

## PSC 309: Interest Group Politics

Tu/Th 12:30-1:50pm  
Hall of Languages 102

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This course examines the role of organized interests in American politics. It is often thought that public policy in the United States results from the combat and ultimate reconciliation of competing interest groups. At the very least, the U.S. policy system is notable for its extensive mobilization of groups—one estimate is that there are 34,000 registered lobbying groups in Washington, DC! This course will look at how such groups mobilize, what explains the rise of interest group politics, how lobbyists go about doing their business, and consider the political impact of organized interests. We will examine theories of interest groups and also look at them in action, asking about the role of PAC money in elections, comparing strategies of influence, and questioning whether interest groups are generally good or bad for democracy.

### Prerequisites

It is understood that students enrolled in this class will have taken Political Science 121 (American National Government and Politics) or its equivalent. In other words, I expect all students to have a working knowledge of American politics and to know how to conduct social science research.

### Objectives

The course will examine the following questions about interest groups:

- How do interest groups form, and how do they maintain themselves?
- Why do people join interest groups, and who is likely to be a member?
- What explains the rise of interest groups politics in the United States?
- What do interest groups want and how do they go about achieving their goals?
- How do interest groups (and interest group money) affect elections?
- How effective are public interest groups, compared to business and other professional groups?
- What are the effects of lobbying on public policy and democracy?
- Are interest groups good or bad for democracy?

## COURSE MATERIALS

Required Texts: Books may be purchased at the Syracuse University Book Store. They are also on 2- hour reserve at Bird Library.

- David Lowery and Holly Brasher, *Organized Interests in American Politics* (Boston, MA: McGraw Hill, 2004).
- Robert Spitzer, *The Politics of Gun Control*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2008).
- William Saletan, *Bearing Right: How Conservatives Won the Abortion War* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004).
- Michael Kraft and Sheldon Kamieniecki, *Business and Environmental Policy: Corporate Interests in the American Political System* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

**Additional readings** (e.g. articles, book chapters) will be posted on the course website on Blackboard either as documents or linked to a webpage/ web-based document. It is your responsibility to ensure that you have access to these readings.

## ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

- **Participation:** Your participation is critical to the success of this class. Given this, the extent and quality of student participation in class discussion and activities will be noted. You can increase your final grade in this course (by up to a whole letter grade) by consistent and high-quality participation in class.

We will be discussing current events as they relate to organized interests, so I encourage you to keep up with national politics by reading a daily newspaper, preferably the *New York Times* or some other nationally recognized newspaper.

To effectively participate, you need to complete the readings before class. Be sure to read carefully (I suggest you take notes) and keep the following questions in mind:

- What are the main points and arguments in the text?
- What evidence does the author use to make her or his case? How well does the evidence support the author's argument? What further evidence is needed?
- Do you find the conclusions convincing? Why or why not?
- Does the reading remind you of any other readings for class?
- Does the reading contradict "conventional wisdom," things you've read for other classes or outside of class, or earlier readings? How can we adjudicate the various and contradictory findings?

Participation requires not only talking but also *active listening*. Please do not carry on side conversations, read the newspaper, or engage in other activities not related to the course.

To earn extra points for participation, you should have excellent attendance and speak regularly in class (without dominating the discussion). You should do all the reading for class and demonstrate an understanding of it. You should be able to answer questions about the reading and develop questions of your own to share with the class. Finally, you should listen carefully to others.

- **Reading quizzes and homework (10%):** Quizzes based on the course readings will occasionally be administered in class and will be graded on a 0-4 point basis. (Your lowest grade will be dropped.) In addition, the syllabus assigns homework which requires some outside research (see “Schedule: Topics and Readings” for specific assignments and dates. Homework assignments are designated with a \*\*. ) These assignments will be collected in class and will be evaluated on a 4-point basis.
- **Short writing assignments (20%):** Two short writing assignments are required. The first asks you to write a recruitment letter for an interest group of your choice and the second requires you to write a strategy memo for the National Abortion Rights Action League. Details on these assignments will be provided in class.
- **Group presentations and memos (20%):** Groups will select an upcoming issue on the Congressional agenda (see end of syllabus for policy issues) and represent an interest group (or set of groups; e.g. the mining industry) that has a stake in the policy outcome. Groups of three students will make a 15-20 minute presentation to the class and write a strategy memo. Detailed instructions for this assignment will be provided in class. Please note that an outline of your presentation is due 10 days before you present, and that your memo is due one week after your presentation. Moreover, you must select a short article (3-4 pages) that provides background information on your issue/ group and submit it 10 days prior to your presentation date. These readings will be posted on the website and be required reading for the class.
- **Mid-term and Final Exams (20%, 30% respectively):** The midterm exam will be in-class on February 26<sup>th</sup>; the final exam will be a comprehensive take-home exam (about 10-12 pages in length) and is due on Friday, May 1<sup>st</sup>.

