Power, Politics, and Democracy in America
Political Science 201
Williams College

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Description.
How does the American political system operate? What sorts of dynamics illuminate its
intricacies, epitomize its challenges, and explain its outputs? This course provides an introduction to
American political ideas, institutions, behaviors, and processes. Topics include (among other things)
the Constitution, political culture, Congress, the presidency, mass media, civic participation, and
public policy. Although we will cover the “nuts and bolts” of American government, our focus is
less civics than political science, our task less memorizing names and dates than analyzing and
interpreting political phenomena.

Objectives.
Thinking Politically. Above all else, politics is about power—who wants it, who has it, how
they get it, and what they do, could do, and should do with it. As such, to think politically is to think
in terms of the sources, distribution, manifestations, uses, abuses, limitations, and ramifications
of power. With the political fight over and exercise of power as our overarching theme, we will
examine structures and rules, investigate incentives and interests, explore causes and conditions—all
so that we may begin to unpack both the art and science of contemporary American politics.

Thinking Holistically. Political actors and institutions do not operate in isolation but,
rather, in a complex system where the actions of one affect the choices available to another.
Although we will study different features of the political system individually, our goal is to
understand both the interactions between and the environment surrounding them. Even as we
delve deeply into particular points of inquiry, remember that our task is to develop a composite and
richly contextual understanding of the nature of American politics in the early twenty-first century.

Format.
Class will combine elements of lecture and open discussion. In order to facilitate broad
participation, I will both accept volunteers and call on students directly. In either case, there will be
ample opportunity for you to ask questions, share your views, and interrogate the course material.

Materials.
• The Constitution of the United States of America (handout) (Const)
• Serow and Ladd, eds., The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity, 5th ed. (2011) (SI)*
• PSCI 201 course packet (in three volumes) (CP)**

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* Available for purchase at Water Street Books.
** The first volume is available for pickup at the Class of ’37 House (51 Park Street) from 9am to 3:30pm M-F; the
   subsequent volumes will be distributed in due course.
Contributions.*

Op-Eds (10% each for a total of 20%). Two 2-3 page opinion pieces on assigned topics—one near the start of the course, one near the end of it.

Essays (20% each for a total of 40%). Two 4-6 page analytic essays due largely on dates of your own choosing and selected from an array of assignments throughout the semester. The assignments are purposely diverse in style, but all require, albeit in distinct ways, broad, systematic, and creative thinking about the material and themes of the course. Regardless of the specific form of writing, your challenge is neither to embark upon outside research nor to summarize the views of others but, rather, to analyze the assigned material, reflect on the issues at hand, and articulate—and then support with evidence and analysis—an argument that answers the question.

Final Exam (25%). A cumulative exam consisting of identifications and essays. Provided sufficient interest, I will be glad to hold a review session at the conclusion of the semester.

Class Participation (15%). A process of active engagement that entails more than simply showing up. Accordingly, participation grades are not a “free 12%” but, rather, a reflection of my holistic assessment of your performance in class.

Evaluation.

Written Work. Good writing is good thinking—that is to say, writing well first requires thinking well. The manner in which and the depth with which you approach writing and thinking will be the determining factors in your grade. More specifically, I base grades for written work on the following three factors: the extent to which you make a clear, compelling, and original argument; the extent to which you support that argument through close analysis and consideration of primary and secondary source evidence, and the extent to which you organize and articulate your thoughts in a logical and sophisticated structure. Needless to say, proper mechanics of writing—including features such as grammar, capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and so forth—are assumed; be sure to proofread your work in order to catch any errors along these lines.

