

INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS

Political Science 101
Fall 2001
M. Baum

Office: 2026 Derby Hall
Hours: Mon 4:00 to 5:00, Thurs 1:30 to 3:00
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This class is concerned with government and politics in the United States at the national level. The course has two major goals:

1. To ensure that you have an understanding of the mechanics of national government and politics--the ways that important processes operate. By the end of the quarter you should have a clear sense of such matters as the process by which Congress adopts legislation, the structure of the federal bureaucracy, and the routes that cases take as they flow through the federal courts.

2. To improve your understanding of the ways that the processes of government and politics work in practice and of why they work in those ways. We will explore such phenomena as the difficulties that presidents face in controlling the bureaucracy, the success that members of Congress enjoy when they run for reelection, and the recent conservatism of the Supreme Court. In each instance we will look for good explanations of these phenomena.

I think these goals are important, and the teaching assistants and I want to do everything we can to help you achieve them. We also want to help you to do as well in the class as possible. This syllabus is intended to be helpful to you. Please read it carefully, because it includes material that you'll need to have about the class and about your responsibilities in the class.

Course Material

The subjects to be studied in the course are listed twice on the syllabus: first, to show the list of topics that we will take up and the readings that go with them; second, to indicate the tentative schedule for our discussion of these topics in class (and for your reading on the same topics).

Readings for the course will be drawn primarily from two books. These books are available at the Student Book Exchange (14th and High Streets) and probably at the other campus bookstores:

Welch, Gruhl, Comer, Rigdon, and Ambrosius, Understanding American Government, 6th edition.

Bruce Allen Murphy, Portraits of American Politics: A Reader, 3rd edition.

There is an additional reading assignment: each day, pick up the OSU Lantern and read any articles in the Lantern that deal with national government and politics. You can test your understanding of politics, and extend that understanding, by trying to make sense of events reported in the news. Some news events will be discussed in class, and the tests will include questions related to those events.

Course material will be presented in the readings, in class sessions, and in recitation section meetings with the teaching assistants. Each has its own purposes:

1. The Welch book provides a good summary of the mechanics of national government and politics. To the extent that you are unfamiliar with the mechanics, this book will provide you with nearly all the information you need. It also provides material on the ways that government and politics work in practice, so it will connect up with the issues that we take up in class.

2. The Murphy book includes various readings on aspects of national government and politics, most of them focusing on specific incidents or people. These readings are intended to give you concrete examples of how the political process works, to illustrate some of the generalizations that are presented in the Welch book.

3. In class sessions we will take up specific aspects of each section that merit closer scrutiny. In class, the primary concern will be why politics and government work the ways they do, and especially how to explain patterns in politics and government. As the list of topics on this syllabus indicates, each topic focuses on a specific question as a way of understanding an important issue in that section of the course.

4. In recitation sections we will look further into aspects of the materials from class sessions and the readings. The section meetings will also be used to help prepare you to do well in the class, especially on the exams. Your paper assignment will be provided and discussed in your section.

Some important material will be presented only in class sessions, only in section meetings, or only in your readings. You are responsible for all the material presented in any of these three places. You are also responsible for all the information provided in class sessions or section meetings about requirements and schedules. If you must miss a class or meeting,

make sure to find out from other students about the material and information that was presented.

Grading

The course grade will be based on several components:

1. A first midterm examination, tentatively scheduled for Wednesday October 10th. This exam will count for 20% of the course grade.

2. A second midterm exam, tentatively scheduled for Monday November 5th. This exam will count for 25% of the course grade.

3. A final exam to be held on Wednesday December 5th at 1:30 p.m. This exam will count for 30% of the course grade. (Graduating seniors will have their final exam on Monday November 26th at 2:30 p.m., during class time. I will meet with them after the second midterm to discuss arrangements for their exam.)

4. A short analytic paper, to be due in your recitation section on Friday November 16th. The specific paper assignment will be provided and discussed in your recitation section. The paper will count for 20% of the course grade.

5. Attendance and participation in your recitation section. Consistency of attendance and quality of participation will be given equal weight; together they will count for 5% of your course grade.

6. Extra credit activities. Participation in an academic experiment in the political science department or other special activities that we will announce in class can raise your total score by 2%

To summarize:

	<u>Points</u>	<u>% of grade</u>
First midterm	40	20%
Second midterm	50	25%
Final exam	60	30%
Paper	40	20%
Recitation	10	5%
Total	200	100%
Extra credit	4	2%

You are expected to take the examinations at the times indicated and to turn in your paper on the due date. If you have very good reason to miss an examination, you must get permission from me to miss that exam before the time it is given. If I give you permission to miss an exam, you must check with me on the first class day after the examination to find out the time for

the makeup examination, and you must appear at that time. (Makeup examinations will consist of essay questions only.) If you miss an examination without prior permission, ordinarily you will receive a score of zero on that examination. If you have very good reason for missing the examination without prior permission, I will allow you to take the makeup with a penalty of five points for each day after the exam before you notified me, including the day of the exam. The paper must be turned in by the time of your recitation section on the due date; there will be a substantial penalty for each day after that time it is handed in, including the due date. Unforeseen circumstances sometimes arise at the last minute; to guard against them, do your best to complete your work for the paper before the due date.

Of course, no dishonest practices on the examinations or on the paper assignment will be acceptable, and any suspected cases of dishonesty will be reported to the university committee on academic misconduct and handled according to university policy.

The examinations will include multiple-choice and short-essay questions. Questions will be drawn about equally from material presented in class sessions and section meetings and from material in the readings. Questions will be related to both of the goals that I have laid out for the class. In other words, they will deal both with the mechanics of political and governmental processes and with description and explanation of the ways that government and politics work in practice. Early in the quarter I will hand out a brief guide to examinations that includes some sample questions.

