

GOV 150: Introduction to American Government

Spring 2008
Druckenmiller—016
Tuesday and Thursday, 1pm-2:30pm

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Office Hours:

Tuesday, 9am-11am
Wednesday, 2pm-4pm
And by appointment

This course is an introduction to the workings of American government. For many, politics and government are uninteresting, unimportant, and even dreadfully boring. For others, political and partisan struggles are off-putting and uncomfortably confrontational. As such, it is en vogue to lament the state of American politics, often without thought or reflection, as either too base to warrant participation or too dull to bother. This course is not intended to make you politicians nor convince you that one partisan or ideological perspective is best. It is, however, designed to teach and inform you about the American democratic system, and give you the tools to make reasoned and thoughtful assessments about politics and political struggles. Should you come to believe – as a consequence of this course – that American democracy is doomed, or (for that matter) that it is superior to all other alternatives, it will ideally come from having read carefully and reflected deeply about all viewpoints and alternatives. It is my hope that you leave this class with a stronger understanding of American politics, and a keener sense of the complex debates that characterize our democratic development.

Course Requirements

There are 3 major components to your grade:

1. **Two Exams** (30 points each) – take-home exams that are NOT cumulative; both exams are open book and open note. Your final exam is the second of these, and the midterm is scheduled for February 28th. The format will be four short essays, and essay topics will be derived from readings and lectures. Exams will be transmitted to you electronically and you will have a specific time (two hours) and page limit (six total pages—double spaced, 12-point font). More information will be provided as we approach the exam.
*The six-page limit will be strictly enforced. I will not read past Page 6.
**You are NOT allowed to work with another student on these exams. ANY evidence of collaboration is grounds for failure of the class.
2. **Committee Report** (15 points)—a group project of about 10 pages. *See the Mock Congressional Outline at the end of the syllabus for more information.*
3. **Participation** (25 points)—this includes attendance AND class participation. Attendance is REQUIRED, and I will take regular note of who is and who is not in class. I understand that people get sick, have doctor's appointments, and so on, but I only grant excused absences in rare

circumstances. Be advised, simple attendance is not sufficient; *see the Mock Congressional Outline at the end of the syllabus for more information.*

Readings

There are three books for this course, and a small number of outside articles. The books are available through the campus bookstore, and all of the outside readings are on electronic reserve (which can be accessed through Blackboard and the library website).

1. *American Government: Freedom and Power*, by Theodore Lowi, Benjamin Ginsberg, and Kenneth Shepsle. W.W. Norton & Company.
2. *How Democratic is the American Constitution*, by Robert Dahl. Yale University Press.
3. *Culture War? Myth of Polarized America*, by Morris Fiorina with Samuel Abrams and Jeremy Pope. Pearson Longman

Other Issues

1. I expect all students to abide by the Bowdoin Academic Honor Code, which can be accessed online at <http://www.bowdoin.edu/studentaffairs/forms/>. If you have any concerns or questions about how to cite work appropriately, please consult me or a reference librarian.
2. If you have chosen to take the class as Credit/D/F, I will only grant a Credit grade if the student has completed all of the work for the class.

January 22—Introductions and Expectations

January 24—Origins of the American Idea

- Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle, Chapters 1 and 2
- Articles of Confederation (<http://www.usconstitution.net/articles.html>) (this is linked on Blackboard)
- Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution (Appendix in Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle; they are also linked on Blackboard)
- Joseph Ellis, “The Duel,” in *Founding Brothers*. New York: Vintage Books.

January 29—Federalism and Separation of Powers

- Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle, Chapter 3

January 31—Congress (Mock Set-up)

- Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle, Chapter 5

February 5—Mock Congressional Session

February 7—How Democratic is the American Constitution, Part 1

- Dahl, Chapters 1-4
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February 12—How Democratic is the American Constitution, Part 2

- Dahl, Chapters 5-8

February 14—Mock Congressional Session (Committee Meetings)

February 19—Presidency

- Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle, Chapter 6

February 21—Bureaucracy

- Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle, Chapter 7
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February 26—Courts

- Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle, Chapter 8

February 28—*Mid-term Exam*

March 4—Mock Congressional Session

March 6—Mock Congressional Session

First Participation grades allocated

March 7-23—Spring Break!!!!