Written work in the A range is characterized by a strikingly creative, perceptive, and persuasive argument; comprehensive synthesis and trenchant analysis of an abundance of course material; straightforward yet sophisticated organization of thoughts; and clear, cogent, fluid, and error-free prose. Written work in the B range is characterized by a sound, original, and reasonably thoughtful argument; competent analysis of various course material; logical and intelligible organization; and clear, cogent, and error-free prose. Written work in the C range is characterized by a relatively underdeveloped, simplistic, or derivative argument; partial, inconsistent, or faulty analysis of course material; convoluted organization; and awkward, stilted, or otherwise distracting prose. Written work in the D range is characterized by an incoherent or extremely confusing argument; superficial or fleeting engagement with the course material; chaotic or irrational organization; and distorted, error-riddled prose. Written work that lacks any argument or analysis, fails to engage the course material, or is in any way incomprehensible earns an F.**

Participation. Three factors contribute to class participation grades: the degree to which you demonstrate analytic or critical understanding of the course material, the degree to which you articulate thoughtful or original questions and arguments in response to the course material, and the degree to which you succeed in advancing discussion by responding meaningfully to what others

* I reserve the right to fail any student who fails any element—op-ed, essays, final exam, class participation—of the course.

** The following adjectives capture the essence of what individual grades mean in this course: truly exceptional (A+), outstanding (A), excellent (A-), very good (B+), good (B), satisfactory (B-), fair (C+), sub-par (C), poor (C-), seriously deficient (D+), minimally acceptable (D), borderline unacceptable (D-), completely unacceptable (F).
have said. The emphasis here is on *quality*, not *quantity*. Select insightful offerings are infinitely more valuable than a multitude of derivative or mediocre ones. Worry not: provided you attend class, complete the reading, and think carefully about the themes of the course, you will be in an excellent position to contribute thoughtfully to discussion.

Participation grades in the A range are reserved for those students who consistently come to class with questions and comments, engage others in a respectful manner, and generally elevate the level of discussion. Participation grades in the B range are earned by those students who participate but do not stimulate discussion, adequately listen to their classmates, or relate their comments to the direction of the conversation. Participation grades in the C range are for those students who are infrequent or unwilling contributors to discussion. Participation grades of D and F, respectively, are for those students who do not arrive adequately prepared for class and for those who disrupt and detract from the overall quality of the course.

Responsibilities.

**Attendance.** Put simply, I expect you to be in class *each and every day*. I do not formally call roll, but I notice—and make a mental note!—when you are absent. Besides avoiding my undying wrath, you should plan on full attendance for three reasons. First, participation, which counts for 15% of your final grade, is impossible if you are not present. Second, the lectures and discussions that occur in class will be crucial elements of your learning in this course. Third, and most importantly, by choosing to take this class, you are making a commitment to me, to your classmates, and to yourself that you will be an active and engaged participant in our academic community. Class will go on without you, but everyone’s learning will suffer as a consequence of your absence. If you know in advance that missing class will be unavoidable, please have the courtesy to let me know.

**Punctuality and Preparedness.** As part of your aforementioned commitment to me, your classmates, and yourself, you are expected to arrive in class on time, prepared, and *without technological distractions*. This means, first, that you have thoroughly and carefully read the material before class and, second, that you have thought about that material and are willing and ready to contribute your thoughts to discussion. (On occasion, I may also ask you to complete a brief exercise or assignment in order to enrich the day’s discussion.) Of course, I recognize that students lead busy lives, have commitments (both academic and otherwise) in addition to this course, and may occasionally be affected by unforeseen events and unpredictable circumstances that make adequate preparation difficult. Even in those instances, I still urge you to come to class and encourage you to let me know—either through an email in advance of class or a quick comment upon entering class—that you were unable to prepare as fully as you had hoped. Not only will you not be penalized for your disclosure, but I agree not to call on you for that period. I trust you not to abuse my generosity by availing yourself of this option more than twice.

**Discourse and Decorum.** You are responsible for conducting yourself appropriately—both in your own comments and in your responses (verbal or otherwise) to the comments of your peers. As respectful discourse is the norm, criticism should be reserved for ideas, arguments, and opinions rather than for people; ad hominem comments will not be tolerated.

