

**POSC 2201  
AMERICAN POLITICS**

Marquette University • Fall 2012 • TuTh 11:00-12:15 • EN202 (Olin Engineering 202)

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**OVERVIEW:** This course is an introduction to the American political system, including its development, institutions, and practices. We begin by examining the principles and political logics shaping the design of U.S. political institutions and the Framers' trade-offs in crafting the Constitution. Next, we analyze the major institutions that constitute the federal system: Congress, the presidency, the judiciary and the bureaucracy. We then turn to the formal and informal channels linking citizens to government – political parties, interest groups, elections, public opinion and the news media – and evaluate how well the major political institutions represent the needs and preferences of a diverse nation. We conclude by asking whether reforms are necessary to make the political system more responsive to constituencies' interests.

This is an especially interesting time to be taking a class on American politics, with the presidential election and Romney's selection of Wisconsin's own Paul Ryan, an open race to replace retiring Senator Herb Kohl, and ongoing debates over healthcare reform, budget deficits, and foreign policy. But it is also a particularly exciting time to be studying these issues here at Marquette: the Law School has been undertaking the most comprehensive polling initiative in Wisconsin's history, following public opinion in the state over the course of the 2012 elections. We will take advantage of these polling data to explore how Wisconsin voters evaluate the candidates and respond to the issues of the 2012 campaigns.

**COURSE FORMAT:** Each class meeting consists of structured discussion of the readings and topics for the given week.

**CURRENT EVENTS:** Students are required to read a major newspaper online everyday, such as the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and/or the *Wall Street Journal*. In addition, I will post articles every week on the course webpage on D2L to supplement students' newspaper reading.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:** This course is organized around several learning objectives. In terms of *course content*, students will be able to:

- Explain the problems that confront all attempts at collective action, and how institutional arrangements have been devised over time to solve these problems;
- Understand how rules and institutions structure the actions and choices of citizens and politicians;
- Evaluate the central concepts, theories, and methods used to explain individual and social behavior;
- Critically examine the democratic nature of the U.S. political system, and the strengths and weaknesses of particular reform efforts.

In terms of *skills*, students will:

- Practice their analytical skills by critically engaging arguments;

- Increase their speaking skills through planning and participating in class debates; and
- Improve their writing and argumentation skills through written assignments and in-class exercises.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:** Be creative. Question what you read. *Make trouble.*<sup>1</sup> The success of this course depends upon your regular contributions to classroom discussion. *Course attendance is not optional.* I expect you to attend every meeting and to read all of the assigned readings before class. If you are unable to attend any given meeting, you must notify me in advance by e-mail. Please note that I will deduct your participation grade for each and every unexcused absence.

The reading load averages about 60-80 pages a week. It is essential that you do not fall behind; if you put off reading until before the exams you will find yourself starting at 400+ pages for each of the exams.

**COURSE TEXTS:** There is one required book for the course (available at BookMarq):

Kernell, Samuel, Gary C. Jacobson, and Thad Kousser. 2012. *The Logic of American Politics*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Additional readings are available on D2L, unless a link is provided directly from the syllabus.

**ASSIGNMENTS:** Grades will be determined according to the following formulation:

Written debate assignment: 10%

In-class Quizzes: 10% each, 4 total

Midterm Exam (Unit 1): 15%

Final Exam (Units 2 & 3): 20%

Constitutional Convention: 15%

**GRADING SCALE:**

94-100 A

88-93 AB

82-87 B

77-81 BC

72-76 C

66-71 CD

62-65 D

62 and below F

**COURSE POLICIES:**

*Academic dishonesty* will not be tolerated. Papers should be your own and you must cite sources appropriately. I expect familiarity with Marquette's policies on academic honesty. Resources on citing sources can be found at: <http://www.marquette.edu/wac/plagiarism/AvoidingPlagiarism2.shtml>.

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<sup>1</sup> This call comes from one of my former professors, Joe Soss.

*Late work* is not accepted (with the exception of a catastrophic event). I will deduct a half letter grade for each day that an assignment is late. Please see me to arrange accommodations for reasons of illness or family emergency.

*Proper email etiquette* is expected. A professional email to a professor should read “Hi Dr/Professor \_\_\_\_\_” and state one’s business clearly and without text-speak. I will do my best to send you a prompt response.

*Disability Accommodations* are provided in compliance with the ADA and Marquette University policy. Students requiring disability accommodations should register with the relevant campus office.

**PHONE/LAPTOP/TABLET POLICY:** Phones must be silenced during class. Computers/Tablets are allowed for taking notes. However, here’s the deal: I will drop the lowest quiz grade for all students in the class if and only if we do not catch any student on Facebook, Twitter, Gmail, etc. during class. The same goes for texting. Any student who is caught will be promptly identified and the entire class will lose out on this deal.

