

**Power and Politics in America**  
**POL-UA 0300**  
**Spring 2019**  
Professor Sanford Clark Gordon

**I. Introduction**

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This course provides an introduction to national political institutions and behavior in the United States, and introduces students to a variety of analytical concepts and approaches useful for the study of domestic politics. In the first part of the course, we discuss issues foundational to the study of U.S. politics, through an in-depth examination of the political antecedents and political consequences of the 1787 Constitution. Next, we consider political participation and mass behavior: how private individuals and groups seek to influence public policy; the nature of American political culture; the formation of public attitudes; and the electoral connection between politicians and citizens. Finally, we examine the formal and informal institutions of governance in the United States and their implications for the creation of public policy.

The goal of this course is to provide a conceptual framework in which to *understand*, and not merely *describe*, U.S. politics. With this in mind, we will delve into such concepts such as public goods and collective action; preference aggregation and the median voter theorem; delegation, representation, and accountability; agenda control; and inter-branch bargaining. A second goal of the course is to characterize the extent to which the political system of the United States is or isn't *dysfunctional*. What systematic criteria, if any, can we use to evaluate the functioning of a political system? What are the sources of dysfunction, and can they be remedied?

**II. Contact and Meeting Information**

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Professor

Sanford Clark Gordon  
19 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street, Room 311  
Office Hours: Monday 2-4pm, or by appointment  
Phone: (212) 998-3708  
E-mail: [sanford.gordon@nyu.edu](mailto:sanford.gordon@nyu.edu)

Assistants in Instruction

Michael Becker [mb4959@nyu.edu](mailto:mb4959@nyu.edu)  
Taylor Mattia [trm354@nyu.edu](mailto:trm354@nyu.edu)  
Tine Paulsen [tnp216@nyu.edu](mailto:tnp216@nyu.edu)  
Christopher Schwarz [cs4770@nyu.edu](mailto:cs4770@nyu.edu)

Lectures

Mondays and Wednesdays from 12:30-1:45pm, GCASL C95

**III. Required Readings**

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The following textbook is available for purchase at the University bookstore:

- Theodore Lowi, Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere, *American Government: Power and Purpose*, 15<sup>th</sup> edition (“LGSA”)

Additional readings can be found on NYU Classes (CL) or online (ON).

#### **IV. Student Responsibilities and Course Grading**

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##### Formal Course Requirements

*Recitation participation:* 15%

Recitations will cover topics discussed in class and in the readings. You are expected to have completed *all* of the assigned readings up to and including those assigned for a particular recitation, and to attend *all* recitations.

*Midterm examination* 25%

The midterm examination will be held in class on **Wednesday, March 13**, and will cover the first half of the course.

*Research Assignment:* 15%

A brief research exercise is due by the beginning of lecture on **Monday, April 22**. The topic will be distributed in class.

*Final examination* 35%

Unless otherwise noted in class, the final examination will be held on **Friday, May 17**, from 12:00-1:50pm. Roughly two-thirds of the exam will cover material not covered on the first exam. The remaining third will review those earlier topics. *Please be sure to note the date of the final exam when making travel arrangements.*

*Unannounced in-class quizzes* 10%

These will be administered periodically at the beginning of the lecture period. You must be present to take the quiz and receive credit. **We will drop your lowest quiz score.**

#### **V. A Bunch of Policies**

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##### Laptops and Tablets in Class

There is now strong [evidence](#) that students who use laptops or tablets to take notes in class learn less and get worse grades. These devices can also be a serious distraction to *other students*. Accordingly, I *strongly encourage you* to take notes with pen and paper. If you feel you must use a laptop or a tablet to take notes, please do not sit in the first eight rows of the lecture hall.

##### Missed Exams and Late Papers

*Exams:* Exceptions in emergency situations are inevitable, but in general, students missing an exam will receive a grade of zero. If you must miss an exam, please contact your teaching assistant *before* the scheduled test time, and if the excuse is justified (such as in cases of documented illness or family/personal emergencies), we will schedule a make-up.