**Submitting Work.** You will receive *three* “extension days”—literally, three twenty-four hour extensions—to be used as you wish and without penalty. Whether to spend one day on each of three assignments or conserve all three days for one assignment is entirely up to you, but I urge you to use your days wisely because they are the only extensions I will grant. Since I will neither consider ad hoc extension requests nor accept late work, assignments that are not accompanied by one or more of your extension days must be submitted—*in class and in person* (unless otherwise specified)—by the due date in order to receive credit.
Academic Honesty. I hope—frankly, I expect—this will not be an issue, but it is worth repeating that all work you do in this course is governed by the College’s Honor Code. (If you have any questions about how the Honor Code applies, do not hesitate to ask!) I take scholarly integrity very seriously, and any suspected violations will be pursued to the fullest extent. No exceptions.

Contact Information.

Email. The most efficient way to reach me is via email. As a general rule, emails received before 9pm will usually receive a reply that day; emails received after 9pm will likely receive a reply on the following day.

Office Hours. For my regularly scheduled office hours, no sign-up or prior notice is necessary, nor is a specific course-related question or concern. (If you wish to schedule an appointment for another time, you should let me know a few days in advance.) Although I am obviously available to discuss any issues that may arise in class or in the reading, you are also more than welcome to stop by and join me for some friendly conversation. Indeed, I encourage you to do so; really—come see me. I am interested in learning about you and your thoughts, and I never (well, ok, hardly ever) tire of talking about American politics.

Some Final Thoughts.

I take teaching seriously, and I hope you will reciprocate by taking learning seriously. That said, I intend for our classes to be enjoyable—both for you and for me. This course revolves around rich, interesting, and controversial debates that help to animate the character and complexities of American political life. So expect to teach each other and to learn from each other, but also expect to enjoy yourself; for my part, I promise to do the same.

Introduction

1. Witnesses, Weather, and Why This Course Won’t Have a Textbook (February 5)

2. (Political) Arts and Sciences (February 8)
   CP: Bachrach and Baratz, “Two Faces of Power”
   Lukes, “The Three-Dimensional View” from *Power: A Radical View*
   Riordan, selections from *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*
   Matthews, selections from *Hardball*

I. Foundations

3. First Principles (February 10)*
   CP: The Declaration of Independence
   The Articles of Confederation

* Quite remarkably, the College owns *original* copies of the nation’s founding documents, including the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the Constitution, *The Federalist*, and the Bill of Rights—all housed in the Chapin Library (on the fourth floor of Sawyer Library). While I will not require you to visit, I cannot recommend strongly enough that you choose to do so at some point during this first unit.
Const: the whole thing!
CP: Ellis, “The Generation” from *Founding Brothers*
SL: Madison, *The Federalist* 10 (10)
CP: Dahl, “Is the Constitution Democratic?”

4. Powers, Separate and Shared  (February 15)
SL: Madison, *The Federalist* 51 (15)
Const: Articles I, II, and III
CP: Immigration and Naturalization Service v. Chadha
W. Wilson, *Congressional Government*
J.Q. Wilson, “Does the Separation of Powers Still Work?”
Shear and Davis, “Immigration Clash Could Lead to Shutdown”
Hulse, “House Republicans, Seizing on Health Law, Challenge Executive Branch”
Steinhauer, “A Congress That Doesn’t Want to Weigh In on War”

5. The Central State and the Many States  (February 17)
SL: Madison, *The Federalist* 39 and 46 (18)
Const: Article I, Section 8, Clause 18 (the last one – beginning with “--And To make”)
Article I, Section 10
Articles IV, V, VI, and VII
10th and 11th Amendments
CP: McCulloch v. Maryland
Peterson, “Who Should Do What?”
SL: Karch, *Democratic Laboratories* (20)
CP: Chatterji, “Don’t Look to States for New Ideas”
Belluck, “The Not-So United States”
Gerken and Dawson, “Living Under Someone Else’s Law”
Walters and Kettl, “The Katrina Breakdown”
Meyerson, “Fed Up With Federalism”
Epstein and Loyola, “The United State of America”

