

WASHINGTON SEMESTER PROGRAM
American University
Washington, D.C. 20016-8083

American National Government and Politics II
Fall Semester 2008
Seminar Days—Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday
Dr. Richard J. Semiatin
Assistant Professor of Political Science
Office: Dunblane 204

SEMINAR SYLLABUS (8 Credit Hours)

Please read this syllabus fully and carefully. It describes in detail the rules and regulations of this program. Each and every student will be held responsible for knowing and observing these rules and regulations. **Please do not ask for special treatment, it would be unfair to your classmates and wrong.**

PART ONE--COURSE DESCRIPTION

The purpose of the Washington Semester Program in American National Government is to provide you with an empirical understanding of how Washington works on a daily basis. During the semester you will be meeting with political practitioners and policymakers--both elected and unelected--who influence legislation, execute decisions, resolve disputes and help others win electoral office. The semester will help you unravel some of the mysteries behind the complexity of the government as you learn first-hand about "practical politics."

The first part of the semester will focus primarily on how the major political institutions and political actors make decisions and what the consequences are for the public. Therefore, you should think about questions such as: how do campaigns strategize for victory? Do the institutions of government operate efficiently enough to provide for the public welfare? What is the impact of an important piece of legislation, not only on the public, but on the institutions themselves? How much public influence is acceptable? What level of accountability should politicians be held to professionally and personally? How rational are the decisions that governmental officials make? Ask yourself these questions at the beginning of the semester and, again, at the close of the program. Your answers may surprise you.

The second part of the semester mainly focuses on domestic policy, civil liberties and the court. What role should government play in the everyday lives of its citizenry? Should the government involve itself more in trying to solve social problems which plague our country or should the government take a more "hands off" approach to ameliorating such problems?

The goal of the semester is to focus on the politics of cooperation v. polarization as the fall 2006 elections approach. The main source of President Bush's support comes from his handling of terrorism. Congressional Democrats, in opposition, with the exception of social security reform, have been relatively ineffective in opposing the president's initiatives on energy policy and judicial appointments.

Congress and the president will wrestle with issues such as reducing the budget deficit (about \$490 billion for FY 2009), social security reform, medicare reform, immigration, terrorism and Iraq.

Domestic politics also concerns issues that come before the Supreme Court. The court reflects a divided nation with textualists (Scalia, Thomas, Roberts and Alito) on one side. Adaptavists (constitution is a living, breathing document) represent the second major wing of the court (Breyer, Ginsburg, Souter, and Stevens) and the balance of the court resides with a centrist (Kennedy). Therefore, in summary, the course, examines the institutions, major issues and linkages among them.

There are three components to the seminar: 1) guest lectures with invited speakers; 2) classroom discussions and lectures with the professor; and 3) assigned readings commensurate with each component of the seminar. Each week we will meet as a group five or six times on Monday through Wednesday. Class sessions will take place on campus or at the offices of the guest speaker. Scheduling varies each week and you will receive ample notice of upcoming seminars. Seminars may occasionally be cancelled or rescheduled due to conflicts in the schedules with guest speakers.

PART TWO--REQUIREMENTS

Assigned Readings

The following texts will comprise the majority of reading material during the semester. The books can be purchased in the Campus Bookstore on the main campus. The list includes required texts.

Required

- 1) Charles Peters, *How Washington Really Works* (Intro Week)
- 2) Bradley Patterson, *The White House Staff* (The Presidency)
- 3) David Price, *The Congressional Experience* (Congress)
- 4) Richard Semiatin, editor, *Campaigns on the Cutting Edge* (Campaigns and Elections)
- 5) David O'Brien, *Storm Center: The Supreme Court in American Politics* (Courts)

6) George McKenna and Stanley Feingold, Editors. *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Political Issues* (Public Policy)

7) *American Government 08/09* (Reader)

8) publicagenda.com (assigned readings and data on-line)

9) *Issues for Debate: In American Public Policy* (Public Policy)

Readings

The readings described above focus on the institutions and electoral processes of government. Each of the books provide a very realistic presentation of how politics operates. All readings will be assigned on a weekly basis to meet the objectives of the seminars to be attended. The readings also follow the proscribed path of the course: from electing our government officials, to developing legislation, to executing and implementing decisions, to judging controversies in the public realm and finally, to challenging the outcomes of public policy through organized interests.