*Research assignment:* In general, students will be penalized 1/3 of a grade (e.g., from a B+ to a B) per day late. If you know you will be late, it is in your best interest to contact your teaching assistant *prior to* the deadline, since the penalty may be relaxed in extenuating circumstances.

*Unannounced quizzes:* Make-ups are not permitted.

##### Grading-Related Grievances

Students who feel that an error has been made in the grading of one of their assignments should first consult their teaching assistants. If the issue is not resolved, a student may submit a brief, one paragraph description of the grievance to the professor. Please keep in mind that any formal

re-grading will be conducted *de novo* (i.e. without reference to the original grade), and could potentially result in a loss of points.

### Academic Integrity

All of the work you do in this course is expected to be your own. *Absolutely no cheating or plagiarism* (using someone else's words or ideas without proper attribution) *will be tolerated*. All ideas not your own must be properly cited. Any cases of cheating or plagiarism will be handled according to university policy. For more information on university policy, see [here](#).

### Religious Observance and Class Attendance

NYU is a nonsectarian institution and permits members of any religious group to absent themselves from classes without penalty when required for compliance with their religious obligations. We have taken pains not to schedule assignment deadlines or exams on major religious holidays. But please don't hesitate to bring your need for an accommodation to the attention of your teaching assistant or me.

### Special Accommodations

New York University is committed to providing equal educational opportunity and participation for students with disabilities. It is the University's policy that no qualified student with a disability be excluded from participating in any University program or activity, denied the benefits of any University program or activity, or otherwise subjected to discrimination with regard to any University program or activity. Students requesting accommodations must document their disability with the [Moses Center for Students with Disabilities](#).

## **VI. Weekly Schedule**

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### **Part A. Foundations: Analytical and Constitutional**

#### **Week 1. Introduction**

Monday, January 28

*Introduction and Orientation*

- No assigned readings

Wednesday, January 30

*Some Fundamental Political Dilemmas*

- LGSA, pp. 2-23
- Bueno de Mesquita, Ethan. 2016. "The Role of Models." In *Political Economy for Public Policy*, pp. 5-7 (CL)

Recitations, 1/28-2/1

There will be no recitations in the first week of class

#### **Week 2. Constitutionalism and Public Authority: Preliminaries**

Monday, February 4

*Constitutional Governance: Practical and Philosophical Foundations*

- John Adams, "Thoughts on Government," April 1776 (CL)

- James Madison, “Vices of the Political System of the United States,” April 1787 (CL)
- The Articles of Confederation and the original U.S. Constitution (not including the Bill of Rights), in the Appendix of LGSA
- For a basic civics refresher if you need it, skim LGSA, pp. 30-57

### Wednesday, February 6

#### *The Compound Republic*

- LGSA, pp. 72-93
- *The Federalist*, Nos. 10 (read twice), 15, 39, and 46 (ON)
- Brutus (Robert Yates?), “To the Citizens of the State of New-York” (CL)

### Recitations, February 4-8

#### *Getting Comfortable with Analytical Models of Politics*

- No additional readings

## **Week 3. Constitutionalism, Governance, and Public Authority: Conflicts & Tradeoffs**

### Monday, February 11

#### *Self-Enforcing Constitutionalism: Shared Norms or Countervailing Forces?*

- LGSA, pp. 93-103
- *The Federalist*, Nos. 48, 49, and 51 (read No. 51 twice) (ON)
- Selection from Azari, Julia R., and Jennifer K. Smith. 2012. “Unwritten Rules: Informal Institutions in Established Democracies.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 10: 43-49 (CL)

### Wednesday, February 13

#### *Evaluating the Constitution: A Preliminary Assessment*

- Address and Reasons of Dissent of the Minority of the Convention of Pennsylvania to their Constituents (CL)
- Dahl, Robert. 2002. *How Democratic is the American Constitution*, ch. 2 (CL)

### Recitations, February 11-15

#### *Where should Sovereignty Lie? Federalism and Drug Policy*

- Lopez, German. January 5, 2018 “[The Trump Administration’s New War on Marijuana, Explained.](#)” *vox.com* (ON)
- Waldrep, Jordan. November 13, 2018. “[What Replacing Jeff Sessions as AG Means for Marijuana Legalization.](#)” *Forbes* (ON)