6. Truth, Justice, and the American Way  (February 22)
Const: Preamble
1st-10th Amendments
CP: Tocqueville, excerpts from *Democracy in America*
Slaughter, excerpts from *The Idea That Is America*
Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*
Smith, “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz”
Hochschild, “What is the American Dream?”
SL: Kammen, *People of Paradox* (6)
CP: Brooks, “One Nation, Slightly Divisible”
II. Institutions

7. The Zoo on the Hill  (February 24)
   Const: Article I
   16th and 17th Amendments
   CP: Madison, The Federalist 53
   Madison, The Federalist 62
   Madison, The Federalist 63
   Baker, “Politics of Scale” from House and Senate
   Draper, excerpts from Do Not Ask What Good We Do
   Packer, “The Empty Chamber”
   Steinhauer, “Republicans Lead Congress With Two Distinct Agendas”

8. Of Party and Policy, Constituents and Career  (February 29)
   SL: Mayhew, Congress: The Electoral Connection (22)
   Fenno, Home Style (23)
   CP: Dodd, “Congress and the Quest for Power”
   Fiorina, “The Rise of the Washington Establishment”
   Arnold, “Explaining Congressional Action” from The Logic of Congressional Action
   A Member of Congress, “Confessions of a Congressman”
   Hamilton, “The Case for Congress”
   SL: Price, The Congressional Experience (31)

9. Hail to the Chief  (March 2)
   Const: Article II
   22nd Amendment
   CP: Hamilton, The Federalist 69
   Hamilton, The Federalist 70
   SL: Neustadt, Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents (32)
   CP: Kernell, Going Public
   Davis, “In Wielding Rarely Used Veto, President Obama Puts Budget Heat on Republicans”
   Howell, “Presidential Power in the Modern Era” from Power without Persuasion
   Calmes, “Obama Counts on Power of Convening People for Change”
   Lincoln, “The Prerogative Theory of the Presidency”
   Roosevelt, “The Stewardship Theory of the Presidency”
   Taft, “The Literalist Theory of the Presidency”

10. The Way to Rushmore  (March 7)
    CP: Skowronek, “Structure and Action” from The Politics Presidents Make
    Barber, “Presidential Character and How to Foresee It” from The Presidential Character
    Greenstein, “The Person of the President, Leadership, and Greatness”
    Beinart, “Why America Is Moving Left”
    Lowry, “The Interlude”
11. Bureaucracy—Just Bureaucracy* (March 9)
   Const: Article II
   SL: Reich, *Locked in the Cabinet* (41)
       Wilson, *Bureaucracy* (42)
   CP: Kaufman, *Red Tape*
       Aberbach and Rockman, *In the Web of Politics*
       Heclo, “Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment”
       Cato Institute, “Privatization” from *Cato Handbook for Policymakers*
       Hacker, “Bigger and Better”
       DiIulio, “Want Better, Smaller Government?”

12. Neither Force Nor Will… (March 14)
   Const: Articles III and VI
   11th Amendment
   SL: Hamilton, *The Federalist* 78 (43)
   CP: *Marbury v. Madison*
       *Cooper v. Aaron*
       Bickel, excerpts from *The Least Dangerous Branch*
   SL: Rostow, “The Democratic Character of Judicial Review” (44)
       O’Brien, *Storm Center* (45)
   CP: Rosenberg, “The Fly-Paper Court” from *The Hollow Hope*
       McGloskey, “The Court of Today and the Lessons of History” from *The American Supreme Court*

13. …But a Whole Lot of Judgment (March 16)
   Const: 1st-10th and 14th Amendments
       Scalia, “Originalism: The Lesser Evil”
       Breyer, “The Basic Approach” from *Making Our Democracy Work*
       *Griswold v. Connecticut*

