Course Description

This course examines the current state of political parties within the U.S. political system. We will examine various aspects of parties – their organizational elements, citizen identification with parties, and the role of parties within the government. Our focus is on describing each of these three major elements, understanding the linkages among them, and assessing their influence within the electoral and policymaking spheres. A comparative approach will be employed when possible as we examine parties on the national, state, and local levels. Such a perspective will enable us to address several fundamental questions: Do political parties enhance or detract from representative democracy? Do the two major parties in the U.S. provide real policy alternatives to voters? Over time, have parties become too powerful? Or have they become too weak in the current candidate-centered electoral environment to be effective players within the political process? Party polarization is a major concern of many observers and this issue will often enter our discussions. To what extent have political parties become more polarized in recent years, what is responsible for this trend, and what implications does it have for politics and policymaking?

In addition to our substantive focus, we will also give attention to the methods used by scholars in answering important questions about political parties. One of our objectives is to assess the evidence uncovered by scholars. How do these findings comport with common perceptions or media accounts concerning political parties? While this is not a course on political science methodology, issues involving research design and analysis will play prominently in many of our class discussions.

Reading Materials

The following book is available for purchase in the bookstore:


In addition to the text, other required readings listed on the syllabus can be accessed through the class Moodle site for this course. The articles themselves (or links to them) are available for download.

Course Requirements

The grade for the course is determined by a student’s performance in the following areas:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance and Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>State Party Project</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-Term Exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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Letter grades will be determined as follows: A = 90 – 100 percent, B = 80 – 89 percent, C = 70 – 79 percent, D = 60 – 69 percent, and F = below 60 percent.
Classes are generally conducted in a lecture-discussion format so it is important to keep up with the readings and to come to class prepared. Students are strongly encouraged to take part in class discussions. In order to do this, it is necessary to complete the readings in advance and to spend time thinking about them in a critical manner. Also, please keep up with current political developments since these will often be used as examples in our discussions. I will occasionally ask you to provide a brief paragraph concerning the day’s assigned readings. I may also give you brief quizzes if I suspect that you are not keeping up with the readings. These assignments along with informed commentary and questions you provide in class throughout the semester will be assessed in calculating your participation grade. Attendance will also be checked periodically and will be used as a component of your grade.

State Party Project

A major portion of the course grade (25%) is determined by your work on a report and presentation about state party organizations on an assigned state. The report requires that you collect information on the party organizations, their structures, and their various activities during recent elections. Students will make brief presentations to the class on November 19 and 21 and a final report is due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, November 26. Details concerning the project will be provided in an additional handout.

Exams

There is a midterm and a final exam (dates are listed on the syllabus). These tests will consist of multiple-choice, short-answer, and/or brief essay questions. Note that makeup exams are all-essay exams and will only be administered when a student can produce a valid written excuse. If you anticipate a problem, please let me know as soon as possible. Also, for anyone who has special needs or who requires accommodations through Disability Services, please advise me of your situation in advance of the exams so arrangements can be made.

General Policies

Academic Honesty

Students are required to abide by the academic conduct policies outlined in the LSU Code of Student Conduct (http://www.lsu.edu/judicialaffairs). Examples of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to: cheating on exams, plagiarizing, buying or selling assignments, altering grades, and collaborating with others without permission. I reserve the right to investigate when I suspect a violation of any of these policies. All violations of the university’s academic conduct policies are turned over to the Dean of Students.

Classroom Etiquette

Please be considerate to those around you who are trying to listen, take notes, and participate. Please make every effort to be on time to class. Be seated and ready to begin at 10:30 and leave early only for emergencies. Turn cell phones and pagers to silent. Most importantly, do not talk during class. Disruptive students will be asked to leave immediately.

Recording Devices, Photography and Computers

No audio or video recording devices are allowed unless special permission is granted by the instructor. Please do not take photographs of the overheads. Photography of any kind is forbidden. This rule is strictly enforced during exams and during review of exam materials. All violations of this policy are turned over to the Dean of Students. You are free to use laptop computers and other electronic devices for class purposes (e.g., taking notes, looking up relevant information, etc.). But please do not simply play on the internet, check e-mail, or use social networking sites.

Late Assignments and Missed Work

Make every effort to take scheduled exams and hand in work on time. However, I recognize there are legitimate reasons for missing a deadline or an exam. The following reasons are some, but probably not all, of the excuses that are considered acceptable: a documented illness, a family emergency, some severe mechanical failure (related to transportation, computing, etc.), or a scientifically documented anomaly in the space-time continuum. Please note that most job-related issues are not considered acceptable excuses (although see university regulations concerning military duties, official events, etc.). For late assignments, penalties are assessed based upon the circumstances, but
will generally involve a substantial loss of points. Recognize that for reasons of fairness to other students in the class, credit cannot be given at the end of the semester for missed exams or papers not handed in. In other words, when you experience a significant problem that prevents you from meeting a deadline or taking a test, it is your responsibility to let me know about it in a timely manner and to make arrangements to make up the missed work. Excuses must be provided within one week of your return, NOT at the end of the semester. Excuse forms are available on this course’s Moodle site where they must be submitted along with any other accompanying documentation (a doctor’s note, etc.).

Graded Work

I do not make grades available on Moodle and I will not e-mail grades. I return major assignments and will allow time in class for you to view exams. You are also free to come by during my office hours to look at your tests. During office hours I am happy to review grades with you and talk with you about ways to improve your performance.

Graduate Credit or Honors Credit

For students taking this course for graduate credit or for those who wish to receive special Honors credit, it is the student’s responsibility to contact me to make appropriate arrangements.

Special Needs

For students who have special needs or require accommodations through Disability Services, please advise me of your situation so arrangements can be made.

Course Schedule

August 27  Introduction to the Course

- No reading assignment.

August 29  What Are Political Parties and Why Should We Study Them?


September 3  Approaches to Studying Parties

- Reading #5: “Appendix: A Brief Introduction to Regression.”
- Reading #6: “Important Definitions.”

September 5  Gauging Party Competition and Control

September 10  Party Organizations at the State and Local Levels

- Text: Hershey pp. 47-68.

September 12  Party Organizations at the National Level


September 17  Party Activists: Who They Are, What They Do, and Why They Do It?

- Text: Hershey pp. 91-106.

September 19  Political Parties in the Electorate


September 24  Party Identification


September 26  Changes in Party Identification and Voting Coalitions


October 1  Party Polarization in the Electorate?


October 3  Parties and Voter Participation

- Text: Hershey pp. 149-170.
October 8  
Party Financing: Sums and Sources, and Rules


October 10  
Mid-Term Exam

October 15  
How Parties “Choose” Candidates

- Text: Hershey pp. 171-188.

October 17  
Parties in Candidate Recruitment and Nomination


October 22  
Parties and Presidential Nominations


October 24  
Presidential Nominations Process


October 29  
Party Conventions


October 31  
Political Parties in the General Election


November 5  
Minor Parties in U.S. Elections

- Text: Hershey: Re-read pp. 36-46.
November 7  Fall Break

November 12  *Party in Government*

- **Text:** Hershey: pp. 257-295

November 14  *Party Influence in Legislatures*


November 19  ***Presentations***

November 21  ***Presentations***

November 26  *Party Influences on Representation*


November 28  Thanksgiving

December 3  *Party Influence on Policy*

- **Text:** Hershey, pp. 296-312.

December 5  *Parties and Democratic Governance: Summation and Review*

- **Text:** Hershey, pp. 313-327.

December 10  Final Exam in this classroom on Tuesday, December 10 from 7:30-9:30 a.m.