American Political Institutions
Spring 2009

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Course Description:
This course should serve as an advanced examination of the major institutions of American politics. After completing the course, you should have: a) a detailed understanding of how the different institutions of government function b) what the strengths and weaknesses of these different institutions are, and c) what questions about these institutions most interest the scholars who study them.

The course is broken into four sections. The first section examines the ideas behind the institutional structure of the government embodied in the U.S. Constitution and different perspectives on how we can best understand institutions. In the second part of the course we examine linking institutions- that is, institutions that link the public to the formal governmental policy-making institutions. The third section examines the major formal policy-making institutions of the U.S. government. Lastly, we will spend two weeks trying to tie all of this material together by considering the role of these institutions in domestic and foreign policy-making. Since it is a graduate course/upper division course there will be quite a bit of reading and writing required.

Required Readings:
All readings listed in the course outline below are available via the Pius library website e-journal portal unless otherwise noted in the syllabus. In addition, you should frequently read a major national newspaper in order to keep up with current political events that are of relevance to the week’s material, which we will discuss for a few minutes at the beginning of each class.

Assignments:
Weekly Papers (20%):
Each week I will provide a question on the readings that will require a one-page, typed single-spaced response. You will be graded on an A-F scale and your 10 highest grades will be counted to determine your overall weekly paper grade. The purpose of only counting the 10 highest is to allow you some practice papers to get the hang of these assignments without them negatively affecting your course grade.

Long Paper (20%)
You will choose a topic and write about it in one of the following types of papers: 1) a review of the existing literature on this topic (i.e. literature review) 2) a research design/proposal or, 3) a research paper that requires the collection of data, examination of hypotheses, etc. The resulting paper should be approximately 15-20 pages in length. You should consult with me regarding a potential topic as soon as possible.

Midterm (15%) and Take Home Final Exam (25%)
You will be given one or a few broad essay questions that will require you to write on the major topics, readings and ideas that we have covered throughout the semester.

Class Participation (20%)
Seminars rely on student participation and input. All students should come to class ready and willing to discuss the readings and to participate in discussions that develop. You will be evaluated on both the frequency and the quality of participation. Attendance is mandatory, and since we only meet once a week absences should be avoided as they will have a serious negative effect on your final grade.
Course Outline – In some weeks I may add or remove readings. Updates to the syllabus will be provided verbally in class and/or via e-mail.

PART I: The American System of Government
Week 1 (1/12): Introduction to the Course and Review of American Institutions

1/19 – MLK Day, No Class

Week 2 (1/26): Analyzing Political Institutions
Hall, Peter A. and Rosemary C.R. Taylor. “Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms.” (I will distribute)
Publius. 1787 *Federalist Papers* (can be found at http://lcweb2.loc.gov/const/fed/fedpapers.html)
Representation/Prevention of Tyranny: Numbers 10-11.
Checks and Balances, Separation of Powers: Numbers 47-51.
Brutus. 1787 or 1788. Number 1 (http://www.constitution.org/afp/brutus01.htm)
Centinel. 1788. Number 1 (http://www.constitution.org/afp/centin01.htm)

Week 3(2/2): The United States Institutional Structure
The United States Constitution.

PART II-Linking Institutions
Week 4(2/9): Political Parties: Organization and Electoral Coalitions

Week 5(2/16): Political Parties: Governing
Key, V.O. 1949. *Southern Politics* (excerpts)
Theriault, Sean M. 2005. “Party Polarization in Congress.” (I will distribute via e-mail).
Week 6(2/23): Organized Interests: Formation and Representation

Week 7(3/2): Organized Interests and Policy-making

Midterm exam in Second Half of Class
3/9 – No Class, Spring Break

PART III. Institutions

Week 8(3/16): Congress as Representative Institution
Readings:

Week 9(3/23): Congress as Law-making Body

Week 10(3/30): Theories of the Presidency
Skowronek, Stephen A. *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton*. (excerpts)

Week 11(4/6): The Development of the Presidency and George W. Bush
The Historical Record.” Political Science Quarterly 123(2):201-28.


Week 12(4/13): The Bureaucracy Class is held from 5-6:30


Week 13 (4/20): The Supreme Court


Week 14(4/27): Political Institutions and Domestic Policy

Mackuen, Michael B., Robert S. Erikson and James A. Stimson. 1995 “Dynamic Representation.” The American Political Science Review


Week 15(5/4): Political Institutions and Foreign Policy


Week 16 (5/11): Final Exam Due