

INTEREST GROUP POLITICS
George Mason University
Government 318
Monday/Wednesday 10:30am – 11:45am
Robinson B, Room 111
Spring 2013
(updated March 4, 2013)

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Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays 1:30pm – 2:30pm
Course Website: Available on Blackboard via courses.gmu.edu

I. Course Description

This course is intended to survey the role of interest groups in American politics. In this course we will learn how groups form, why people join them, and how groups maintain their member-base. We will examine the various types of interest groups and the advocacy tactics they use. Our look at group activities will lead us through topics such as lobbying, political action committees (PACs), campaign contributions, protest, and the like. We will also discuss the role that groups play in various American institutions (*i.e.*, congress, courts, bureaucracy, and judiciary). Finally, we will examine how groups interact in the process of policy formation. Students are expected to have basic knowledge of American politics before taking this course.

II. Course Goals

The primary goal for this course is to help students think critically about the role of interest groups in various aspects of political life. Students will gain theoretical knowledge of how and why interest groups operate and the effect they have on some types of government processes. Further, each student will have the opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge of a small number of organizations of the student's choice. The course will emphasize critical thinking, deductive reasoning, and empirically founded claims. Students should leave the course with a two main accomplishments: a greater understanding of the role of interest groups in American politics *and* better research, writing, and reasoning skills.

III. Teaching Philosophy and Teaching Style

My teaching philosophy is based on three primary principles.

- First, I believe the gap between undergraduate and graduate coursework in political science is too broad. I therefore introduce advanced theoretical concepts in undergraduate classes so that students understand the true value of studying politics as a science; moreover, should any student choose to pursue advanced or graduate work in political science, they will be well prepared.

- Second, I believe in incorporating current events into classroom lessons. Nothing in science seems concrete until one can “see it with their own eyes.” Reading a daily newspaper and following current events, then applying theoretical concepts to political happenings helps to clarify theoretical concepts and demonstrate their utility.
- Finally, as an instructor and a leader of class discussions on everything from lawmaking to elections, I aim to remain politically neutral and non-partisan. Students should learn to collect and evaluate information on their own. I would not want students who disagree with my political views to hear all course information with a skeptical ear; nor would I want students who tend to agree with my views to accept everything I say at face value. I encourage students to express their views, be critical, and challenge information when it is appropriate.

Accordingly, my teaching style supports my philosophy. I therefore use a Socratic-style, frequently ask questions, and encourage an interactive learning experience. I do my best to learn students’ names, encourage participation, and create, what I hope is, an open learning environment where students feel free to question, comment, and explain how they view course content. Such an environment helps to foster student interaction, thinking, and analytical and creative skills. Moreover, while lectures are important because they help to distribute necessary information and facts, they are not usually the most effective way to learn information. For this reason, we will do a variety of activities in the classroom. Successful performance in this course will include classroom participation and working in and out of class with your peers.

IV. Student Responsibilities

A. *Class Attendance and Participation.* Learning is an *active*, rather than *passive*, exercise. Accordingly, every student is expected to attend class as well as be prepared to ask questions about and comment on the readings. You need to complete the daily reading assignment *prior* to the class meeting. You will be much more successful in this class if you attend regularly, take notes, pay attention, and participate.

B. *Readings.* As is the case with attendance, keeping pace with the reading is essential to succeeding in this class. It is *your* responsibility to obtain copies of the readings prior to the date we will discuss them in class. You will be much more successful in this course if you complete the assigned readings and take notes on them.

C. *Cheating, Plagiarism, and Academic Integrity.* Students in this course will be expected to comply with the George Mason University Honor Code (see <http://honorcode.gmu.edu/>). Any student engaged in any academic misconduct *will receive an F on the offending exam or assignment.* Egregious violations will result in an F grade for the course and will be reported to the appropriate Dean’s office. These violations include cheating on an exam, using someone else’s work as your own, and plagiarizing the written word. Plagiarism (using someone else’s words or ideas without providing credit or citation) is a serious offense. *If you have any questions at all about what constitutes cheating, plagiarism, or academic misconduct, please ask the instructor.*

D. *Students with Disabilities.* If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, please let me (the instructor) know and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at (703) 993-2474. All discussions with me regarding disabilities are confidential.

V. Following Political Developments in the Media

Students are encouraged to follow current political events. A familiarity with current happenings around you will facilitate your ability to understand the material. Along with any local papers you may read, I recommend that you read *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* or *The Washington Post* with frequency. You can sign up to receive daily e-mail news updates from the *New York Times* or *The Washington Post* on their websites. Additionally, you may want to examine news-magazines for more in-depth coverage of particular issues and events. *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* and *National Journal* are two particularly informative periodicals. Other options include *Time*, *Newsweek*, or *The Economist*. Finally, I strongly encourage students to listen to NPR at 88.5, where “Morning Edition” (5am-9am) and “All Things Considered” (4pm-6pm) provide excellent current events information. You can also subscribe to podcasts where you can listen to headlines from all of these news sources.

