benjamin Bishin, “Constituency Influence in Congress: Does Subconstituency Matter?” Legislative Studies Quarterly (2000) 24: 389-415 (COURSEPACK)
- \* John Griffin and Brian Newman, Minority Report (University of Chicago Press: 2008), two chapters (COURSEPACK)

**Session VII: Congress II: Polarization and Problem Solving (October 12)**

Questions to think about while reading

**What role do committees and parties play in organizing Congress? How important are parties in Congress and how do they exert their power? What are the sources and effects of polarization in Congress? What are the differences between the Senate and House in terms of polarization? How does Congress still gets things done – produce policy – in the face of partisan polarization?**

READINGS

- \* C. Lawrence Evans, “Parties and Leaders: Polarization and Power in the U.S. House and Senate,” in Jamie L. Carson, ed., New Directions in Congressional Politics (Routledge: 2012), TO BE HANDED OUT
- \*Danielle Thomsen, “Party Fit Theory”, Conference Paper from Southern Political Science Association, January 2013 (TO BE HANDED OUT)
- \* Morris Fiorina, “Party Homogeneity and Contentious Politics,” Chapter 10 in Daniel Shea and Morris Fiorina, Can We Talk? The Rise of Rude, Nasty Stubborn Politics (Pearson, 2013), TO BE HANDED OUT

\* John Aldrich, “Partisan Polarization and Satisfaction With Democracy”, Chapter 9 in Daniel Shea and Morris Fiorina, Can We Talk? The Rise of Rude, Nasty Stubborn Politics (Pearson, 2013)

\* Paulina Rippere, “Sensemaking in the Senate: Bipartisan Cooperation through Bill Cosponsorship,” Working Paper, TO BE HANDED OUT

\* Scott Adler, Congress and the Politics of Problem Solving (Cambridge University Press, 2012), Chapters 1, 5, 8, 9 (TO BE HANDED OUT)

NO CLASS OCTOBER 19

## **Session VIII: Interest Groups (October 26)**

Questions to think about while reading

**How do interest groups arise? How do we explain their formation? What impact do they exert on the policy process, and what is the nature of their influence?**

### READINGS

#### **A. Interest Group Formation**

\* Beth Leech and Frank Baumgartner, “On the Group Approach,” in Basic Interests (Princeton University Press: 1998), Chapter 3, pp. 44-63 (COURSEPACK)

\* Jack Walker, Mobilizing Interest Groups in America (University of Michigan Press: 1991), pp. 1-17, 27-32 (COURSEPACK)

\* Beth Leech, Frank Baumgartner, Timothy La Pira, Nicholas Semanko, “Drawing Lobbyists to Washington: Government Activity and Interest Group Mobilization,” Political Research Quarterly (March 2005), Vol. 58, No. 1: 19-30 (UF Library Website)

#### **B. Readings on Impact of Groups**

\* Leech and Baumgartner, Basic Interests, Ch. 7, pp. 120-146 (COURSEPACK)

\* Richard Hall and Frank Wayman, “Buying Time: Moneyed Interests and the Mobilization of Bias in Congressional Committees,” American Political Science Review (1990) 84:797-820 (UF Library Website)

\* Diana Evans, “Before the Roll Call: Interest Group Lobbying and Public Policy Outcomes in House Committees,” Political Research Quarterly (June 1996), Vol. 46, No. 2: 287-304 (UF Library Website)

\* Joshua Kalla and David E. Broockman, “Campaign Contributions Facilitate Access to Congressional Officials: A Randomized Field Experiment,” American Journal of Political Science, April 2 2015 Early View (published before inclusion in an issue)

\* Douglas Roscoe and Shannon Jenkins, “A Meta-Analysis of Campaign Contributions’ Impact on Roll Call Voting,” Social Science Quarterly, March 2005, Vol. 86, No. 1, pp. 52-68 (UF Library Website)

## **Session IX: Presidency (November 2)**

Questions to think about while reading

**How do we define and explain presidential “success”? How has the presidency as an institution evolved over time and how does it interact with other political actors? What are the main constraints on presidential power?**

## READINGS

\*Michael Nelson, ed., The Presidency and the Political System (CQ Press: 2009): Chapters 2, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12.