Why the Readings are Important

The readings provide the student background on the course that is otherwise unobtainable through the seminar class. The readings provide you with a broad background to help you understand the subject matter before meeting the guest speaker. Feel free to ask me any questions about the substance of the readings during the semester. The readings also can help you to prepare questions that you might want to ask the guest speakers. Occasionally, an author of a book or article will meet the class to discuss their work. Generally, however, most of the time the student is responsible for integrating substance from the readings into questions for guest speakers, class discussions, and identification and essay questions on exams. Doing the assigned reserve readings are regarded as important as doing assigned readings from books.

Grading

Attendance/Punctuality/ Class Participation/Professionalism	25%
Memorandum #1	10%
Memorandum #2	10%
Memorandum #3	10%
Memorandum #4	10%
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Exam	20%
Total	100%

Due Dates

Tuesday, September 16	Memorandum #1
Monday, October 6	Midterm Examination
Monday, October 13	Memorandum #2
Wednesday, October 29	Memorandum #3
Wednesday, December 3	Memorandum #4
Monday, December 8	Final

SPECIAL NOTATION ON FALL 2008 SCHEDULES: DURING ELECTION WEEK NOVEMBER 3-7, WE WILL NOT MEET M-W, BUT INSTEAD W-F. ATTEND YOUR INTERNSHIPS ON MONDAY AND TUESDAY OF THAT WEEK. OTHERWISE, WE FOLLOW M-W SCHEDULE FOR EACH WEEK.

Since you receive two course grades for the class, the grade calculated above will be assigned to both courses. Failure to hand in **any** required assignment or take any exam will result in that student not passing the class.

Why Attending Seminars Is Important and Mandatory

Each seminar represents a unique experience with a Washington policymaker. Each seminar is irreplaceable and provides unique information to the Washington Semester student that would otherwise be unavailable. The seminars provide you with experiential learning that would otherwise be unavailable in a traditional learning environment. Most important is the substance of what get speakers explain to you about politics.

ATTENDANCE/PUNCTUALITY AND CLASS PARTICIPATION/PROFESSIONALISM

Excellent attendance, on-time arrival at seminars, frequent class participation and conduct worthy of professionals is expected of students. This is also an opportunity for you to learn that you will never have again. Take advantage of this opportunity and you will be glad that you did so.

POLICY

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. Missing classes will have a substantial and deleterious impact on your grade. If an emergency arises where you are unable to attend a seminar (i.e., a death in the

family or an extreme illness), then you are required to inform me before the seminar explaining why you are unable to attend either by phone or note. Failure to do so will adversely affect your class grade for each class missed. Visits from guests, internship interviews, deadlines for the research project, or other requirements are not acceptable reasons for absenteeism.

The positive side: attending seminars regularly will have a beneficial effect on your grade!

Punctuality

Being prompt to seminars on campus or downtown is extremely important. Since these guest speakers give their time freely to speak to our class, out of respect and courtesy we appear punctually. You will also get more out of the seminar by being on time. Plan to leave campus one hour ahead of schedule for seminars downtown. ***Tardiness will also have a negative impact on your grade.*** Being prompt will aid you in your learning experience here in Washington. One suggestion I have for all of you is to buy a map of Washington, D.C. I still use one after living here for twenty years!

Class Participation

Class participation means being active and involved by asking thoughtful questions of guest speakers and volunteering insightful comments during class discussions. ***You are expected to participate regularly.*** Adequate class participation means participating each week in questioning guest speakers and in class discussions. If you naturally tend to be reticent, you might wish to prepare a question for each seminar to ask the guest speaker. **This is your semester of opportunity and learning. For many individuals, this opportunity comes once in a lifetime.** The more you participate, the more you will get out of your semester experience. Furthermore, you will enjoy the semester more if you actively participate.

