

**PS 111: Introduction to American Politics
Winter 2007**

Professors:
Vincent Hutchings
Arthur Lupia

Head GSI: Adam Seth Levine

Classroom: Auditorium A, Angell Hall.
Meeting Time: Tuesday & Thursday 9-10.

Overview:

This course introduces students to the central processes and institutions of American politics. It is designed to help you approach American politics with a critical eye and an analytical frame of mind. Such skills are important because politics plays an important role in your lives. As we gather today, governments amass trillions of dollars of debt that you will inherit, prosecutes a war on terrorism that may enhance your safety or diminish your liberties, sets policies that affect the college tuition you pay and designs regulations that affect who you can marry and the kinds of careers that you can pursue. Politics matters to you. You can also matter to it. The University of Michigan was once a hotbed of anti-war radicalism. It could be again. Or it could be something else, say, a hotbed of religious or right-wing radicalism. Or it could be a place, which it really already is, where students with varied interests and opinions can engage in lively debate, community activism, protest behavior, letter-writing campaigns, or get-out-the-vote efforts in state or national elections. Cynics will say that such activities don't change anything, and it would be hard to say they're wrong in any particular case. The correct response is that citizen engagement in politics doesn't necessarily change any policies, but it does increase the probability of desired outcomes. What citizens do and think affect the kind of politics we get. The connections are not always transparent or as simple as many news reports allege. Public opinion and behavior may matter, but their impact is affected through the institutions of government: through elections and referenda, in the calculations of executives and legislators, via the organization of interest groups and parties, through the lobbying of corporations and NGOs, because of the issue attentiveness of policy entrepreneurs and the media. This course will help you to understand those institutions and their interactions and thereby locate yourself in your political world.

To this end, we have selected a textbook with a strong analytical bent. It does not simply describe political processes and institutions for you. It provides the conceptual tools you will need to analyze politics for yourself. The main concepts are laid out in the first chapter. It is important that you comprehend them clearly and quickly, for they will recur in subsequent chapters, lectures, and discussions in section. Do *not* assume that the book is a substitute for the lectures and sections, or vice versa. In lectures and sections we will often invoke but not always redefine key concepts or arguments presented in the text. Often we will use the text as the point of departure for issues or ideas not covered, or not covered well, in the text. If something is not clear during lecture, of course, you are welcome to ask

questions and we will do our best to answer them, given time available, or invite you to meet outside of class, either with one of us or your GSI.

Your participation in discussion section is critical to the educational value of this course. Often in lecture we will have to paint political phenomena with a broad brush or deploy abstract terms. In section, you have the opportunity to clarify what you don't understand, to make the abstract more concrete, and to engage your GSI and your classmates around key issues and ideas. Do not miss these opportunities.

Each professor will take a turn conducting lectures that should help you learn the key concepts and findings from the study of American politics. While there will be substantial overlap in the themes and theoretical concepts they discuss, they will also bring different perspectives to the topics. The professors will assign additional readings to supplement the textbook chapters listed below. Those supplemental readings will be available online; you will not be required to purchase additional books or a coursepack.

Evaluation:

Midterm and Final Exams (two): 25% each (50% total)
Midterm and Final Essays (two): 15% each (30% total)
Section Grade: 20%

Textbook for Purchase:

Theodore Lowi, Benjamin Ginsberg, and Kenneth Shepsle, *American Government: Power and Purpose*, 8th or 9th Edition

Core Lecture and Reading Schedule

(Note: Additional readings will be assigned by each professor)

- January 4: Professor Lupia
Introduction to Course & Critical Concepts
Lowi, Ginsberg, & Shepsle, Ch. 1
- January 9/11: Professor Lupia
The Constitution: The Basic Design of Government
Lowi, Ginsberg, & Shepsle, Ch. 2,
- January 16/18: Professor Lupia
Federalism: Its Design and Implications
Lowi, Ginsberg, & Shepsle, Chs. 3
- January 24/26: Professor Lupia
The Legislative Branch
Lowi, Ginsberg, & Shepsle, Ch. 5
- January 30/February 1: Professor Lupia
Delegation to the Bureaucracy

Lowi, Ginsberg, & Shepsle, Ch. 7

February 6/8: Professor Lupia
Elections and Participation
Lowi, Ginsberg, & Shepsle, Ch. 10

February 13/15 Professor Lupia
Policy-making
Lowi, Ginsberg, & Shepsle, Ch. 14, 16

February 20: MIDTERM EXAM
MIDTERM ESSAYS DUE

March 6/8: Professor Hutchings
Presidential Power
Lowi, Ginsberg, & Shepsle, Ch. 6

March 13/15: Professor Hutchings
Judiciary and Civil Rights and Liberties
Lowi, Ginsberg, & Shepsle, Chs. 4, 8

March 20/22: Professor Hutchings
Public Opinion
Lowi, Ginsberg, & Shepsle, Ch. 9

March 27/29 Professor Hutchings
Political Parties
Lowi, Ginsberg, & Shepsle, Ch. 11

April 3/5 Professor Hutchings
Interest Groups and Social Movements
Lowi, Ginsberg, & Shepsle, Ch. 12

April 10/12: Professor Hutchings
The Mass Media
Lowi, Ginsberg, & Shepsle, Ch. 13

April 17 Final Exam Review with GSIs
FINAL ESSAYS DUE

April 24 (10:30-12:30) FINAL EXAM (Not cumulative)