\*Amnon Cavari, "The Short Term Effect of Going Public," Political Research Quarterly, June 2013, 66: 336-51. (UF Library Website)

\*Matthew A. Baum and Samuel Kernell, "Has Cable Ended the Golden Age of Presidential Television?" American Political Science Review Vol. 93 (1): March 1999: 99-114.

\*Additional Readings TBA

## **Session X: Supreme Court (November 9)**

### Questions to think about while reading

**How powerful is the Supreme Court? What is the relationship between the court and public opinion? Does the Court play a leadership role in initiating social change? How does the political power of the Court compare to, and interact with, the power of Congress and the presidency?**

## READINGS

\* Alexander Bickel, The Least Dangerous Branch (Bobbs-Merill: 1962), chapter 1, pp. 1-33 (COURSEPACK)

\* Robert Dahl, "Decision Making in a Democracy: The Supreme Court as National Policy Maker," Journal of Public Law (1957): 279-295 (COURSEPACK) NEXT PAGE

\* Thomas Burke, "The Judicial Implementation of Statutes: Three Stories about Courts and the Americans With Disabilities Act" in Mark C. Miller and Jeb Barnes, eds., Making Policy, Making Law (Georgetown Press, 2004) TO BE HANDED OUT

\* Neal Devins, "Is Judicial Policymaking Countermajoritarian?" in Mark C. Miller and Jeb Barnes, eds., Making Policy, Making Law (Georgetown Press, 2004) TO BE HANDED OUT

\* Gerald Rosenberg, Hollow Hope (REQUIRED TEXT), chs 1-3, 6

\* Richard Pacelle, The Supreme Court in a Separation of Powers System (Routledge, 2015), pp. 8-23 (TO BE HANDED OUT)

\* Timothy R. Johnson and Andrew D. Martin, "The Public's Conditional Response to Supreme Court Decisions," American Political Science Review, Vol. 92, No. 2 (June 1998): 299-309 (UF Library Website)

## **Session XI: Bureaucracy (November 16)**

### Questions to think about while reading

**What motivates bureaucrats and explains their behavior? Who--if anyone--controls the bureaucracy?**

## READINGS

- \* James Q. Wilson, Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It (New York: Basic Books, 1989), chs. 4, 5 (OUTSIDE MY DOOR TO COPY)
- \* Weingast and Moran, "Bureaucratic Discretion or Congressional Control? Regulatory Policymaking by the FTC," Journal of Political Economy (1983) 91:764-800 (UF Library Website)
- \* Terry Moe, "Assessment of the Positive Theory of Congressional Dominance," Legislative Studies Quarterly (1987) 12: 475-520 (UF Library Website)
- \* Mathew McCubbins, Roger Noll and Barry Weingast, "Administrative Procedures as Instruments of Political Control," Journal of Law, Economics and Organization (1987), Vol. 3, 243-277 (UF Library Website)
- \* Mathew McCubbins and Thomas Schwartz, "Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols Versus Fire Alarms," American Journal of Political Science (1984) 28: 165-179 (UF Library Website)
- \* Kenneth Meier and Lawrence O'Toole, "Political Control Versus Bureaucratic Values," Public Administration Review, Vol. 66, Issue 2 (March 2006); 177-192 (Uf Library Website)
- \* Andrew Whitford, "The Pursuit of Political Control By Multiple Principals," Journal of Politics, Vol. 67, No. 1 (February 2005): 29-49.

