Political Institutions and Processes

The purpose of this course is to develop an understanding of the policy-making institutions and processes in the American political system. It is designed as a survey course, covering a wide range of topics in the study of American political institutions. The course requires a considerable amount of required readings as noted below. Getting the most out of each class session requires that you have completed the reading for that session. Do not fall behind as the steady stream of readings will make it difficult for you to catch up. During the course of the semester, I will be available during office hours. I can also be reached by phone at ext. 3952 or by email at fleisher@fordham.edu. If the need arises, do not hesitate to give me a call or send an email. Feel free to stop by my office (674 Faber Hall) during my office hours. If you are not available during the times posted for my office hours then contact me after class or by email to arrange a time that we can meet. Alternatively, you can stop by my office and if I am available I will try to make time to meet with you.

Grades for the course will be based on a paper, a take-home final examination and class participation. The paper and the take-home final examination will each count for 40% of the course grade, with class participation counting for 20%. Your grade on class participation will reflect your contribution to our class discussions as well as your contribution to the panel discussion of which you are a member. All students will be assigned to one of three panels. The number of students assigned to each panel will be limited and decided on a first come first served basis.

At the panel discussion, you will have approximately 15 minutes to make an initial presentation. If you wish, you can use PowerPoint to aid in your discussion. As part of your presentation answer the theme question by laying out the argument and evidence that you believe makes the most persuasive case. After everyone on the panel has presented, we will have time for questions and give-and-take among panel members. For the paper, you are to address the question raised in that panel by constructing an argument complete with supporting evidence in which you take a stand on one side or the other of the controversy. For each of the topics there are books and journal articles that have been written by Political Scientists. The paper is to be based on your assessment of the relevant political science literature on your topic. I expect that you will do a thorough job of incorporating this research into your discussion. A significant part of the paper grade will be based on how thorough you are in addressing the relevant literature. Speak to me if you have difficulty locating relevant literature.

To give you some guidance I anticipate that the average paper will be approximately ten pages, double-spaced. This is not meant to suggest either a minimum or a maximum length. Because the paper requires a considerable amount of additional reading I strongly encourage you to start doing the additional reading relevant to your topic early in the semester. In grading this essay, I will evaluate it for both content and writing style so be sure to proofread the paper before submitting it. You are to use the American Political Science Association’s citation rules when citing material in the paper. I suggest that you consult the Chicago Manual of Style regarding how to use this citation format. The Chicago Manual of Style is available in the reference room of Walsh Library (Ref Z 253 .C57 15th ed). Make sure that you do not plagiarize. The University defines plagiarism as any instance when an individual attempts to claim credit for material that which has come from another source. A student may be guilty of plagiarism even if material has not been copied verbatim or even when the act was not intentional.

The final examination will be a take home. I will hand out the questions on May 4 and the exam is to be turned in one week later. In grading the take-home final, I expect that you will demonstrate that you can explicitly use the material from the readings to answer the questions posed.
Require Readings

The following books may be purchased in the bookstore:

Neustadt, Richard. 1990. **Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents.**
Wright, John R. **Interest Groups and Congress.** Pearson Longman Publishers.

There are some readings that have been placed on electronic reserve. Journal articles that are more than three years old are available on JSTOR. Articles that are less than three years old may be available through one or more of the databases (EBSCO Host or Proquest) available in the library or in hard copy in Walsh Library.

Reading Assignments

I. January 26


II. February 2

Neustadt, Richard.1990. **Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents.**

III. February 9 and February 17 (we will spend two weeks discussing this literature on the presidency)

Rockman, Bert A. and Richard W. Waterman. 2008. **Presidential Leadership: The Vortex of Power.** (Read all of the essays in this volume)
IV.  February 23


V.  March 2


VI.  March 9 and March 23


VII.  March 30 and April 6


For the next three sessions I expect that everyone in the course will read the assigned reading. For those of you who make up the panel you are to go beyond the assigned reading in bringing the work of other authors into the discussion.

VIII. April 20 - Panel Discussion – Are Ordinary Citizens Polarized?


IX.  April 27 - Panel Discussion – Is Policy Gridlock the Norm in American Politics?


X.  May 4 - Panel Discussion – Do PAC Contributions Corrupt the Legislative Process?

Wright, John R. *Interest Groups and Congress.*

XI.  May 11 – Take-home final exam to be turned in