Department of Political Science

POLS 212: American Political Parties and Politics

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Office Hours—
Mondays from 2:10pm to 3:30pm,
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Course Description

This course is dedicated to the intensive analysis of American political parties. This course examines a mix of theoretical and practical issues including: the development of political parties; alignment and realignment; the two-party system and their ideological evolution; “minor” parties; party behavior in legislatures and the bureaucracy; parties and elections; and the influence of money on party behavior.

Course Goals

1. Gain a better understanding of key concepts and literature on American political parties and politics.

2. Develop ability to construct well organized, clearly written, informatively presented, and persuasive arguments on issues related to American political parties and politics.

3. Improve ability to engage in oral debate and dialogue on issues and ideas concerning American political parties and politics.

Course Objectives

1. Students will be better, more confident writers and thinkers.

2. Students will analyze critical concepts in a variety of settings.

3. Students will improve their ability to analyze historical and contemporary political events and claims.
Instructional Methods

This course is part lecture, part seminar. A premium is placed on high quality writing and class participation. You are expected to ask and answer questions and offer informed analysis in class. Please be civil to and respectful of your colleagues when they express opinions with which you disagree. Make sure that your commentary is relevant to the discussion and literature.

Textbooks

Required


Please note that numerous journal articles are also included in the required reading. They are accessible online from a variety of databases. I have found JSTOR to be the best source.

Recommended


Grading

Your final grade will reflect your performance in the following areas:

1. Three literature reviews, which will require written assessments of assigned and unassigned readings. See final page of this syllabus for details (75% of your final grade).
2. Informed discussion of assigned reading (15%).
3. Article Presentations (10%).

Each student is expected to complete all of the assigned readings for each class session, and be prepared to summarize, offer assessments, or both, of the literature as well as discuss the comments of fellow classmates. Instructions for research paper and literature reviews will be provided.

Please Note: For this course, an “A” grade is reserved for sustained outstanding performance in all aspects of the course – writing assignments, class participation, and presentations. A “B” grade is assigned to those who demonstrate mastery of the course readings and above average performance in all aspects of the course. The grade of “C” denotes average/marginal performance. “D” and “F” grades are unacceptable.

A few words on class participation: Class participation encompasses questions and comments that demonstrate knowledge of – though not necessarily agreement with – assigned course readings or other information that sheds light on a topic relevant to the course. Expert scholars must be able to speak effectively in small groups and to make presentations of their work. The only way to learn these skills is to practice, so students are expected to contribute to discussions and will be required to present summaries of selected readings. I place a heavy emphasis on class participation. Please note that it is likely that a student who earned an “A” on the writing assignments will end up with a final grade of “B” if he or she does not regularly participate in class discussions.

Class attendance is considered in student assessments. While it is understandable you will occasionally conflict with class times, missing more than two class sessions will make it virtually impossible to earn a grade of “A” for the course. Missing more than three sessions make a grade of “C” or lower likely.

Policies

Laptop Computers: Permissible, though I prefer that you take notes by hand.

Mobile Phones: Please respect your colleagues and instructor by turning off your phone before entering the classroom.

Extra Credit: No extra credit assignments will be given in this course.

Late Submission of Research Papers: All papers should be submitted on time. Any paper
submitted after the deadline will be penalized one full letter grade (no exceptions).

**Incomplete Grades:** No incomplete grades will be assigned at the end of this semester.

**Academic Accommodation for a Disability:** Howard University is committed to providing an educational environment that is accessible to all students. In accordance with this commitment, students in need of accommodations due to a disability should contact the Office of the Dean for Special Student Services for verification and determination of reasonable accommodations as soon as possible after admission to the University, or at the beginning of each academic semester. Contact the Office for Special Student Services, Howard Center Suite 725, 2225 Georgia Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20059, at 202-238-2420 for more information. Please notify me within the first two weeks of class if you require such accommodation.

**Howard University Academic Code of Student Conduct**

(Revised 2010)
Approved by the Board of Trustees, June 29, 2010

Howard University is a community of scholars composed of faculty and students both of whom must hold the pursuit of learning and search for truth in the highest regard. Such regard requires adherence to the goal of unquestionable integrity and honesty in the discharge of teaching and learning responsibilities. Such regard allows no place for academic dishonesty. To better assure the realization of this goal any student enrolled for study at the University may be disciplined for the academic infractions defined below.