**ACADEMIC FREEOM:** No doubt that in a class such as this, students will find that they passionately disagree with one another. Students may also find that they disagree with me on sensitive and politically charged topics. And be prepared: I will push students to think critically about their premises and conclusions. I encourage disagreement and dissent, but ask that we maintain a civil atmosphere and respect the views of others. Your grades will not be affected by any beliefs or ideas expressed in class or in assignments. That said I also expect you to come to class with an open mind. If you think you’ve already got the right answer, this class is not for you.

## UNIT 1: FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN POLITICS

8/28: Course Introduction & Syllabus Handout

8/30-9/4: Logic of American Politics, KJK Chapter 1

Discussion Questions: Why can’t we solve all our disputes through bargaining? What is a collective action problem? How do political institutions help solve this problem? Can you think of any current events in the news that illustrate a collective action problem?

9/6-9/11: Constitutional Rules of the Game, KJK Chapter 2  
The U.S. Constitution  
Federalist #10 and #51

In-class assignment: outline Madison’s argument in *Federalist* No. 10

Discussion Questions: What were the central problems the Founding Fathers faced at the Constitutional convention and how did they resolve them? Which issues were consciously left unresolved by the Framers, and why? What does Madison say about the relation between self-interest and the nature of government in Federalist #10? In Federalist #51, why did Madison argue that it was necessary to separate governmental authority among several branches?

## Quiz 1 (9/6)

- 9/13: Founding Ideas  
Louis Hartz, "The Liberal Tradition in America," (D2L)  
Michael Kammen, "The Nature of American Constitutionalism," (D2L)  
Charles Beard and Robert Brown, "An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution: Founding Fathers, the Question of Motive" (D2L)

Discussion Questions: What is distinctive about the American constitutional system? What explains the simplicity and durability of the Constitution? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the document's simplicity? What is the "liberal tradition" in America and how did it affect the founding era? Do you think it is good to regularly amend the Constitution to reflect changing values and address current problems, or should the Constitution be changed only rarely?

- 9/18: In-class movie: Huey Long

Assignment: Write a script of a debate between Madison and Huey on the best form of government (no more than 3-4 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins).

- 9/20: Federalism, KJK Chapters 3

Discussion Questions: What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a strong central government? How has the balance of power between the states and the national government evolved over time? How are the states fighting back to resist centralization at the national level?

In-class assignment: Handout on immigration laws passed by Arizona, Georgia and Alabama. What are the potential conflicts that arise when individual states attempt to regulate immigration? Is this an area better left to the federal government, or should individual states have the right to pass their own immigration laws? Why?

### **DUE: Madison v. Long debate**

- 9/25: The Right to Participate: Civil Rights, KJK Chapter 4  
Abraham Lincoln, "The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions," (D2L)  
Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter From the Birmingham Jail," (D2L)

Discussion Questions: What did the North and South each expect to gain from the Civil War? What benefits did Reconstruction produce for former slaves? For northern whites? What benefits and which groups did Reconstruction "leave out" and why? What party did most African Americans support prior to the 1930s and why? Why did this change after the 1930s and what was responsible for that change? How did the civil rights demonstrations of the 1960s change the political calculations of Democratic politicians? What challenges and opportunities do Hispanics face in their current civil rights efforts? How do these challenges differ from those blacks faced in their civil rights campaigns? Lincoln and King take opposing views about the place of civil disobedience in trying to promote social change. Which do you find more convincing? If you think that civil disobedience can be appropriate, how does one decide where to draw the line between legitimate civil disobedience and lawless behavior?

9/27: The Right to Participate: Civil Liberties, KJK Chapter 5

Discussion Questions: How has the role of national government differed in the development of civil rights policy versus that of civil liberties? How did the Bill of Rights come to apply to states? Do the states still have a role in defining civil liberties? How would you address the tradeoff between security and freedom in addressing the threat of terrorism? Do you think we have the right balance, or are we undermining civil liberties too much or ignoring security too much? What is the constitutional basis for the right to privacy? What is the Court's current stance on capital punishment?

In-class assignment: Is it better for Congress, as the popularly elected branch who must sit for reelection, to set civil liberties policy compared to federal judges, who are unelected and life tenured?

## UNIT 2: MODERN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

10/2: TBD

### Quiz 2 (10/4)

10/4-9: Congress, KJK Chapter 6

Discussion Questions: Is Congress truly the "first branch" of government? What aspects of its operation either justify or undermine that label? Do the justifications for the bicameral legislature presented by the Founders still ring true today, or would we be better off with a unicameral legislature? What is the difference between a member being responsive and a member being responsible? How does the method of election help foster one behavior over another? What constraints are placed on states when they draw districts for congressional elections? How can parties give their members an advantage through districting? Why is it so difficult for Congress to put the interest of the public above "special interests"? Why does the House have stricter rules and greater leadership control than the Senate? If members are elected by majorities from districts, why do interest groups sometimes prevail, even in conflicts with majority opinion?