March 25—Bill of Rights, Civil Liberties, and Civil Rights

- Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle, Chapter 4

March 27—Public Opinion and the Media

- Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle, Chapter 9
 - Fiorina, Chapters 1-2
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April 1—Beyond the Culture War

- Fiorina, Chapters 3-6

April 3—No class (*Recommendation: Meet to Discuss Committee Report!*)

April 8—Explaining the (lack of a) Culture War

- Fiorina, Chapters 7-10

April 10—Mock Congressional Session

April 15—Mock Congressional Session

Second Participation grades allocated

April 17—Elections and Voting

- Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle, Chapter 10
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April 22—Political Parties

- Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle, Chapter 11
- Joel Silbey. 2002. “‘Essential to the Existence of Our Institutions’ to ‘Rapacious Enemies of Honest and Responsible Government,’” in *The Parties Respond*, L. Sandy Maisel (ed.)

April 24—Political Parties

- Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle, Chapter 11
 - Anthony Corrado. 2006. “Party Finance in the Wake of BCRA: An Overview,” in *The Election After Reform*. Michael Malbin (ed.)
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April 29— Interest Groups

- Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle, Chapter 12

Committee Reports Due

May 1— Mock Congressional Session

May 6— Mock Congressional Session

2-page self assessment due (see Mock Congress outline)

Final Exam: Wednesday, December 14th, 9:00am

Presidential Primary Schedule—2008

Month	Date	Election
January	3	Iowa
	5	Wyoming Republican caucus
	8	New Hampshire
	15	Michigan
		South Carolina Republican primary
	19	Nevada
	26	South Carolina Democratic primary
	29	Florida
February	3	Maine Republican caucus
		Alabama
		Alaska
		Arizona
		Arkansas
		California
		Colorado
		Connecticut
		Delaware
		Georgia
		Idaho Democratic caucus
		Illinois
		Kansas Democratic caucus
		Massachusetts
		Minnesota
		Missouri
		Montana Republican caucus
		New Jersey
		New Mexico Democratic primary
		New York
		North Dakota
		Oklahoma
		Tennessee
	Utah	
	5	West Virginia Republican convention
		Kansas Republican caucus
		Louisiana
		Washington
	9	Nebraska Democratic caucus
	10	Maine Democratic caucus
		District of Columbia
		Maryland
	12	Virginia
		Hawaii Democratic primary
	19	Wisconsin
March		Ohio
		Rhode Island
		Texas
	4	Vermont
	9	Wyoming Democratic caucus

	11	Mississippi
April	22	Pennsylvania
May		Indiana
	6	North Carolina
		Nebraska Republican primary
	13	West Virginia Democratic primary
		Kentucky
	20	Oregon
	27	Idaho Republican primary
June		Montana Democratic primary
		New Mexico Republican primary
	3	South Dakota
August	Aug. 25-28	Democratic National Convention — Denver, CO
September	Sept. 1-4	Republican National Convention — Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN

*To keep track of the delegate tally for each party, I recommend CNN's Election 2008 website: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/> (this is linked on Blackboard)

Mock Congress Outline

The Goal: To simulate a Senate congressional session consisting of 51 participants (50 students and your professor). This is an educational tool to convey the process of passing legislation.

Our Senate is split into 26 Democrats and 25 Republicans. Students will be assigned a party, state, and committee. These will be announced at the beginning of class on January 29th. Your professor will serve as the Majority Leader (a Democrat from the great state of Wisconsin).

Although unseen by us, we will operate in a political context where the House of Representatives (also controlled by the Democrats) and Republican President George W. Bush are also advocating for certain pieces of legislation. Whatever we pass out of the Senate could stall in the House or be vetoed by the President.

The Process: We will attempt to follow the actions of the real U.S. Senate. This means filibusters, cloture votes, holds, and unanimous consent agreements are all valid and will be used this semester.