Professionalism

The Seminar in American Politics is a serious academic program. Students should conduct themselves professionally and be respectful to guest speakers, peers and the professor. The attitude a student exhibits in classes, seminars and other class-related interactions has a substantial affect on the class participation grade. Please remember that *discussions are about exchanging ideas, they are not screaming debates such as MSNBC's "Chris Matthews."* **Equally important is your ability to LISTEN to classmates, speakers and the professor.** *The ability to listen, not socialize in class, and be reflective is critical to one's grade.*

A positive, polite and respectful attitude serves you well not only in this course but also at your internship and in your future career endeavors. On the other hand, disruptive or other negative behavior, whether it is active or passive conduct, will have a serious impact on the class participation grade you receive from this class. In the real world, your demeanor and attitude have a profound impact on achieving successes in your professional career.

Failure to comply with any one of the aforementioned standards, attendance, punctuality, class participation or professionalism will have a severe impact on your class

participation grade. On the other hand, complying with these standards will help you learn and grow during your experiences here in Washington and it will certainly enhance your overall class participation grade, the largest single component of your final grade. Students who give of themselves receive as much, if not more, in return for their efforts. No component of your grade more important than this one. Students who do not comply with these standards can lose substantially more than 25 points from their grade. Please always be professional, responsible, active, listen well, kind and polite and you will do very well! I am sure that you will! Thank you.

Memoranda: Writing for Life

Four short memoranda will be assigned during the semester. The purpose is to provide you with writing skills for life. The assignments relate directly to the class and help the student think conceptually and logically. Furthermore, the student is taught to research and source all information; to interpret the research; and to write specifically to an audience. The first memorandum covers campaign management, the second memorandum covers the congress/presidency; the third memorandum covers public policy; and, the fourth memo addresses constitutional law. The skills should help prepare you for life in the job or graduate school world you will enter soon.

Each memo must be well-written, organized, analytical and insightful. Memos should be written with great care and be technically precise. The former sentence implies that memos should be neat and not have spelling, grammatical, stylistic or other technical errors. That is a baseline expectation for the work turned in to be evaluated. The draft that you turn in to be graded should be the final draft of your memo. Students are also strongly encouraged to use outside sources for their memos when appropriate. Finally, students should also provide data and statistics to augment their memos to demonstrate the importance of key ideas in the text.

The topics for memos will be addressed in class. Ample time is provided to write each assignment. Memos delivered past the deadline (date and time) will be deducted one full grade and an additional half grade will be deducted for each additional day the memo is late. Please plan ahead. Memos are assigned well in advance. Neither computer excuses nor other excuses are acceptable for late memos for any reason.

EXAMS

The exams require you to integrate substance from guest lectures, readings and class discussions. Make sure you incorporate each of these elements in your answers. The dates for the exams are enumerated in the "Course Outline" on the subsequent pages. Details will be provided later in the semester on the type and form of exam. A good suggestion is to review your class material each week.

You should take detailed notes when guest speakers talk unless they ask you not to do so. This will help you in preparing for your memos and exams. You will need substantial evidence from your guest speakers and readings to support arguments made in your exams as well as memos; otherwise, the reader (me) will remain unconvinced. Please remember that you receive two grades

for this class, thus you should study two classes worth for the examinations. If you study over time, it makes preparation much, much easier. Reviewing your material on a weekly basis will help you enormously. Finally, a study/discussion guide is given to students at least one week before each exam.

TENLEY WRITING LAB

Students have available to them the Tenley Writing Lab to get help on written assignments. Students who utilize the Lab tend to do better in the course. Students who attend the Lab can prove verification to the professor by getting a receipt and showing the professor the marked up copy of the text. The receipt alone does not suffice as proof since there have been cases in the past when this particular process was violated.

PART THREE--COURSE OUTLINE

Course Outline

As stated in the introduction, the course is divided into two sections. The first half (prior to the midterm) primarily focuses on the institutions of government and voters (but not exclusively). The second half of the course will focus on public policy, civil liberties and rights and the courts. In other words, how the actions of government affect our lives.

On a number of occasions, seminars will be scheduled out of sequence, rescheduled or cancelled. However, this is generally the exception and not the rule.

The following outline provides some of the major subjects we will be discussing during the semester.

First Half of the Course--INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT

Introduction to Politics Inside the Beltway

During the first week guest speakers will discuss how Washington works politically and through the avenues of public communications. As you will find during your semester, many officials "inside the Beltway" gravitate from political and governmental positions to consulting.