Professor Victor’s Top News Websites

Name	URL	Description
<i>New York Times</i>	http://www.nytimes.com	General national news and current events.
<i>Washington Post</i>	http://www.washingtonpost.com	General national news, with a concentration on events in Washington, D.C.
Influence Alley*	http://influencealley.nationaljournal.com/	Specialized blog about lobbying and advocacy in Washington, D.C.; includes columnists.
CNN	http://www.cnn.com	General national news
Congressional Quarterly Politics	http://www.cqpolitics.com	News about Congress, events on Capitol Hill, and government.
National Journal*	http://www.nationaljournal.com	News about Congress, elections, and important people in government.
Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*	http://library.cqpress.com/cqweekly/	Legislative news
<i>The Hill</i>	http://www.thehill.com	News about Congress and

* These items require a subscription, which is provided through the University. Access these sources via <http://library.gmu.edu/>.

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VI. Course Requirements and Graded Evaluation

There are three categories of graded requirements for this course, described below. Grades will be calculated on a non-curved typical A-F scale where,

97-100	A+	87-89	B+	77-79	C+	67-69	D+	< 60	F
93-96	A	83-86	B	73-76	C	63-66	D		
90-92	A-	80-82	B-	70-72	C-	60-62	D-		

Reading Quizzes (15%) Each student will complete five on-line quizzes based on the readings for that time period. Each student’s lowest quiz score will be dropped. Students will receive electronic notification of quiz availability. Each quiz will be available for a one week period and must be completed in a timed setting. Students must do their own work, but quizzes are open book and open note. Quizzes will primarily cover information in the required readings, but may occasionally cover material discussed in class, such as current events.

Interest Group Investigation Essays (50%) Each student will write two (2) essays of 4-6 pages each (1000 – 1500 words). Each essay will be worth 25% of the total grade. In each essay students will select one interest group (or lobbying group) and write a researched essay in which the student answers a series of specific questions regarding the origins, successes, and strategies of the group. Successful essays will show original research, in-depth knowledge, and a clear application of theoretical concepts discussed in class. Details about this assignment will be provided in class. These assignments are due on **Monday, March 18** and **Monday, April 15**.

Final Exam (35%) This will be a take-home exam that will be due **no later than 11:59pm on Wednesday, May 8**. The exam will be made available via Blackboard at least a week before it is due. Exams will be submitted electronically via Blackboard (or e-mail). The exam will consist of short and long essays that will cover material from the entire course. It is an open book and open note exam.

VII. Missing and Late Work

If you are aware that you will miss an exam or assignment due date you must notify the instructor *at least two days* prior to the due date or exam date. Make-up exams are conducted at the instructor’s discretion and are granted only in extraordinary circumstances. Make-up exams will be closed-book essay exams. Late assignments will have scores reduced by 5 percent for each day the assignment is late. I will waive the score reduction for a verified illness (bring a doctor’s note) or a verified family emergency (you must provide documentation).

VIII. Reading Assignments

The reading assignments are chosen to buttress and expand on the analytic foundation laid in class. **Please notify the instructor about problems obtaining the readings as soon as**

possible. The following materials are required and can be found at the bookstore (or on-line where indicated):

- Campus Bookstore* Ainsworth, Scott H. 2002. *Analyzing Interest Groups: Group Influence on People and Policies*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, Inc.
- Campus Bookstore* Cigler, Allan J. and Burdett A. Loomis, eds. 2012. *Interest Group Politics*, 8th ed. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press.
- On-line* Madison, James. 1982 (1787). "The Federalist No. 10," in *The Federalist Papers*, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay. New York: Bantam Books, pp 42-49. ON-LINE
<http://www.foundingfathers.info/federalistpapers/fedindex.htm>
- Independent Sellers* Rozell, Mark J., Clyde Wilcox, and Michael M. Franz. 2011. *Interest Groups in American Campaigns: The New Face of Electioneering*. Oxford University Press.
- Blackboard* Schattschneider, E.E. 1975 (1960). *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America*. New York: Harcourt Brace Javoanovich College Publishers.
- Campus Bookstore* Wright, John R. 2003. *Interest Groups & Congress: Lobbying, Contributions, and Influence*. New York: Pearson Longman.

IX. Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

W, Jan. 23 Introduction to the Course (1)

PART I: INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS

M, Jan. 28 Pluralism and the Study of Groups (2)
Readings: Madison, *Federalist No. 10* (AVAILABLE:
<http://www.foundingfathers.info/federalistpapers/fedindex.htm>)
Ainsworth, pp. 3-17

Concentration Questions: *What problem does Madison define and how does he say we should solve it?*
Be able to define pluralism. Who were the pluralists?
What argument did the anti-pluralists make?

W, Jan. 30 & M, Feb. 4 The Collective Action Problem (3/4)
Readings: Ainsworth, pp. 17-35
Schattschneider, Chs 1 & 2 (pp. 1-45)

Concentration Questions: Concentrate on understanding collective action theory.
How does Olson define collective action? Can you give examples?
What are some solutions to the collective action problem?