III. Linkages

14. The Fourth Estate (April 4)
   CP: Cook, “The News Media as a Political Institution”
   podcast: *This American Life*, “Primary” – Act I
   CP: Boorstin, “Pseudo-Events”
   SL: Sabato, *Feeding Frenzy* (77)
       Mutz, “How Mass Media Divide Us” (80)
   CP: Fallows, “Why Americans Hate the Media”
       Smolkin, “What the Mainstream Media Can Learn from Jon Stewart”
   SL: Sunstein, *Republic.com 2.0* (79)
   CP: Sullivan, “Why I Blog”

* Ummm…I’ve got nothing here; I dare you to do better!
15. Vox Populi Vox Dei (April 6)
   CP: Popkin, The Reasoning Voter
   SL: Key, Public Opinion and American Democracy (57)
   CP: Lippman, The Phantom Public
   SL: Jacobs and Shapiro, Politicians Don’t Pander (59)
   CP: Menand, “The Unpolitical Animal”
       Bartels, “The Irrational Electorate”
       Hochschild and Einstein, “What Do People Know and Why Does It Matter?” from Do Facts Matter?

16. Tocquevillian Dreams (April 11)
   Const: 14th, 15th, 17th, 19th, 24th, and 26th Amendments
   CP: Tocqueville, “On the Use that the Americans Make of Association in Civil Life” from Democracy in America
       Putnam, “The Strange Disappearance of Civic America”
       Skocpol, “The Narrowing of Civic Life”
       Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, “The Big Tilt”
       Jonas, “The Downside of Diversity”
       Fiorina, “Extreme Voices”
   podcast: This American Life, “This Week” (May 6, 2011) – Act III
   CP: Niedzviecki, “Facebook in a Crowd”
       Garber, “The White House Petition Site is a Joke (and Also the Future of Democracy)”

17. Madisonian Nightmares (April 13)
   SL: Madison, The Federalist 10 (10) (yes—again!)
       Tocqueville, Democracy in America (61)
   CP: Truman, “Defending Pluralist Politics”
   SL: Schattschneider, The Semisovereign People (62)
   CP: Judis, “The Pressure Elite”
   SL: Skinner, More Than Money (63)
   CP: Tau, “How the Gun Lobby Shot Down D.C.’s Congressional Vote”
       Barstow, “Tea Party Lights Fuse for Rebellion on Right”

18. Agents of Legitimate Opposition (April 18)
   CP: Aldrich, Why Parties?
   Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy
   Fiorina, “The Decline of Collective Responsibility in American Politics”
   SL: Brownstein, The Second Civil War (75)
   CP: Halstead, “The Chieftains and the Church”
   podcast: This American Life, “Houses of Ill Repute” – Act III
   CP: Steinhauer, “A Day of Friction Notable Even for a Fractious Congress”
       Hulse and Pear, “Departing Lawmakers Bemoan the Decline of Compromise”
       Hulse, “Parties Coming to More Agreement (Just Not on Who Deserves Credit)”

19. On the Trail and In the Booth (April 20)
   Const: Article I, Sections 2-4
       Article II, Section 1
       12th, 17th, and 22nd Amendments
podcast: *This American Life*, “The Facts Don’t Matter” – Act II
CP: Crowley, “Survey Says…”
SL: Johnson, *No Place for Amateurs* (67)
CP: Everline, “Notes of an Opposition Researcher”
Ansolabehere and Iyengar, *Going Negative*
Freedmen, “Thirty-Second Democracy”

podcast: *DecodeDC* and *99% Invisible*, “The Political Stage”
CP: Leibovich, “Memo to Self: Do Not Run for Office”

