

**TO:** GOVT 150 Students (American Political Institutions)

**FR:** Larry Evans

**DT:** September 2, 2008

**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, but the workload is heavy. 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. The readings are structured around six books 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. 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.

**Contact Information.** My office telephone extension is 1-3030 and my e-mail address is [clewan@wm.edu](mailto:clewan@wm.edu). For Fall 2008, my formal office hours will be Friday afternoons from 2:00 to 5:00, 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. 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:

*Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.*, by Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams, Jeremy C. Pope

*Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*, by Larry M. Bartels

*The Road to the White House 2008, 8<sup>th</sup> ed.*, by Stephen J. Wayne

*The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton*, by Stephen Skowronek

*Party Wars: Polarization And the Politics of National Policy Making*, by Barbara Sinclair

*Supreme Conflict: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Control of the United States Supreme Court*, by Jan Crawford Greenburg

There may be a few short readings added to the list. 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: Two brief analytical essays (10 percent each); a longer research paper (30 percent); an exam (30 percent); and class participation (20 percent). The essays will be five pages maximum (double-spaced) and will address the questions denoted below on the assignment schedule. Later in September, I will provide detailed expectations about the structure and contents of 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 1955-2002 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. A rough draft of the research paper will be due two 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

8/28	No assignment
9/2	Fiorina et al, Chapters 1-5
9/4	Fiorina et al, Chapters 6-10
9/9	Bartels, Chapters 1-3
9/11	Bartels, Chapters 4-5
9/16	Bartels, Chapters 6-8
9/18	Bartels, Chapters 9-10
9/23	Guest lecture
9/25	Wayne, Chapters 1-3

9/30	Wayne, Chapters 4-6
10/2	Wayne, Chapters 7-8
10/7	Wayne, Chapters 9-10
10/9	<b>First essay due:</b> Is the presidential selection process structured in a manner likely to produce competent chief executives?
10/16	Skowronek, Preface, Chapters 1-3
10/21	Skowronek, Chapters 4-5
10/23	Skowronek, Chapter 6
10/28	Skowronek, Chapter 7
10/30	Skowronek, Chapter 8
11/4	<b>Second essay due:</b> Which of Skowronek’s “recurrent structures of presidential authority” best fits the administration of George W. Bush?
11/6	Sinclair, Chapters 1-2
11/11	Sinclair, Chapters 3- 5
11/13	Sinclair, Chapters 6-7
11/18	Sinclair, Chapters 8-10
11/20	<b>Draft research papers due</b> Greenburg, Chapters 1-3
11/25	Greenburg, Chapters 4-7
12/2	Greenburg, Chapters 8-12
12/4	<b>Research papers due</b>
TBA	<b>Exam</b> (to occur during final exam period for relevant section)