Introduction to American Politics - W1201  
Fall 2009

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Office Hours: Thursday 2:00-4:00, and by appointment

Teaching Assistants:  
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Course Description  
This course develops a context for understanding contemporary American politics both as participant-observers as well as students. Why do many Americans feel that the American political system is broken? Why does there seem to be a persistent, if not growing gap between the public’s ideals and the performance of American political and civic institutions? The second goal of the course is to help students understand the craft of political science. What is political science? Why do political scientists ask the questions that they do? And, how do they go about answering these questions? Attempts to address these and other questions are the foundations for course readings, lecture and discussion. We will look at issues such as democracy, institutional performance, participation, and political change.

Course Requirements  
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. Students are required to register and attend a discussion section. Attendance and participation will be a part of the course grade.

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

In-class Debate: There will be one in-class debate during the semester (currently scheduled for October 14). Attendance is required in order to complete the written assignment.

Quizzes: Unannounced quizzes may be given if in the instructor’s opinion, class participation and/or preparation is not satisfactory.

Exams: There will be a Midterm Exam that will cover the first half of the semester. The Final Exam will cover the entire semester, but will probably emphasize the second half of the semester. Both exams will cover lectures and readings.

Assignment due dates: All assignments are due in-person at the beginning of class. Late assignments will 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: A given. 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.

The letter as well as the spirit of this code applies to all students in this class.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade distribution</th>
<th>Percent of Total Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance at section meetings in mandatory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empirical assignment</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Instructions will be handed out in section</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-class debate/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing Assignment</td>
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<td>Midterm</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>25</td>
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Statement on Disability
Students with disabilities who will be taking this course and may need disability-related accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see me as soon as possible. Disabled students who need test or classroom accommodations must be registered in advance with their institution’s Office of Disability Services.

Course Readings
Assigned books are available at Book Culture bookstore, 536 West 112th Street.
Articles readings are available via CourseWorks, JSTOR or CLIO; e-books are available via CLIO; assigned books are on reserve at Barnard College Library.

Books (in order of use)
Robert Dahl, *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* (Yale University Press, 2002)
Course Schedule

Week 1: Course Introduction

Frantzich & Ernst: Introduction


Week 2: Current Approaches to the Study of American Politics

Frantzich & Ernst: Introduction

September 9

September 14, 16

Week 3: Constitution

Frantzich & Ernst: Chapter 1

September 21, 23

Dahl, How Democratic is the Constitution, (Yale University Press, 2002). Chapters 1-4


Constitution in Practice


Dahl, How Democratic is the Constitution, compare above with chapters 6 & 7.

No class – Monday, September 28
Week 4: Presidency
Frantzich & Ernst: Chapter 3

Presidential Power
Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (Simon and Schuster, 1990), Chapters 1 and 3 PDF


Studying the Presidency


In class debate: October 7
Writing Assignment on Presidents Due: October 12

Weeks 5: Congress
Frantzich & Ernst: Chapter 2

Congress: Norms & Structure


Congress: Representation

Carol Swain, *Black Faces, Black Interests* (Harvard University Press, 1993) Chapters 1, 2, 9, 10 PDF
Week 6: Supreme Court
Frantzich & Ernst: Chapter 4


Week 7: Bureaucracy
Frantzich & Ernst: Chapter 3


Midterm: Wednesday, October 28

No class: Monday, November 2

Week 8: Parties
Frantzich & Ernst: Chapter 7

Structure and Behavior

Week 9: Realignment Theory and Voting Behavior
Frantzich & Ernst: Chapter 7 & 8

http://www.jstor.org/stable/2126401

http://www.jstor.org/stable/2127162

Peter F. Nardulli, “Concept of a Critical Realignment Electoral Behavior, and Political Change,”

http://www.jstor.org/stable/2669291

Week 10: Political Participation
Frantzich & Ernst: Chapter 8

Running for office
James Bryce, “Why Great Men are Not Chosen President,” The American Commonwealth PDF

David T. Canon, “Sacrificial Lambs or Strategic Politicians? Political Amateurs in U.S. House
http://www.jstor.org/stable/2111546

Jennifer Lawless and Richard L. Fox, It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don’t Run for Office
(Cambridge University Press, 2005). TBA

Citizen Participation
Robert Putnam, “Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in
http://www.jstor.org/stable/420517

http://www.jstor.org/stable/2082425

Week 11: Public Opinion and the Media
Public Opinion
Susan Herbst, Numbered Voices: How Opinion Polling Has Shaped American Politics (Chicago,
1993) TBA

Philip E. Converse, “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics.” In Ideology and

http://www.jstor.org/stable/2111583
The Media
Frantzich & Ernst: Chapter 6


Week 12: Explaining Political Change

December 7, 9


Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” (1964) PDF

Week 13: Course conclusion

December 14

FINAL EXAM – Wednesday, December 23rd (Tentative Date)