Introducing Legislation

Students are responsible for drafting and introducing legislation. When drafted, they should email the Majority Leader (and the Minority Leader) and request the legislation be referred to committee. If the Majority Leader agrees to do so, he will assign the bill to one or more relevant committees.

Keep in mind—it's possible that legislation passed by the House will also be introduced for consideration by the Senate. In practical terms, this will be legislation drafted by your professor.

How should you draft legislation? You can propose anything you wish (removal of all troops from Iraq; a constitutional amendment banning abortion; the renaming of the Brunswick post office to the "Tom Brady Post Office Building"). It must be presented to me in a specific format, however, which we'll discuss later. You can browse legislation under consideration by Congress currently or passed into law previously at The Library of Congress website (<http://thomas.loc.gov/>). (I have linked this site on Blackboard.) Of course, a lot of legislation considered by Congress is often lengthy and complicated. I recommend keeping your drafted bills fairly short and straightforward (a half page would be about right). We do not have enough time to consider the intricacies of bill drafting.

A piece of advice—the Senate is a highly individualized legislative body, as we will see. Any member can disrupt the flow of legislation at any time. As such, bipartisan efforts often have the best chance of passing. Consider reaching across the aisle and co-sponsoring a piece of legislation. On the other hand, your party leaders will expect a fair amount of party discipline. If you are too bi-partisan, you risk being ostracized by your party. This is especially true when it comes to voting on controversial pieces of legislation.

Committee Meetings

Committees will consist of 11 student members (the Majority Leader will not serve on a committee). The Democrats will have 6 members, and the Republicans will have 5. For every committee, the Democrats will choose a chairperson, and the Republicans will choose a ranking member.

The chair of the committee is responsible for moving (or not moving) on legislation referred to the committee. We will discuss this more in class. The most practical way to hold committee sessions are on

Blackboard. I have posted Discussion boards for each committee. Chairs can post legislation on the discussion board and ask for comments and arguments from the committee members. The Chair should probably then designate a time for a vote, and all members should cast their ballot by that specific time. Committee members can choose to vote or abstain on any legislation.

Anything passed out of committee will be put on a calendar for consideration by the entire Senate. Of course, the timing of such consideration is at the discretion of the Majority Leader. Once we take up a piece of legislation on the Senate floor, the committee chairperson and ranking member should be ready to advise the Majority Leader on the structure of debate.

Floor Sessions

I have designated nine class sessions for floor sessions. These are:

January 31
February 5
February 14
March 4
March 6
April 10
April 15
May 1
May 6

On these days we will meet as a Senate body and consider legislation passed out of committee. Prior to each class session, however, I will post on Blackboard a short number of “unanimous consent” agreements. This will set out the agenda for the floor session. According to the Senate:

“These agreements are usually proposed by the Majority Leader or floor manager of the measure, and reflect negotiations among Senators interested in the measure. Many are ‘time agreements,’ which limit the time available for debate and specify who will control that time. Many also permit only a list of specified amendments.... Many also contain other provisions, such as empowering the Majority Leader to call up the measure at will or specifying when consideration will begin or end.”

ANY Senator can object to these agreements, which effectively kills consideration of that bill. This disagreement is called a “Hold.” This gives tremendous power to individual Senators, but it can also be very disruptive. Be very careful about when and if to use such a Hold. If you plan to do so, please email me before class (or tell me prior to the beginning of class), and I can potentially work out a compromise.

If the unanimous consent agreement is acceptable, and if the agreement does not contain specific rules about debate on a bill, a filibuster is possible. The Senator can either filibuster in actuality or signal to me that they *intend* to filibuster. The Majority Leader may decide to attempt a cloture vote, which requires 60 percent of all Senators. The cloture vote ends the filibuster. If 60 percent is not obtained, the filibuster effectively kills consideration of the bill.