**Definitions of Academic Infractions**

- **Academic Cheating**—any intentional act(s) of dishonesty in the fulfillment of academic course or program requirements. This offense shall include (but is not limited to) utilization of the assistance of any additional individual(s), organization, document, or other aid not specifically and expressly authorized by the instructor or department involved. (Note: This infraction assumes that with the exception of authorized group assignment or group take-home assignments, all course or program assignments shall be completed by an individual student only without any consultation or collaboration with any other individual, organization, or aid.)

- **Plagiarism**—to take and pass off intentionally as one’s own the ideas, writings, etc. of another without attribution (without acknowledging the author).

- **Copy Infringement**—Copy infringement occurs when a copyrighted work is reproduced, distributed, performed, publicly displayed, or made into a derivative work without the permission of the copyright owner.
Administration of the Code

This Academic Code of Student Conduct applies in all schools and colleges. In professional schools and colleges that have adopted honor codes, the honor code may supersede this Code. The authority and responsibility for the administration of this Academic Code of Conduct and imposition of any discipline upon any particular student shall vest in the Dean and faculty of the School or College in which the student is enrolled but may be delegated by the faculty to the Dean of the School or College in which the student is enrolled. The Dean shall be assisted in this responsibility by any faculty members and administrative officers in the School or College the Dean shall consider appropriate. Any student accused of an infraction of this Code shall have a right to a limited hearing, as described herein, of the charges against him before a committee of faculty members, at least three in number, none of whom shall be the accuser or witness to the alleged infraction. The committee may be either a standing of the School or College, whose responsibilities are considered appropriate by the Dean to conduct a hearing under this code, or a committee appointed by the Dean for the special purpose of conducting only a particular hearing or all such hearings that may arise during an annual period. The hearing committee shall be chaired by a member designated by the Dean and the chairperson shall have the right to vote in cases of a tie vote.

Procedure

Any faculty member who has knowledge of an infraction of this Code shall assemble all supporting evidence and identify any additional witnesses to the infraction and make this information known to the Dean of the School or College in which the student is enrolled at least ten (10) business days after the date of the infraction.

Upon being notified of an alleged infraction of this Code, the Dean shall, as soon as possible, consider the weight of the assembled evidence and, if the Dean considers the evidence sufficient to warrant further action the dean shall notify the alleged offender of the charge(s) against him/her together with a designation of a hearing time and place where the accused may respond to the charge(s). The hearing date shall be no later than ten (10) business days after notification to the accused of the charge(s) against him/her. The Dean shall similarly notify the hearing committee members of the time and place of the hearing together with identification of the accuser and accused.

The “limited hearing” authorized by this Code is not an adversarial proceeding. Constitutional principles of “due process” are not applicable to these proceeding. The faculty member concerned shall present the case for the University. Both shall be allowed to present witnesses and evidence in support of their positions concerning the charge(s). However, no legal counsel for either side shall be allowed. The members of the hearing committee may question the accused and the accuser and examine all evidence presented. The standard of proof for the proceedings under this Code shall be the standard of “substantial evidence.” The proceedings may be tape recorded but will not be transcribed.

After the hearing of the charge(s) against the accused, the hearing committee shall, in closed session,
vote by secret ballot to sustain or reject the charge(s). If the charges are sustained, the committee shall transmit the results and recommendation of the hearing committee to the Dean five (5) business days after the hearing.

Upon receipt of the results and recommendations of the hearing committee, the Dean may sustain the recommendation of the Committee concerning the penalty or may reduce or increase the severity of the penalty, and shall, within five (5) business days, notify the student of the Dean’s determination. The student may appeal directly to the Provost and Chief Academic Officer or Senior Vice President for Health Sciences (Health Science students) for reconsideration of any disciplinary penalty. The student shall have five (5) business days to make such appeal from date of receipt of notification.

After hearing any appeal from a student, the Provost and Chief Academic Officer or Senior Vice President for Health Sciences shall make a decision that shall be communicated to the student within ten (10) business days. This decision shall be final.

