

The Politician

Pol 550S, Fall 2012

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Class: T Th 3:30-4:45, Dooly Memorial 208
Office Hours: Wednesday & Friday 11:15-12:15, & by appointment

Description

This course will consider the role of the professional politician in the American political system. Political leadership is vital to the effective functioning of representative democracy, yet politicians operate within a constrained environment that limits opportunities for political leadership. In this course, we will examine the institutional context and psychological aspects of political candidate emergence, and consider the environment in which office holders operate. The course will devote particular attention to when and why politicians exhibit political leadership and when and why efforts toward leadership are encumbered by environmental constraints.

Course Materials

Lawless, Jennifer L. 2012. *Becoming a Candidate: Political Ambition and the Decision to Run for Office*. Cambridge University Press.

Edwards, George C. 2009. *The Strategic President: Persuasion and Opportunity in Presidential Leadership*. Princeton University Press.

All other the required reading will be made available on the Blackboard page for this class.

Grading

The course grade will be determined by the following:

- **Class Participation and Engagement** (25 percent)
 - Arrive to class ready to discuss the assigned reading.
 - Contribute to each class meeting. I'm looking for stable participation over the semester, so participating a lot one week and then not participating the next week is not a good strategy.
 - In the (hopefully unlikely) event that students start coming to class unprepared, I will administer reading quizzes. My expectation is that this will be unnecessary but I will resort to quizzes if circumstances warrant.
 - Note that you will be evaluated on your participation, not your attendance.
- **Two Class presentations** (10 percent)
- **Midterm Exam** (30 percent)
 - Tentatively scheduled for October 11
- **Take-Home Final Essay Exam** (35 percent)

Course Policies

- Students are expected to be courteous and considerate of the instructor and one another. This consideration includes, but is not limited to, not engaging in activities that draw your attention away from the seminar – including holding private conversations, surfing the internet, reading, doing homework, etc.
- Computers may only be used for taking course notes.
- Of course, the standard disclaimers regarding cheating, plagiarizing, and the Student Honor code all apply.

General Reading Questions to Think About in Preparing for Class

- What question the author is trying to answer?
- Why is this question important?
- How does the author answer the question?
 - What data does he/she use?
 - What types of analysis does he/she present? Statistical, case study, historical description, etc.?
- Does the author succeed in answering his/her question? Why or why not?
 - Did the author’s evidence support his/her claims or did his/her claims and conclusions go beyond the evidence?
 - Why do you believe or not believe the findings/conclusions the author reports?
 - * Focus on the author’s own reasoning and evidence – not your own beliefs – in thinking about this question.
- Improvements and extensions
 - If you were unconvinced, what could the author do to make the argument more convincing?
 - * In thinking about this question it is useful to think about how you would answer the question if you faced no constraints – if you could, for example, read minds, had unlimited funds, etc. Then work from that idealized design to think up studies that a researcher could implement in the real world.
 - What new questions or research avenues does the author’s argument motivate?

Reading Assignments

- August 28, 30: Recruitment

Lawless, Jennifer L. 2012. *Becoming a Candidate: Political Ambition and the Decision to Run for Office*. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press.

– “You think I should run for office?” (pp. 135-163)

Masket, Seth. 2004. “A party by other means: The rise of informal party organizations in California.” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.

- selections from the chapter “If we don’t control you, who the hell is?” (pp. 199-215)
- September 4, 6: Political Ambition and Deciding to Run for Office
 - Lawless, Jennifer L. 2012. *Becoming a Candidate: Political Ambition and the Decision to Run for Office*. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press.
 - pp. xvii-xviii
 - “Who would ever run for office” (pp. 1-10)
 - “The decision to run for office” (pp. 14-30)
 - “Biting the bullet: Deciding to run for office” (pp. 164-187)
- September 11, 13: Politicians and the Parties
 - Price, David. 2004. *The congressional experience* (3rd Edition). Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.
 - “Parties and partisanship” (Chapter 8)
 - Smith, Steven S., Jason M. Roberts, and Ryan J. Vander Wielen. 2011. *The American Congress*. 7th ed. Cambridge University Press.
 - “Parties and leaders” (Chapter 5)
- September 18, 20, 25, 27: Latent Opinion and Governance
 - Zaller, J. 2003. Coming to grips with VO Keys concept of latent opinion. In *Electoral Democracy*, pp. 311-334.
 - Berinsky, Adam J. 2009. In *Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq*. University Of Chicago Press.
 - “Partisan structure of war support: Events, elites, and the public” (Chapter 5)
- October 2, 4: Personality, Leadership, and Political Context
 - Ellis, Richard J., and Michael Nelson, eds. 2009. *Debating the Presidency: Conflicting Perspectives on the American Executive*. 2nd ed. CQ Press.
 - “Resolved, a president’s personal attributes are the best predictors of performance in the White House” (a debate between Fred Greenstein and Stephen Skowronek)
 - Additional item TBA
- October 9, 11: Catch-up, Review, and Midterm
 - No new reading for this week
- October 16, 18, 23, 25: Politicians and the Pressure Groups
 - Schattschneider, Elmer E. 1975. *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist’s View of Democracy in America*. Wadsworth Publishing.
 - Selections TBA
 - Heinz, John P. et al. 1997. *The Hollow Core: Private Interests in National Policy Making*. Harvard University Press.
 - Selections TBA
 - Baumgartner, Frank R. et al. 2009. *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why*. University Of Chicago Press.

- Selections TBA
- October 30, November 1: Issue Politics in Congress
 - Sulkin, Tracy. 2005. Issue Politics in Congress. Cambridge University Press.
 - “Electoral challenges and legislative responsiveness” (Chapter 1)
 - Price, David. 2004. The congressional experience (3rd Edition). Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.
 - “Policy Entrepreneurship” (Chapter 6)
- November 6, 8: Policy Leadership by Members of Congress
 - Mayhew, Professor David R. 2002. America’s Congress: Actions in the Public Sphere, James Madison Through Newt Gingrich. Yale University Press.
 - Selections TBA
- November 13, 15, 20: Presidential Leadership
 - Edwards, George C. 2009. The Strategic President: Persuasion and Opportunity in Presidential Leadership. Princeton University Press.
 - Selections TBA
- November 27, 29: Catch-up, Review, and Discussion
 - No new reading for this week.