## **Part B. Political Behavior**

## **Week 4. Political Culture**

### Monday, February 18

#### *President’s Day: No Class*

### Wednesday, February 20

#### *Political Culture and Social Capital*

- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, selections (CL)

- Doherty, Carroll, Jocelyn Kiley, and Bridget Johnston. 2017. "The Partisan Divide on Political Values Grows Even Wider." Pew Research Center Report, pp. 1-5 (CL)

Recitations, February 18-22

*Is the Fabric of American Political Culture Fraying?*

- Fiorina, Morris P. "The Political Parties have Sorted" (CL)
- Kramer, Katherine. 2016. *The Politics of Resentment*, pp. 15-34 (CL)

**Week 5. Mass Attitudes and Beliefs**

Monday, February 25

*Attitude Formation and the Mass Public*

- LGSA, pp. 384-411

Wednesday, February 27

*Citizen (In)Competence*

- LGSA, pp. 411-430
- Achen, Christopher, and Larry Bartels. 2016. *Democracy for Realists*, pp. 36-40 (CL)

Recitations, February 25-March 1

*Epistocracy, Idiocracy, or Neither?*

- Brennan, Jason. September 6, 2016. "[Against Democracy.](#)" *National Interest* (ON)
- Müller, Jan-Werner. September 21, 2017. "[Blaming the People: Is Democracy Really the Problem?](#)" *The Nation* (ON)

**Week 6. Mass Behavior: Voting and Campaigns**

Monday, March 4

*Mass Participation*

- LGSA, pp. 442-452, 464-469, 512-526

Wednesday, March 6

*Campaigns and Elections: Mobilizing or Persuading?*

- LGSA, pp. 477-485
- Vavreck, Lynn. 2009. *The Message Matters*, ch. 2. (CL)

Recitations, March 4-8

*Should We Restrict Money in Elections?*

- Biersack, Bob. February 7, 2018. "[8 Years Later: How Citizens United Changed Campaign Finance.](#)" *opensecrets.org* (ON)
- Castleton, Scott. May 7, 2018. "[It's Time for Liberals to Get Over Citizens United.](#)" *vox.com* (ON)

**Week 7. The Media**

Monday, March 11

*The Media in American Politics*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This material will *not* appear on the March 13 midterm. Please get around to the readings after the midterm!

- LGSA, ch. 14

Wednesday, March 13

*Midterm Examination*

Recitations, March 11-15

\*\*In lieu of regular recitations we will hold at least one review session on Monday or Tuesday\*\*

**Week 8. SPRING BREAK!**

### **Part C. The Institutions of Governance**

**Week 9. Electoral Competition and the Nature of Representation**

Monday, March 25

*The Structure of Party Competition*

- LGSA, pp. 470-473, 500-512, 527-532, and skim from 532 to end of chapter

Wednesday, March 27

*On the Nature of Representation*

- *The Federalist*, Nos. 62 and 63 (ON)
- LGSA, pp. 188-205

Recitations, March 25-29

*Does Geographic Representation Create Democratic Distortions?*

- MacGillis, Alec. October 22, 2016. “[Go Midwest, Young Hipster.](#)” *New York Times* (ON)
- Lapowsky, Issie. February 20, 2018. “[The Geeks Who Put a Stop to Pennsylvania’s Partisan Gerrymandering.](#)” *Wired* (ON)

**Week 10. The First Branch?**

Monday, April 1

*Legislative Preferences and Legislative Strategy*

- Barber, Michael J., and Nolan McCarty. 2015. “Causes and Consequences of Polarization.” In Mansbridge, Jane, and Cathie Jo Martin, eds., *Political Negotiation: A Handbook*, pp. 15-35 (CL)
- Selections from David Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (CL)

Wednesday, April 3

*Congressional Power and Power in Congress*

- LGSA, pp. 205-230
- Barber, Michael J., and Nolan McCarty. 2015. “Causes and Consequences of Polarization.” pp. 35-52 (CL)