The first midterm will cover all the material that we have reached by that time. The second midterm will cover the material since the first midterm. The final examination will cover primarily the material since the second midterm but it will also include questions on material from earlier in the quarter.

Grades in the class will not be based on a 90, 80, 70, 60 scale. Rather, I will set a grade scale for each test after the test, and there will also be grade scales for the paper and for the recitation section. Your grade in the class will be based on the total of your scores (including extra credit) compared with the total of the grade scales for each assignment. So, if the lowest A's for the various assignments add up to 175, students with scores of 175 or higher will get A's in the class. The lowest score for an A will be an A-, and the three scores closest to the borderline for other grades will be given + or - grades. For example, if the lowest A is 175 and the lowest B is 153, 176 and above will be A's, 175 will be an A-, 172-174 B+, 156-171 B, and 153-155 B-.

Assistance

As I noted earlier, both the teaching assistant for your section and I want to give you any help with the course that you need. My office hours are listed at the beginning of the syllabus, and your teaching assistant will announce office hours in the section meeting. If you use electronic mail, feel free to send me a message when you have a question or concern; my address is listed also.

You may find that you are working hard to understand the course material but that you are still confused. Or you may do badly on the first examination even though you felt that you were well prepared. Please come to see one of us if you have these kinds of problems. We may be able to help you in understanding difficult material, or we may suggest ways to study that will help you to do better. And, of course, if you don't have any problems but want to talk about the course, feel free to come see us.

Students with disabilities may need special assistance or special arrangements, particularly for the examinations. Please let me know what you need as soon as possible and early enough that it can be provided.

List of Topics and Readings

Listed below are the topics that we'll be taking up in the Monday and Wednesday class sessions, along with the readings for each section of the course.

1. Introduction: why doesn't government work better?

Welch, ch. 1

2. The Constitution

a. Dividing power: why there are so many fronts in the tobacco wars.

b. Limiting government: why the police can't scan houses for marijuana crops.

Welch, chs. 2, 3

Murphy, readings 1.3, 1.4, 1.5

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3. Money in politics

- a. The power of money: why United Parcel is flying to China.
- b. The failure of regulation: why soft money is stronger than hard money.

Welch, ch. 9

4. Interest groups

- a. Organizing groups: why we join the AAA.
- b. Group influence: why it may get harder to go bankrupt.

Welch, ch. 6

5. Public opinion

- a. Impact of public opinion: why Bill Clinton finished his term and Richard Nixon didn't.
- b. Sources of public opinion: why we don't trust the government.

Welch, ch. 4

6. The mass media

- a. Media coverage: why Gary Condit got more attention than poverty.
- b. Media impact: how the president spent his summer vacation.

Welch, ch. 5

7. Elections

- a. Election rules: why Al Gore is out of work.
- b. Voters' decisions: how we figure out what to do.
- c. Party tides: why it's tough to be a Southern Democrat.
- d. Effects of the election process: do good candidates become good presidents?

Welch, chs. 7, 8

Murphy, readings 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4

"The Mechanics of Presidential Elections" (handout)

8. Congress

- a. Winning re-election, part 1: why the House keeps voting against flag burners.
- b. Winning re-election, part 2: why Hawaii has interstate highways.
- c. Power in Congress: how Jim Jeffords turned government upside-down.
- d. The legislative process: why we never get a budget on time.

Welch, ch. 10

Murphy, readings 3.1, 3.2

9. Bureaucracy

- a. The politics of structure: why people listen to Alan Greenspan.
- b. Administrative effectiveness: why the INS keeps messing up.
- c. Bureaucratic politics, part 1: how the IRS got defanged.
- d. Bureaucratic politics, part 2: why J. Edgar Hoover got anything he wanted.

Welch, ch. 12

Murphy, readings 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.5

10. The presidency

- a. Styles of governing: what difference does George Bush make?
- b. Organizing the presidency: who is Andrew Card, and why should we care?
- c. Presidents and Congress: how we got a tax cut this year.
- d. Presidents and the bureaucracy: how Christine Whitman protects the environment.

Welch, ch. 11

8

Murphy, readings 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.5

11. The courts

- a. Selecting judges: why Michael Luttig may get from Richmond to Washington.
- b. Criminal cases: why the Unabomber pled guilty.
- c. Making law and policy: why abortion is legal.
- d. Implementing decisions: why it took forever to desegregate the schools.

Welch, ch. 13

Murphy, readings 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 7.1

12. Conclusion: does government work better than we think?

Tentative Class Schedule

The Monday and Wednesday sessions and dates for assignments are listed below. Note that there may be minor changes in the schedule; any changes will be announced.

September 19	1	Introduction
September 24	2	Rules of the game: the Constitution
September 26	3	Money in politics
October 1	4	Interest groups
October 3	5	Public opinion
October 8	6	The mass media
October 10		FIRST MIDTERM
October 15	7	Elections
October 17		Elections (cont.)
October 22	8	Congress
October 24		Congress (cont.)
October 29	9	The bureaucracy
October 31		Bureaucracy (cont.)

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November 5	SECOND M I DTERM
November 7	10 The p r e s i d e n c y
November 14	P r e s i d e n c y (c o n t .)
November 16 (F r i d a y)	(P A P E R S D U E)
November 19	11 The c o u r t s
November 26	C o u r t s (c o n t .)
November 28	12 C o n c l u s i o n
December 5 (W e d n e s d a y)	F I N A L E X A M N A T I O N (1 : 3 0)