In-class assignment: We'll take a look at some congressional districts. Do some look like they've been gerrymandered? Why might these districts have been drawn in that particular way? Is gerrymandering a good or bad thing?

10/11: **Midterm Exam**

10/16: The Federal Judiciary, KJK Chapter 9

Discussion Questions: Why is the judiciary regarded as the "least dangerous" branch of government? What features of the Court make it appear undemocratic? How does the Court enforce its decisions on lower courts? On the executive and legislative branches? Which cases appealed to the Court are most likely to be taken up by the justices? What factors can increase a case's likelihood of being granted *certiorari*? How does the membership of the Court affect its decisions? How is membership of the Court determined?

10/23: Presidency, KJK Chapter 7

Discussion Questions: What are the powers granted to the president in the Constitution? What are the nonconstitutional sources of presidential power? What are executive orders? How did the presidency of the 1800s differ from that of today? How did the president's interactions with his party and his cabinet change over time? What is "going public"? What specific tools or resources are available to the president when using this strategy? Why don't members of Congress go public as often as the president does? Why doesn't the president use this tactic on every issue?

### UNIT 3: THE PUBLIC IN POLITICS

10/25: Public Opinion, KJK Chapter 10

Discussion questions: Do voters think in terms of ideologies? Are voters' attitudes generally consistent? Given the mechanisms through which politicians and the media can influence it, does public opinion really matter? Who are opinion leaders? What are the limits on how much these opinion leaders can control public opinion?

In-class assignment: Marquette University Law Poll.

10/30-11/1: Voting, Campaigns, and Elections, KJK Chapter 11

Discussion Questions: What are the potential problems with delegating authority to representatives in government? How do elections help reduce those risks? What benefits do people get from voting? What factors explain the decline in voter turnout around the 1960s? Why is this decline surprising? What are the main differences between modern campaigns and those of the patronage-based party organizations of the past? Where does the money required to finance modern campaigns come from?

#### Quiz 3 (11/1)

11/6: In-class movie: Mr. Smith Goes to Washington

11/8-13: Political Parties, KJK Chapter 12

Discussion Questions: Why didn't the Framers want parties? How did the Constitution help promote the emergence of parties? Why do third parties do so poorly in U.S. elections? Why do such parties do so much better in other democracies? How has the nomination process for party candidates changed over time? How do party activists differ from rank-and-file voters of their parties? What consequences does this difference have for American politics and policymaking?

11/15-20: Interest Groups, KJK Chapter 13

Discussion Questions: What sorts of benefits do politicians receive from lobbyists? If these groups are so beneficial, why do voters view them with such suspicion? How do governmental policies create interest groups? What do Political Action Committees (PACs) get in return for their donations to candidates? How will the Supreme Court's *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* decision shape the role of interest groups in federal elections? Are there ways to

reconcile the protection of First Amendment rights of interest groups with concerns about their influence over elections and policy?

In-class Assignment: Choose an interest group that you are somewhat familiar with, and go to that group's Web site. Report to the class on what the interest group's stated purpose or mission is. What kind of information do they provide on their Web site? Do they explicitly discuss having a lobbying arm or any activities that you would classify as lobbying? Do they have a specific section of their Web site devoted to political issues and/or lobbying? Does their Web site say how many members the group has and how many people are employed in their lobbying arm?

#### **Quiz 4 (11/20)**

11/27-29: The News Media, KJK Chapter 14

Discussion Questions: How do market forces make political news more "democratic"? Have market forces played the same role in press coverage throughout American history? What resources do politicians have that might allow them to "go around" the press and communicate with the public directly? In general, how successful are those attempts?

12/4-6: Mock Constitutional Convention

12/13: **Final Exam (8:00-10:00 am, Wehr Physics 141)**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Assignment</b>
8/28	Class intro	
8/30	Logic of American Politics	
9/4	Logic of American Politics	
9/6	Constitutional Rules of the Game	Quiz 1
9/11	Constitutional Rules of the Game	
9/13	Founding Ideas	
9/18	In-class movie	
9/20	Federalism	Debate due
9/25	Civil Rights	
9/27	Civil Liberties	
10/2	TBD	
10/4	Congress	Quiz 2
10/9	Congress	
10/11	MIDTERM EXAM	
10/16	Judiciary	Amendment due
10/23	Presidency	
10/25	Public Opinion	
10/30	Voting, Campaigns and Elections	
11/1	Voting, Campaigns and Elections	Quiz 3
11/6	In-class movie	
11/8	Political Parties	
11/13	Political Parties	
11/15	Interest Groups	
11/20	Interest Groups	Quiz 4
11/27	News Media	
11/29	News Media	Group Outlines due
12/4	Mock Constitutional Convention	
12/6	Mock Constitutional Convention	
12/13	FINAL EXAM	