#### **COURSE POLICIES**

- **Attendance:** A well functioning class that promotes learning requires good attendance. While I strongly encourage you to attend all classes, you are allowed two personal days. If you are absent more than twice, I will deduct points for each unexcused absence from your final course grade. The only excused absences are in the case of a family crisis or your own illness, and these require proper documentation.
- **Laptops:** Laptops are not allowed in class except for the group presentations. If you must use a laptop to take notes, please see me during the first week of class.
- **Course Website:** Materials for the course can be found at the course website on Blackboard. Please note that the assigned articles will be posted on the website under “Readings.”
- **Email Policy:** I am happy to respond to student questions via email, and I generally respond quickly. But please note that it may take up to 24 hours to get a response in some cases. For complicated questions or issues, I advise you to talk to me in person during my office hours.
- **Academic Honesty/ Plagiarism:** As stated by the SU Office of Academic Integrity, “At Syracuse University, academic integrity is expected of every community member in all endeavors. Academic integrity includes a commitment to the values of honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, and respect...An individual’s academic dishonesty threatens and undermines the central mission of the University. It is unfair to other community members who do not cheat, because it devalues efforts to learn, to teach, and to conduct research.”

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. It includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Copying text from books, articles, or the Internet without proper citation of the source;
- Taking an idea from one of the above sources without crediting the original author;
- Giving a false or non-existent citation;
- Feigning illness to avoid handing in assignments;
- Submitting work under your name that was prepared by someone else.

Cases of academic dishonesty may result in an “F” for the assignment and/or an “F” for the course. For additional policies, guidelines, and resources, see the SU Office of Academic Integrity’s webpage.

This class will be using *Turnitin*, a plagiarism prevention system that identifies “matched text” and offers an “originality report” for each submitted paper. We will interpret the originality report to determine whether the paper has been properly cited. You will be given the opportunity to submit your own papers to Turnitin to check that all sources you have used are properly acknowledged and cited. Note that all submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers.

- Accommodations: If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you should contact me and the Office of Disability Services, 804 University Ave. (443-4498), as early as possible in the term.

### SCHEDULE: TOPICS AND READINGS

Please note that this schedule may change in small ways during the course of the semester. Any changes in the readings or schedule will be announced in class; it is your responsibility to keep abreast of these changes. All the readings posted on Blackboard will be dated according to the date they are due.

It is essential that you keep up with the reading; please complete the reading assignments before the class in which we discuss it. Your exams may contain questions on topics that were covered only in the readings, not in lecture.

#### KEY:

**Bb**= Article can be found on PSC 309 Blackboard website under “Readings.”

**L & B** = Lowery and Brasher, *Organized Interests in American Politics*.

**Saletan** = Saletan, *Bearing Right*.

**Spitzer** = Spitzer, *The Politics of Gun Control*.

**K & K** = Kraft and Kamieniecki, *Business and Environmental Policy*.

**TBA**= Reading to be announced; you will find it on the Blackboard website.

## Week 1

1.13 Introduction to the course

1.15 Themes & Theories

- Madison, Federalist #10, **Bb**
- L & B, Chapter 1
- Kirkpatrick, "In Transition, Ties to Lobbying," **Bb**

**\*\*** Select an interest organization to track through the "influence production process." (You may *not* choose the NRA or NARAL. Your group must be significantly involved in politics/policy; it will be easier if you select a group that has registered with the Federal Election Commission, but this is not a requirement. See the Appendix in L & B for useful websites.) Answer the questions on pages 25-26 of Lowery and Brasher and bring your answers to class on Tuesday, 1.20 (typed, w/ name and date).

## Week 2

1.20 Group Formation & Maintenance

- L & B, Chapter 2
- Morone, selections from *Hellfire Nation*, **Bb**

**\*\*** Answer the questions on pages 63-64 of L & B and bring them to class on Thurs., 1.22.

1.22 Group Formation & Maintenance, continued

- Jeffrey Berry, "Nonprofit Organizations as Interest Groups: The Politics of Passivity," **Bb**
- Bardach, "Bread for the World," **Bb**

## Week 3

1.27 The Universe of U.S. Interest Groups

- L & B, Chapter 3

**\*\*** Answer the questions posted on Blackboard for this week and bring your answers to class on Thurs., 1.29.

1.29 Growth of, and Biases within the Interest Group Universe

- Baumgartner and Leech, "Interest Niches and Policy Bandwagons: Patterns of Interest Group Involvement in National Politics," **Bb**

## Week 4

2.3 Influencing the Public; Interest Groups in Elections

\* First short paper (recruitment letter) due in class!