Recitations, April 1-5

*Spatial Models of Legislative Behavior*

- No additional readings

## **Week 11. Legislative Dysfunction and Interbranch Bargaining**

Monday, April 8

*Distortions in Legislative Incentives*

- Lee, Frances. 2016. *Insecure Majorities*, selections from chs. 2 and 3 (CL)

Wednesday, April 10

*Pivots, Standoffs, and the Politics of Blame*

- Keith Krehbiel, *Pivotal Politics: A Theory of U.S. Lawmaking*, 20-39 (CL)

Recitations, April 8-12<sup>2</sup>

*Budgetary Chicken: The Game and the Blame*

- Binder, Sarah. January 26, 2019. “[Why the Shutdown Ended – and What to Watch for Now.](#)” *Washington Post: Monkey Cage Blog* (ON)

## **Week 12. The Presidency**

Monday, April 15

*The Sources of Executive Authority*

- LGSA, pp. 277-292
- Neustadt, Richard. 1960. *Presidential Power*, pp. 29-49 (CL)

Wednesday, April 17

*The Institutional Presidency*

- LGSA, pp. 248-277

Recitations, April 15-19

*Is Donald Trump a Powerful President?*

- Glassman, Matt. December 27, 2017. “[Donald Trump is a Dangerously Weak President.](#)” *vox.com*; and April 25, 2018. “[How Congressional Republicans Have Neutered the Trump Agenda.](#)” *National Review* (ON)

## **WEEK 13. The Bureaucracy and Private Influence in Public Policy**

Monday, April 22

*The Bureaucratic State*

- LGSA, pp. 307-334
- Wilson, James Q. 1989. *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*, pp. 154-171 (CL)

Wednesday, April 24

*The Mechanisms of Private Influence*

- LGSA, pp. 563-592
- Carpenter, Daniel P. 2013. “Detecting and Measuring Capture.” In Carpenter, Daniel P., and David Moss, eds., *Preventing Regulatory Capture* (CL)

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<sup>2</sup> I’m gonna reserve the right to update the readings for this week’s recitation. Honestly, who the heck knows what will be going on by then.

Recitations, April 22-26

*Political Influence in the Regulatory State*

- Dlouhy, Jennifer A. December 26, 2018. “[Trump’s EPA to Maintain Obama-Era Coal Plant Rules, with a Twist.](#)” *Bloomberg News* (ON)
- Sanger-Katz, Margot. January 22, 2019. “[For Trump Administration, It Has Been Hard to Follow the Rule on Rules.](#)” *New York Times* (ON)

**Week 14. The Judiciary and the Regulation of State-Citizen Relations**

Monday, April 29

*The Least Dangerous Branch?*

- LGSA, pp. 351-382 (for factual background skim 336-351)
- *The Federalist*, No. 78 (ON)
- *Marbury v. Madison* (CL)

Wednesday, May 1

*The Citizen and the State*

- LGSA, ch. 4

Recitations, April 29-May 3

*What Should Judges Do?*

- Breyer, Stephen. 2006. *Active Liberty*, selections (CL)
- Scalia, Antonin. 1997. *A Matter of Interpretation*, selections (CL)
- Read *Congressional Quarterly* synopses of [District of Columbia v. Heller](#) (2008), [Citizens United v. FEC](#) (2010), and [Obergefell v. Hodges](#) (2015) (ON)

**Week 15. Inequalities**

Monday, May 6

*Inequalities I*

- LGSA, ch. 5

Wednesday, May 8

*Inequalities II*

- Hacker, Jacob S., and Paul Pierson. 2010. *Winner-Take-All Politics*, selections (CL)

Recitations, May 6-10

*Inequality and Political Participation*

- Weaver, Vesla M., and Amy E. Lerman. 2010. “Political Consequences of the Carceral State.” *American Political Science Review* 104: 817-833 (CL)

**Week 16. Wrapping Up**

Monday, May 13

*Review and Conclusion*

Friday, May 17, from 12:00-1:50pm

*Final Examination*