

Power and Politics in America

POL-UA 300

Spring 2020

Professor Christopher Dawes

Course Description

This course is an introduction to American political institutions and behavior. The course is made up of four primary components. First, we will discuss the American Constitution, political culture, civil liberties, and civil rights. Second, we will focus on parties, interest groups, campaigns and elections at the national level. In this section we will devote attention to which citizens participate in politics and how they make political choices. Third, we will cover the institutions of American national governance including the Congress, Presidency, judiciary, and bureaucracy. Finally, we will wrap up the course with discussions of reform of the political system. A theme we will continue to come back to throughout all of these components is the existence and importance of political inequality in American politics.

As part of the course, students will be exposed to analytical and empirical tools that political scientists utilize in the study of politics. In addition, we will compare the United States to other countries around the world to highlight how American politics is similar and different.

Course Logistics

Lecture

Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:30-1:45pm

Global Center for Academic and Spiritual Life (238 Thompson Street)

Room C95

Contact Information

Phone: 212.998.8533

Email: cdawes@nyu.edu

Office Hours

19 West 4th Street, Room 325

Monday, 2:30-4:30pm

Teaching Assistants

Tine Paulsen (tine.paulsen@nyu.edu)
Michael Becker (mb4959@nyu.edu)
Trellace Lawrimore (tml410@nyu.edu)

Required Readings

There is one required text book for the course (available for purchase at the NYU Bookstore):

The Logic of America Politics (Ninth Edition) by Samuel Kernell, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, and Lynn Vavreck [Logic]

I encourage all students to use the website set up for Logic (<https://edge.sagepub.com/kernell9e>). This site is a particularly good resource for review of course materials.

Additional assigned readings will be made available on NYU Classes [Classes].

Course Grading

Midterm Exams (20% each): There will be two in-class written midterm exams comprised of short answer and essay questions. The first exam will be Monday, February 24 (covering the first third of the class) and the second will be held Monday, April 6 (covering the second third of the class).

Research Assignment (15%): A short research exercise is due in lecture on Monday, April 27. The topic will be distributed in class.

Final Exam (30%): The in-class final exam will cover the entire semester with an emphasis on material presented after the second midterm. The exam is currently scheduled for Friday, May 15 from 12-1:50pm.

Recitation Participation (10%): The goal of recitation is to help you better understand the topics presented in lecture. Attendance is required and the schedule of required readings for recitation is included at the end of the syllabus.

Pop Quizzes (5%): Throughout the semester you will be given a brief quiz to answer at the beginning of class. These quizzes will be based on the reading. You must be present to take and receive credit for the quiz and there are no makeups.

Missing Exams

Students missing either of the two midterm exams or the final exam will be assigned a zero unless a justified excuse is provided (illness or family/personal emergency). Travel plans are not an acceptable excuse. If you know that you must miss an exam (and have a justified excuse), please contact your teaching assistant ahead of time in order to schedule a make-up.

Late Assignments

The research assignment is due at the beginning of lecture on Monday, April 27. A penalty of 1/3 a grade (e.g. B+ to B) will be imposed for each day it is late.

Academic Integrity

All of the work you do in this course must be your own and the penalties for academic dishonesty are severe. I will follow university academic policy for any incident of cheating or plagiarism. For details, see <https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html>

Lecture Schedule and Assigned Readings

The best way to prepare for lecture and recitation is to have the readings completed before each lecture.

Introduction and Tools

Course Introduction (Monday 1/27)

Analytical Tools (Wednesday 1/29)

Logic, Chapter 1

The Nationalization of Politics

The Constitution (Monday 2/3)

Logic, Chapter 2

The Articles of Confederation (Logic, Appendix 1)

The Constitution of the United States (Logic, Appendix 3)

Federalist #10 and 51 [Classes]

Federalism (Wednesday 2/5)

Logic, Chapter 3

The Price of Federalism excerpts [Classes]

Devolution Revolution [Classes]

American Political Culture (Monday 2/10)

Logic, Chapter 10 Section “The Content of Public Opinion”

The American Anomaly excerpts [Classes]

Views of a Changing World pages 103 - 117 [Classes]

Trends in American Values: 1987-2012 “Overview” and “Section 1” [Classes]

Civil Liberties & Civil Rights (Wednesday 2/12)

Logic, Chapter 4

Logic, Chapter 5

****President's Day – No Class (Monday 2/17)****

The Public's Influence on National Policy

Public Opinion (Wednesday 2/19)

Logic, Chapter 10

The Democratic Dilemma excerpts [Classes]

****First Midterm (Monday 2/24)****

Who Votes? (Wednesday 2/26)

Logic, Chapter 11 Section “Who Uses the Right to Vote?”

Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America excerpts [Classes]

Who Votes Now? excerpts [Classes]

Spatial Model of Voting / Economic Voting (Monday 3/2)

The Gamble excerpts [Classes]

Identity Crisis excerpts [Classes]

Campaigns (Wednesday 3/4)

Logic, Chapter 11 Section “Election Campaigns”

The Gamble excerpts [Classes]

Identity Crisis excerpts [Classes]

The Message Matters excerpts [Classes]

Party Identification (Monday 3/9)

The American Voter excerpts [Classes]

Partisan Hearts and Partisan Minds excerpts [Classes]

Political Partisanship as a Social Identity [Classes]

Polarization (Wednesday 3/11)

The Polarized Electorate [Classes]

Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America excerpts [Classes]

The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States [Classes]

****Spring Break (Monday 3/16 and Wednesday 3/18)****

Political Parties as Institutions (Monday 3/23)

Logic, Chapter 12

Party Ideologies in America, 1828-1996 excerpts [Classes]

The Role of the Media (Wednesday 3/25)

Logic, Chapter 14

Interest Groups and Lobbying (Monday 3/30)

Logic, Chapter 13

The Logic of Collective Action excerpts [Classes]

Formal Institutions of National Government

Institutional Design of Congress (Wednesday 4/1)

Logic, Chapter 6

Congress: The Electoral Connection excerpts [Classes]

Electoral Incentives and Partisan Conflict in Congress [Classes]

****Second Midterm (Monday 4/6)****

Representation / Legislative Strategy (Wednesday 4/8)

Descriptive and Substantive Representation in Congress [Classes]

Setting the Agenda excerpts [Classes]

The Presidency (Monday 4/13)

Logic, Chapter 7

The Politics Presidents Make excerpts [Classes]

The President and Congress (Wednesday 4/15)

Going Public excerpts [Classes]

Pivotal Politics excerpts [Classes]

The Bureaucracy (Monday 4/20)

Logic, Chapter 8

The Politics of Presidential Appointments excerpts [Classes]

The Judiciary (Wednesday 4/22)

Logic, Chapter 9

The Real World of Constitutional Rights [Classes]

Gay Rights [Classes]

Impose Your Friendly Hand [Classes]

Political Inequality, Reform, and Wrap Up

Political Inequality (Monday 4/27)

Unequal Democracy excerpts [Classes]

Affluence & Influence excerpts [Classes]

Winner-Take-All Politics excerpts [Classes]

Prospects for Reform (Wednesday 4/29)

Logic, Chapter 15

The Politics of Reforming Social Security [Classes]

Biology and Politics? (Monday 5/4)

Predisposed excerpts [Classes]

Guest Lecture (Wednesday 5/6)

Wrap Up and Review for Final Exam (Monday 5/11)

*****Final Exam (Friday 5/15, 12-1:50pm)*****