**Penalties**

The minimum disciplinary penalty imposed upon a student found to have committed an infraction(s) of this Code shall be no credit for the course assignment or examination in which the infraction(s) occurred; however, a more severe penalty, such as failure in the course involved or suspension from the University, may be imposed depending upon the nature and extent of the infraction(s).

**Additional Thoughts on Plagiarism**

The profession of scholarship and the intellectual life of a university as well as the field of political science inquiry depend fundamentally on a foundation of trust. Thus any act of plagiarism strikes at the heart of the meaning of the university and the purpose of the Department of Political Science. It constitutes a serious breach of professional ethics and it is unacceptable.

Plagiarism is the use of another’s words or ideas presented as one’s own. It includes, among other things, the use of specific words, ideas, or frameworks that are the product of another’s work. Honesty and thoroughness in citing sources is essential to professional accountability and personal responsibility. Appropriate citation is necessary so that arguments, evidence, and claims can be critically examined.

Plagiarism is wrong because of the injustice it does to the person whose ideas are stolen. But it is also wrong because it constitutes lying to one’s professional colleagues. From a prudential perspective, it is shortsighted and self-defeating, and it can ruin a professional career.
The following poem offers some food for thought about the importance of politics. It is called “Why You Should Be Involved in Politics”.

Politics and politicians decide
the wars you fight
the interest you pay
the speed you drive
the taxes you pay

Politics and politicians control
the purity of your food
the schooling of your children
the value of your money
the weights and measures you use
the floor under your wages

Politics and politicians use taxpayer money to hand out
subsidies to farmers
subsidies to airlines
subsidies to oil companies
subsidies to magazines and newspapers
subsidies to bankers
subsidies to builders

Politics and politicians protect or destroy
your right to speak freely
your right to worship freely
your right to organize
your right to vote

Politics and politicians control your life

The author of this poem is unknown to me, but his or her words strike at the core of my professional and political interests. There may well be very few things in this world you can do that are not shaped, directly or indirectly, by politics. To sit on the sidelines and not be involved could literally be hazardous to your health.
**Course Outline**

1. **Course Overview (January 15)**

   **Required Reading –**

   *The Federalist*, No. 10.

   **Recommended Reading –**


   **Discussion Questions –**

   - How do Burke, Downs, Aldrich, Chamber, and Key define political parties?  
   - Do we need parties?  
   - Are parties good for democracy?  
   - What are the three interacting parts of an American political party?  
   - What are the responsibilities of political parties?  
   - What environmental forces shape party politics?

2. **Theories on and Development of Political Parties (January 22, 29, and February 5)**

   **Required Reading –**

   Hershey, Chapter 2.


**Recommended Reading –**


**Discussion Questions –**

- Aldrich identifies a number of approaches to the study of American political parties. What are they and how does he describe them?
- What is Aldrich’s theory of political parties?
- What are collective action problems within government?
- In which ways were there unstable majorities in the First Congress?
- What were among the earliest political parties?
- How does Aldrich assess the changing for of political parties?
- What were the issues around which the parties formulated their policy positions?
- How did the Democrats and Republicans come into existence?
- What causes a two-party system?
- How does Maisel describe the development of modern parties?
3. Two-Party Dominance in the U.S. (February 12)

Required Reading –


Recommended Reading –


Discussion Questions–

- Why do the Republicans and Democrats dominate American politics?
- What circumstances would be necessary to challenge their dominance?
- What is Duverger’s Law and how does it impact the American two-party system?

4. “Minor” Parties (February 19)

Required Reading –


**Recommended Reading** –


**Discussion Questions**–

- Why do minor parties remain minor?
- To what extent do the Democrats and Republicans prevent minor party growth?
- What connections can be drawn between distrust in government and support for a third-party candidate?
- Why do third-party candidates do well in some elections and poorly in others?

**5. Party Organization (February 26)**

**Required Reading** –

Hershey, Chapters 3-5.

Maisel, Chapter 3.

