

TO: GOVT 150 Students (American Political Institutions)

FR: Larry Evans

DT: August 28, 2003

RE: Course expectations

Overview. This course is a freshman seminar intended for first-year undergraduates with an interest in American national politics. There are no prerequisites or expectations about prior background. I have several goals for the class.

First, my aim is to introduce new college students to some of the best recent scholarship about the major political institutions within American national government. There is no “textbook” for the course. Instead, the readings are structured around six recent treatises about American national politics authored by some of the leading scholars in the country.

Second, the seminar is designed to be “writing intensive.” As a result, there will be several writing assignments included among course requirements and we will regularly discuss the different kinds of writing that students will do during their undergraduate years and also after graduation.

Third, there will be a major “research” component to the course. Rather than expect students to design their own projects, I will provide each member of the class with a topic and data set that touches on the coalition building process on a major piece of legislation from the post-World War II era. As a result, even though this is an introductory class aimed at first-year students, members of the class will be able to conduct original research on significant topics. I will attempt to assign you a topic that meshes well with your policy interests (e.g. foreign versus domestic policy, health issues v. education matters). The research component also will include a very basic introduction to the construction of data sets and to very rudimentary statistical analysis. (I emphasize that this seminar assumes absolutely no statistical background or significant quantitative abilities – I will teach you exactly what you need to know.)

At the end of the seminar, participants should have: (1) learned a lot about the substance of American national government; (2) developed skills at interpreting and criticizing cutting-edge scholarly work in political science; (3) significantly improved their writing abilities; and (4) developed a basic familiarity with the main approaches to research used by contemporary social scientists. For interested students, this class also will fulfill the computer proficiency requirement for the government concentration.

Contact Information. My office telephone extension is 1-3030 and my e-mail address is clewan@wm.edu. For Fall 2003, my formal office hours will be Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:00 a.m. to 12:15 p.m., but students should feel free to drop by my office at any time: It is located in Morton Hall 137-B. There also is a Blackboard website for this seminar. Students should access this site as soon as possible and make sure that they are properly enrolled in the site (you can get to the site through my.wm). I will be communicating with you regularly throughout the semester via the various features of the course site, especially the e-mail listserv, and it is critical that everyone receive these messages.

Course Readings. The reading list is oriented around six books, which are all available for purchase at the William and Mary bookstore. The titles are the following:

Politicians Don't Pander, by Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro.
Going Home: Black Representatives and their Constituents, by Richard F. Fenno, Jr.
Unorthodox Lawmaking, 2nd ed., by Barbara Sinclair
Stalemate: Causes and Consequences of Legislative Gridlock, by Sarah A. Binder
The Politics Presidents Make, by Stephen Skowronek
The Hollow Hope: Can Courts bring about Social Change, Gerald Rosenberg.

There may be a few short readings added to the list, mostly pertaining to the course writing assignments. If so, I will provide students with such materials as the class proceeds.

Course Requirements. Final grades for the seminar will derive from five assignments: A brief reaction memo about one of the course books (10 percent); a research prospectus (10 percent); a research paper (30 percent); an exam (30 percent); and class participation (20 percent). The reaction memo will be two pages maximum (single-spaced) and will summarize and critique one of the course books. Included here will be the books by Fenno, Sinclair, Binder, and Skowronek. I will make the reaction assignments during the second week of class. Reaction memos must be turned in to me at the beginning of class on the first day for which a book is assigned. The research prospectus also will be in memo format with a two-page maximum (single-spaced). It will summarize for me how you intend to proceed with the research paper. During early September, I will provide detailed expectations about the structure of the prospectus and the research paper. As mentioned, the research paper will be an analysis of coalition-building activities on a major legislative initiative. It will make use of a unique data set that I am constructing of whip counts (secret polls conducted by congressional party leaders of Member positions) on major bills in the 1955-86 period. The collection of the data was sponsored in part by the Charles Center, as part of ongoing efforts to enhance opportunities at William and Mary for undergraduate research. There is no need for special concern about the research paper. I will work closely with you as you conduct the research. A rough draft of the research paper will be due three weeks before the due-date for the final version. The target length for the final version of the research paper is 15 pages (double-spaced). There also will be an exam covering all of the reading materials and class discussions. It will be scheduled during the regular final exam period allotted to your section of GOVT 150. Finally, because this is a small seminar class, I will expect regular participation in class discussions by all students enrolled in the course.

Schedule

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| 8/28 | No assignment |
| 9/2 | Jacobs and Shapiro, Chapters 1-2 |
| 9/4 | Jacobs and Shapiro, Chapters 3-4 |
| 9/9 | Jacobs and Shapiro, Chapters 5-7 |
| 9/11 | Jacobs and Shapiro, Chapters 8-10 |

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| 9/16 | Fenno, Chapters 1-2 |
| 9/18 | Fenno, Chapter 3 |
| 9/23 | Fenno, Chapters 4-5 |
| 9/25 | Fenno, Chapters 6-7 |
| 9/30 | Sinclair, Chapters 1-3 |
| 10/2 | Sinclair, Chapters 4-6 |
| | Research Prospectus Due |
| 10/7 | Sinclair, Chapters 7-9 |
| 10/9 | Sinclair, Chapters 10-12 |
| 10/16 | Binder, Chapters 1-3 |
| 10/21 | Binder, Chapters 4-6 |
| 10/23 | Skowronek, Preface, Chapters 1-3 |
| 10/28 | Skowronek, Chapters 4-5 |
| 10/30 | Skowronek, Chapter 6 |
| 11/4 | Skowronek, Chapter 7 |
| 11/6 | Skowronek, Chapter 8 |
| 11/11 | Draft Research Papers Due |
| 11/13 | Rosenberg, Introduction, Chapters 1-2 |
| 11/18 | Rosenberg, Chapters 3-4 |
| 11/20 | Rosenberg, Chapters 5-6 |
| 11/25 | Rosenberg, Chapters 7-8 |
| 12/2 | Rosenberg, Chapters 9-10 |
| | Research Papers Due |
| 12/4 | Rosenberg, Chapters 11-12 |
| TBA | Exam (to occur during final exam period for relevant section) |