W, Feb. 6 & M, Feb. 11 Formation and Maintenance of Groups (5/6)

Readings: Ainsworth, Chs. 3 & 4, +pp. 93-5.

Concentration Questions: What are some other theories of mobilization? Can you summarize them?
Pay attention to the example of Welfare Rights Organizations in Ainsworth pp 50-52. What are they? How did they succeed?
What is the paradox of majority rule?
What is the principal agent problem?
Define the Median Voter Theorem.
How can groups prevent unraveling?

W, Feb. 13 Interest Group Organization (7)

Readings: Cigler and Loomis, Chs. 3 – 6.

Concentration Questions: According to Halpin and Nownes, what do groups do to survive?
What did the Australian Conservation Foundation do to survive as a group?
According to Drutman, how are trade associations different from other types of groups?
According to Barakso, what did the AMA do during the health care reform debate?
What leadership skills are important in a group leader?

M, Feb. 18 & W, Feb. 20 History of Groups (8/9)

Readings: Wright, Chs. 1 & 2
Ainsworth, Ch. 5

Concentration Questions: What provisions in the US Constitution helped interest groups to establish?
Why did it take so long for organized interests to develop in the US?
Which 20th century reforms helped groups get organized?
Why was there an interest group explosion in the late 20th century?

M, Feb. 25 & W, Feb. 27 Group Resources and Activities (10/11)

Readings: Wright, pp. 37-49

Concentration Questions: What are groups' most important resources?

Questions: *What strategies can groups use to influence the government?
How do groups decide which strategies to use when?*

PART II: GROUPS AND INSTITUTIONS

**M, Mar. 4, &
W, Mar.6, &
M, Mar. 18, &
W, Mar. 20**

Interest Groups and Congress (12/13)

Readings: Cigler and Loomis, Ch. 11 (Victor)
Wright, pp. 65-113

****Interest Group Essay #1 is due Monday, March 18****

Concentration Questions: *What is the spatial model of interest group lobbying?
Under what conditions will interest groups try to break, create, or
maintain legislative gridlock?
What is the primary role groups play in Congress?*

Mar. 11 – 15 NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK

**M, Mar. 25 &
W, Mar. 27**

Lobbying (14/15)

Readings: Ainsworth, Ch. 6

Cigler and Loomis, Chs. 10, 12, & 13

Concentration Questions: *Why is “context” important for lobbyists to consider when devising a
strategy?
What are the equilibria outcomes from the lobbyist-legislator signaling
game?
By what means does government regulate lobbying?*

**M, Apr. 1 &
W, Apr. 3**

Interest Groups and the Courts and Executive Branch (16/17)

Readings: Wright, 49-65
Ainsworth, Ch. 7

Concentration Questions: *What incentives do interest groups have for paying attention to what
happens in bureaucratic agencies? How do they learn about such
things?
Do lobbyists lobby the President?
How do interest groups use the Courts to their advantage?*

M, Apr. 8 & Interest Groups and Political Parties (18/19)

W, Apr. 10

Readings: Rozell, *et al.*, Chs. 1 & 2
Cigler and Loomis, Ch. 9 (Heaney)

Concentration Questions: Which word best describes the relationship between interest groups and parties: adversaries, allies, or oblivious?
Which historical reforms have made it easier for groups to work with parties (and vice versa)?
Which aspects of party organization are groups most interested in?

M, Apr. 15 & W, Apr. 17

Readings: PACs (20/21)
Ainsworth, Ch. 9
Wright, Ch. 5
Rozell, *et al.*, Ch. 3
****Interest Group Essay #2 is due April 15****

Concentration Questions: What is the primary function of a PAC?
Why do PACs have such a negative reputation?
Which laws or rulings were the most important in the growth of PACS?
How important is PAC money for candidates?

M, Apr. 22 & W, Apr. 24

Readings: Interest Groups in Campaigns (22/23)
Cigler and Loomis, Chs. 7 (Cigler) & 8 (Franz)
Rozell, *et al.*, Ch. 4

Concentration Questions: What are the non-financial ways that groups get involved with campaigns?
What legal barriers must groups be most cognizant of when it comes to electioneering?

M, Apr. 29 & W, May. 1

Readings: Interest Groups and Voters (24/25)
Ainsworth, Ch. 8
Concentration Questions: What is soft money and why did it proliferate?
What is FECA and BCRA?
Why is it so difficult to reform campaign finance laws?
What are the current laws about campaign finance and interest groups?

M, May. 6

Readings: Implications and Evaluations (26)
Rozell, *et al.*, Ch. 5

Ainsworth Ch. 10
Wright, Ch. 6

Concentration Questions: *Do organized interests play an inherently positive or negative role in our democracy? Why? (make a list of the positives and negatives)*

Wed., May 8 11:59pm *Take-home final exam is due no later than 11:59pm on this day.*