## **NO CLASS NOVEMBER 23: HOLIDAY**

### **Session XII: Media** (December 2)

#### Questions to think about while reading

**To what extent does the media "set the agenda?" To what extent do the administration and citizens wield influence over the frames put forward by the media? Is the media objective? Is it biased? What are some of the difficulties involved in studying media influence and media bias?**

## READINGS

- \* Iyengar and Kinder, News That Matters, Chs. 1-3, 6, 8-10 (REQUIRED TEXT)
- \* Robert Entman, Projections of Power, Chapters 1, 2 (University of Chicago, 2004) (TO BE HANDED OUT)
- \* W. Russell Neumann, Marion R. Just and Ann N. Crigler, Common Knowledge, (University of Chicago: 1992), pp. 60-77 (COURSEPACK)
- \* Thomas E. Patterson, "Political Roles of the Journalist," in The Politics of News: The News of Politics, ed. Doris Graber, Denis McQuail and Pippa Norris (Congressional Quarterly Press, 1998), pp. 17-32 (TO BE HANDED OUT)
- \* David Niven, "Bias in the News: Partisanship and Negativity in Media Coverage of Presidents George Bush and Bill Clinton," International Journal of Press/Politics, July 2001, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 31-46 (UF library website)
- \* Jonathan Morris and Rosalee Clawson, "Media Coverage of Congress in the 1990s: Scandals, Personalities and the Prevalence of Policy and Process," Political Communication, Vol. 22, Issue 3 (2005), pp. 297-313 (UF Library Website) NEXT PAGE

\*Beth Rosenson, forthcoming Social Science Quarterly publication on newspaper coverage of state legislatures (TO BE HANDED OUT)

**LAST CLASS: Discuss Research Proposals** (December 9)

**RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12 BY 12 pm  
OUTSIDE PROFESSOR ROSENSON'S DOOR; \*\*\*Also please email a copy to the  
professor.**

### **Information on paper topics**

Choose five of the following questions to write on. They are due by email to the professor by 8 am the morning of class, and also bring a hard copy to class. These should be critical essays of 5-7 pages in length (double spaced, with pages numbered). Topics are organized by session topic. There is no paper topic for the first week of assignments, Sept. 2.

Institutions II: How does the unique nature of American political institutions affect policy outcomes? You should discuss specific public policies that are covered in the Weaver/Rockman volume and also talk the impact of divided government.

Constitution: What were the most important tensions in the constitutional debate? What were the important compromises that were made, in terms of the long term impact on our governmental structure?

Parties:

You can write on either of the following questions:

1. How important are parties in American politics, with regard to their contribution to voters' decision making and to policy change (you should reference the first 5 readings for this week).
2. Are parties on the rise or on the decline? Make sure to defend your measure of party strength and consider the various measures of party strength proposed by this week's readings (you should reference the last 5 readings for this week).

Interest Groups: You can write on either of the following questions:

1. What factors best explain the formation of interest groups? What might future research examine to enhance our understanding of why, how, and when groups form?
2. What influence do interest groups have on policy-making? Make sure to address the influence that groups have, or do not have, through campaign contributions to politicians.

Presidency:

What are the most important constraints on presidents? Which factors limit presidents as they attempt to enact their preferred policies, and which factors most contribute to presidential success?

Congress: You can write on either, or both, of the following:

1. What factors are important for explaining the behavior of members of Congress? Which studies are particularly compelling as accounts of Congressional behavior and why? To what extent are you convinced by Mayhew's argument in *The Electoral Connection*?
2. What are the causes and implications of party polarization in Congress? To what extent does Congress still manage to solve problems despite polarization (the latter question is discussed by Adler).

Courts:

How powerful is the Supreme Court? How does it affect public policy and public opinion? What are the limitations to the court's power?

Bureaucracy:

What explains the behavior of individuals in the federal bureaucracy? To whom are they responsive?

Media:

Discuss the power wielded by the media in American politics, with regard to agenda setting and framing in particular. To what extent are journalists bound by the norm of objectivity?