**Recommended Reading** –


V.O. Key, Jr., *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups*, (New York: Crowell, 1964)


**Discussion Questions –**

- What were machines and what is your assessment of them as a reflection of party organizational strength?
- What are the key points that Hershey makes regarding state parties?
- What have been the two paths to power taken by the Democrats and Republicans?
- What is the impact of stronger national parties on state party behavior?
- What draws people into party activity?
- What kinds of people become party activists?
- How does Maisel describe national party organizations?

**6. Party Evolution and Realignment (March 5 and 12)**

**Required Reading –**

Aldrich, Chapters 6 and 8.

Hershey, Chapter 7


**Recommended Reading** –


Discussion Questions–

- What are among the most important points to understand regarding the party-in-elections?
- How have the ideological positions of the Republicans and Democrats evolved? Why?
- Why do some parties “go out of business”?
- What are the notable features of the first five party systems?
- What are among the social bases of party coalitions?
- How did the sixth party system emerge?

7. Parties in Government (March 26)

Required Reading –

Aldrich, Chapter 7.

Hershey, Chapters 13-14.

Jean-Phillippe Therien and Alain Noel, “Political Parties and Foreign Aid,” American Political Science Review, V. 94, No. 1, pp. 151-162.


Sean Theriault, “Party Polarization in the U.S. Congress: Member Replacement and Member Adaptation,” Party Politics V. 12, No. 4, pp. 483-503.

Recommended Reading –


**Discussion Questions—**

- How are parties organized in Congress?
- What are among the various theories of legislatures and political parties?
- What impact did the “Gingrich Revolution” have on congressional party behavior?
- How does Hershey measure party influence on legislative voting?
- How do parties influence the bureaucracy?
- How do parties influence the judiciary
8. Parties, Elections, and the Electorate (April 2 and 9)

Required Reading –
Hershey, Chapters 6 and 8-11.
Maisel, Chapters 4-7.

Recommended Reading –


Discussion Questions –

• What are the arguments for and against the notion that campaigns make a difference in voter behavior?
• What shapes an individual’s party identification?
• How has the national electorate’s party identification changed over the years?
• Why does Hershey see independent voters as a “myth”?
• What is Hershey’s analyst of voting rights for African American voters?
• Why is American voter turnout generally low?
• What are the different types of primaries and how do they effect electoral outcomes?
• What is the “invisible primary” and what is its importance?
• What are the key features of party conventions? How have they evolved overtime?
• What are the three ways in which the party in the electorate is analyzed?
• What alternatives to the Electoral College does Maisel identify?
• Which kinds of election laws discourage electoral participation?

9. Money and Parties (April 16 and 23)

Required Reading –

Hershey, Chapter 12.


Recommended Reading –


Discussion Questions–

• What explains the grown in campaign spending?
• From where does the campaign funds come?
• What is the impact of all the spending?
• What attempts have been made to reform campaign finance rules?
• What loopholes still exist?
• What is McCain-Feingold?
American Political Parties and Politics

Literature Review Assignment

What?

You are to prepare a review of important literature on American political parties and politics. The literature must be in book or journal form (no blogs, newspaper, or magazine articles). Each review should explore at least one book and five journal articles. While you are not obligated to do so, I encourage you to consider the citations in the recommended readings section of your syllabus. Items in the required readings section cannot be used for these reviews. While you are free to choose which area you will review each month, please be sure to talk with me as you begin preparing each document. We need to be on the same page regarding what is considered important literature. Each review should not exceed 12 pages.

- The first review will examine the literature on one of the following areas: theories on and the development of American political parties or two-party dominance in the U.S.
- The second review will examine the literature on one of the following areas: “minor” parties; party organization; and party evolution and realignment.
- The third review will examine the literature on one of the following areas: parties in government; parties, elections, and the electorate; and money and politics.

Why?

- To more deeply immerse you the extant literature on American political parties and politics.
- To prepare students for a portion of their comprehensive examinations.
- To give students training on how to prepare the literature review section of the dissertation or master’s thesis.
- To identify possible voids in the literature that present opportunities for your own research and publishing.

When?

- The first review is due not later than 5:00PM on Wednesday, February 12.
- The second review is due not later than 5:00PM on Wednesday, March 19
- The third review is due not later than 5:00PM on Wednesday, April 23