Elections and Campaigns

Coverage of the presidential and congressional elections, with an emphasis on campaign media, gender, voter turnout and analysis. For instance, prominent media advisors in the political parties and in campaigns will be meeting with the class. With important congressional midterm elections coming up this fall, the entire House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate will be up for re-election.

Campaign Finance

The 2008 presidential election will have about \$4 billion in spending. How well is the campaign finance system working? What are the effects of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) of 2002 (aka, McCain-Feingold) on the transparency of elections and the impact of third party groups?

Congress

How congress works is the focus of this segment of the program. It may include meetings with elected officials, present staff members and journalists who cover congress. These individuals provide insight on the machinations of legislative process. Discussions of congress will provide insight regarding the process and policies.

The Presidency

Working inside the White House and the execution of administration policies are the framework for understanding how the President and executive function in the Washington environment. Former and present White House officials are among the persona who will address the complexities and practicalities of accomplishing administrative objectives.

Midterm—Monday, October 6

Second Half of the Course—ECONOMIC, SOCIAL DOMESTIC POLICY, CIVIL LIBERTIES AND THE COURTS

Entitlement Reform

The budget, medicare and health care issues are major foci of policy debates in Washington. Furthermore, they are related. The budget deficit is expected to increase markedly between the years 2005-2008 because of entitlement growth as the "Baby Boomer" generation, the largest population cohort, begins to retire. The major cause of this entitlement increase is due to health related costs such as Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. The President and Congress are going to have to address how to keep the Social Security system solvent after the year 2042 (where the Trustees of the Social Security Fund predict it will be non-sustainable for all benefits). We will meet with speakers who will provide very different perspectives on the budget, tax and entitlement issues --Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and liberals.

Social Domestic Policy--Family Values, Welfare, Drugs and Crime

Any discussion of social domestic issues focuses on the roots of unrest in society. Only be addressing these issues directly can problems that result from dysfunctional behavior be ameliorated. How likely is it to bring about social change when budget constraints limit action?

We will here from differing points of view on a number of the subject matters described above including the root causes of crime and prospective solutions.

Energy Policy

A short mini-section is presented on energy policy from the perspective of consumer-advocates and the petroleum industry.

National Security

What threats do terrorists pose to U.S. interests and allies at home and abroad? How does a nuclear bomb work? Are chemical and biological weapons truly weapons of mass destruction?

The Judiciary

Courts remain the most understudied branch of the Federal Government. We focus on the Supreme Court as the entity for judicial decisionmaking. Guest speakers will explain not only how judicial decisionmaking works but the impact of the courts on public policy. We will examine originalist (i.e., textualist), adaptive, precedent and libertarian interpretations of the Constitution in reality. Judicial politics is the one area where theory melds most closely to reality and decisionmaking.

Religion, Civil Liberties and Church/State Issues

Religion is the oldest political liberty discussion in the United States. Guest speakers will provide sharp contrasts on the religion issue.

Final Examination Monday, December 8

These are the main blocs of subject matter that we will focus on in the course. Sometimes a timely issue or subject matter will arise and a seminar or two will be arranged to discuss that subject.

Weekly Schedules

Each week you will receive a schedule regarding the subsequent week's theme and seminars. Please read each schedule carefully. It provides a description of the upcoming seminars, directions (if we are traveling) and a list of study/discussion questions that help focus your thoughts for that week.

Reading List

You will be provided with a supplemental reading list for monthly readings. In addition, readings are also posted on weekly schedules which are provided for you in class.

PART FOUR--ACADEMIC INTEGRITY CODE

PLEASE READ THIS VERY CAREFULLY

American University's policy is as follows:

Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the University Academic Integrity Code is provided in your registration packet. By participating in this program, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Academic Integrity Code, and you are obliged to become familiar with your rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will be taken seriously, and disciplinary actions will ensue should such violations occur. Please see me if you have any questions about the academic violations described in the Code or as they relate to particular requirements in this program.

Again, welcome to "D.C." Always feel free to ask me questions or to consult with me about matters. I am here to help you and want to see each and every one of you have a full and worthwhile learning experience. The more you invest in your semester the more you will take back with you. Please come by for a chat if you need help or are interested in discussing an issue that has come up in discussion or with our guest speakers. I want you to have the greatest learning experience of your life.