IV. Tensions

20. Black, White, and (Way More Than Fifty) Shades of Gray  (April 25)
   Const: 13th-15th Amendments
   SL: West, *Race Matters* (5)
   CP: Williams, “Talking About Not Talking About Race”
   Coates, “Fear of a Black President”
   Cobb, “Barack X”
   Chait, “The Color of His Presidency”
   Klein, “Republicans and Democrats Are More Divided on Race Today Than in 1985”
   Davis, “Obama’s Twitter Debut, @POTUS, Attracts Hate-Filled Posts”
   Senior, “The Paradox of the First Black President”
   Dyson, “Whose President Was He?”
   Hochschild, Weaver, and Burch, “Destabilizing the American Racial Order”
   Bouie, “Why I Am Optimistic About the Future of Race Relations in America”
   Sack and Thee-Brenan, “Poll Finds Most in U.S. Hold Dim View of Race Relations”

21. Cents and Sensibility  (April 27)
   Const: Preamble
   podcast: *This American Life*, “Take the Money and Run for Office”
   Israel, “Steve Israel: Confessions of a Congressman”
   Drutman, “How Corporate Lobbyists Conquered American Democracy”
   video: “Wealth Inequality in America”
   CP: Scheiber, “2016 Hopefuls and Wealthy Are阿拉igned on Wealth”
   Bartels, “The New Gilded Age” from *Unequal Democracy*

22. Under Siege and Supervision  (May 2)*
   Const: 1st-10th Amendments
   podcast: *DecodeDC*, “How One Bill Passed In the Aftermath of 9/11 is Still Shaping U.S. Modern Warfare”
   SL: Glendon, *Rights Talk* (55)

* We may have a special guest visiting us that day; if all goes according to plan, we will devote class to discussing American politics with our guest and meet to discuss the listed course material presently on the previous Friday (April 29) instead. I will keep you informed as the date grows closer, but please keep Friday, April 29 open on your schedule in the meantime.
V. Outputs and Outlooks

23. A Big F#*%ing Deal (May 4)
   video: Kaiser Family Foundation, “Health Reform Hits Main Street”
   CP: Cohn, “How They Did It”
       Oberlander, “Long Time Coming”
       Morone, “Big Ideas, Broken Institutions, and the Wrath at the Grass Roots”
       Peterson, “It Was a Different Time”
       Brown, “The Elements of Surprise”
       Hacker, “The Road to Somewhere”
       Kersh, “Health Reform: The Politics of Implementation”
       Jacobs, “America’s Critical Juncture: The Affordable Care Act and Its Reverberations”
       Liptak, “Supreme Court Upholds Health Care Law, 5-4, in Victory for Obama”
       Liptak, “Supreme Court Allows Nationwide Health Subsidies”
       Steinhauer, “House Votes to Send Bill to Repeal Health Law to Obama’s Desk”

24. America the Beautiful (or Hideous, or Weird) (May 9)
   CP: Parker, “Survey: America”
       podcast: BackStory, “City Upon a Hill”
   CP: Kingdon, “Describing the Comparisons” from America the Unusual
       Halstead, “The American Paradox”
       Roberts, “What Americanists Don’t Know About American Politics”
       Graham, “Is the U.S. Ready to Become Scandinavia?”

Conclusion

25. Kids These Days (May 11)
   Const: Article I, Section 2, Clause 2
   Article I, Section 3, Clause 3
   Article II, Section 1, Clause 5
   26th Amendment
   CP: Pew Research Center, “Millennials”
       Thompson, “Study: Millennials Deeply Confused About Their Politics, Finances, and Culture”
       Matthews, “This Poll Proves That Millennials Have Totally Incoherent Political Views”
       Brooks, “The Organization Kid”
       Martin, “The Problem With Youth Activism”
       Seery, excerpts from Too Young To Run?
       Fournier, “The Outsiders”
       Lawless and Fox, “Just Say Run”
Kirby, “Why Students Want to Lower the Voting Age”
Stolberg, “Young, Liberal, and Open to Big Government”
Williams, “Move Over, Millennials, Here Comes Generation Z”