- L & B, Chapter 4

**\*\*** Answer questions 1, 2, 5, and 6 on page 143 of L & B and bring them to class on Thurs., 2.5

- 2.5 Influencing the Public; Interest Groups in Elections, con't
- Duffy, "Business, Elections, and the Environment," Chapter 3 in **K & K**
  - Sabato, "The Misplaced Obsession with PACs," **Bb**

Week 5

- 2.10 Case Study: The NRA and Gun Control
- Spitzer, Chapters 1 & 4
- 2.12 Case Study: The NRA and Gun Control, con't
- Spitzer, Chapters 5 & 6
  - *NYT*, "The Gun Lobby's Loss"
  - Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, memo

Week 6

- 2.17 Lobbying Congress
- L & B, Chapter 5

\*\* Answer questions 3-6 on page 182 of L & B and bring them to class on Thursday, 2.19.

- 2.19 Lobbying Congress, con't
- Layzer, "Deep Freeze: How Business Has Shaped the Global Warming Debate in Congress," Chapter 4 in **K & K**

Week 7

2.24 **Midterm Exam**

- 2.26 Lobbying the Courts
- L & B, Chapter 7
  - McSpadden, "Industry's Use of the Courts," Chapter 9 in **K & K**

Week 8

\*\* Answer questions 1, 3, and 5 on pages 219-220 and bring your answers to class on Tues, 3.3.

- 3.3 Lobbying the Executive
- L & B, Chapter 6
  - Furlong, "Businesses and the Environment: Influencing Agency Policymaking," Chapter 6 in **K & K**
- 3.5 Guest speaker; Scott Armstrong from Armstrong Communications
- Selections from Wittenberg and Wittenberg, *How to Win in Washington: Very practical advice about lobbying, the grassroots, and the media*, **Bb**

March 7-15 **SPRING BREAK!**

### Week 9

#### 3.17 Public Interest Groups

- Berry, selections from *The New Liberalism*, **Bb**

#### 3.19 Public Interest Groups, con't

- Strolovitch, "Trickle Down Representation: Representing the Underrepresented," **Bb**

### Week 10

#### 3.24 Case Study: Abortion Politics in the U.S.

- Saletan, selections from *Bearing Right*, **TBA**

#### 3.26 Case Study: Abortion Politics in the U.S., con't

- Saletan, selections from *Bearing Right*, **TBA**
- Douthett, "Abortion Politics Didn't Doom the GOP," **Bb**
- NYT, "A Parting Shot at Women's Rights," **Bb**

\* Second short writing assignment (strategy memo) due by 2pm on Friday, 3.27.

### Week 11

#### 3.31 The Business Lobby in Environmental Politics

- Guber and Bosso, "Framing ANWR: Citizens, Consumers, and the Privileged Position of Business," Chapter 2 in **K & K**
- Roberts, "The Sweet Hereafter," **Bb**

#### 4.2 The Foreign Policy Lobby

- Uslaner, "All in the Family? Interest Groups and Foreign Policy," **Bb**

### Week 12

#### 4.7 Group presentations

- Readings posted on the course website.

#### 4.9 Group presentations

- Readings posted on the course website.

### Week 13

#### 4.14 Interest Groups and Social Capital

- Cigler and Loomis, "Groups, Social Capital, and Democratic Orientations," **Bb**
- Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," **Bb**

#### 4.16 Group presentations

- Readings posted on the course website.

### Week 14

#### 4.21 Mayfest & Earthday: *No class*

4.23 Group presentations

- Readings posted on the course website.

Week 15

4.28 Wrap Up: Interest Groups and the American Political Future

- L & B, Ch. 8

5.1 Final exam is due by 4:00pm. Please submit your final exam electronically via the Blackboard course website.

Group project issues. You will be asked to choose one of the policy issues below, and encouraged to suggest an interest group (or set of groups) to represent. You will be assigned to a group based on these interests, if possible. Depending on class preferences, more specific issues may be selected within these broad categories, and the general contours of a hypothetical bill will be outlined.

- Agriculture/ Farm subsidies
- Energy/ Global warming
- Health care
- Immigration policy
- Regulation of the banking and financial services industry