We will only consider legislation directly voted out of committee, but unlike the House of Representatives, amendments to legislation need not be germane to the bill (unless specified in a unanimous consent agreement). So, if your bill is stalled in committee, and you want to force consideration of it, it is valid to offer your bill as an amendment to ANY legislation debated during a floor session.

Press Releases

I have posted on Blackboard a Discussion Board for press releases. Although only the class will be able to read them, elected officials often attempt to secure favorable press coverage. You can use the Discussion Board to signal publicly something you deem important. I recommend this strategy as a possible signal to other members about anything you deem important.

The Players:

Majority Leader (1 member)—Michael M. Franz (D-WI)

Majority Whip (1)—TBA

Minority Leader (1)—TBA

Minority Whip (1)—TBA

President pro tempore (1)—TBA

Vice President of the United States—all tied votes on the Senate floor are broken by the Vice President (currently Dick Cheney). For our purposes, if a floor vote is tied, the deciding vote will be determined by the majority position of the Republican members. In other words, we'll use Republican members to infer how Cheney *probably* would have voted.

Committee chairs (5) and ranking members (5)—TBA

Armed Services (Comprising of 6 Democratic members [including the chair] and 5 Republican members)

Energy and Natural Resources (6 Democratic members, 5 Republican members)

Foreign Relations (6 Democratic members, 5 Republican members)

Appropriations (6 Democratic members, 5 Republican members)

Commerce, Science, and Transportation (6 Democratic members, 5 Republican members)

Important Additional Notes:

Participation

25 percent of your entire grade is determined by your participation in the class. This includes class attendance to ALL lectures, and attendance at ALL floor sessions. In addition, your participation in the Mock Congress is crucial to securing a good grade.

How will I assess participation? Students can participate in a variety of ways—by introducing legislation, contributing to committee debates on legislation, contributing to floor debates, running for, winning, and performing well in a leadership post (available posts include: majority whip, minority leader, minority whip, 5 committee chairs, and 5 committee ranking members). *I will pay close attention to the quality of that participation (i.e., I will not reward poorly written bills).*

Participation SHOULD include contributing to the overall production of the Senate. This includes, but is not limited to, asserting your perspective on legislation. Students who choose only to vote on bills during floor sessions will NOT receive a good grade for participation. We'll discuss this more in class.

To help with monitoring your progress (and to improve if initial performance is lacking), I have scheduled three dates to assign you PART of your participation grade. After the March 6 floor session, I will assign 5 of the 25 participation points (assessing participation up to that point in the semester). After

the April 15 floor session, I will assign 5 more of the 25 participation points. Your final 10 points will reflect participation for the remainder of the semester, as well as overall participation.

Keep in mind, also. You are assigned a party and state. These assignments might not be to your liking (i.e., a liberal student from Massachusetts assigned to be a Republican from Wyoming). Your representation style is at your discretion (whether you choose to be bi-partisan, highly partisan, liberal, conservative, etc), but you should look up the real Senators from your assigned state. ***On May 6th, a 2-page (single-spaced) self-evaluation is due in class.*** The evaluation should compare your approach to representing that state with the representation offered by the real Senators. Were you more liberal than them? Did you offer similar legislation as them? I will not grade you on how similar that representation is, but *on how well and how thoroughly you assess your style in comparison to theirs.*

Committee Report

15 percent of your grade will be determined by a committee report (10 double-spaced pages) that you hand in on April 29th. This is a group project. The 6 Democratic members of each committee will form a group (meaning 5 groups of 6 members), and the 5 Republican members of each committee will form a group (meaning 5 groups of 5 members). The committee report will discuss one piece of legislation considered by your committee this semester. The report will include the following sections:

- a. Policy history: what is the origin of the policy? Who are the major players pushing the proposal or idea? Who are the players opposed? Why is the policy controversial?
- b. House, Senate, and presidential history with the policy: What have federal (or state-level) elected officials proposed or enacted into law to deal with the issue? Has your committee dealt with similar legislation recently? What was the result?
- c. Media coverage of the policy: how much coverage has the media devoted to the idea?

More information will be provided later on how to research these component pieces.