What’s the first thing you think of when you think about politics? For many of us, the answer to that question might have to do with current and controversial issues—abortion, immigration, health care. In this course, we will take a look behind the rhetoric and examine the political and policy factors that come into play to produce a more thorough understanding of these controversies. The bottom line concept to our discussions will be that of political power—what does it mean? Who has it? How does it impact our policy choices? What does a lack of power mean and how can it be overcome?

We will begin by describing various ways in which political scientists have defined and thought about political power (section I) and will describe/review the policymaking process and its relation to ideas about power (section II). Throughout these sections, and particularly in sections III and IV (power in action and Putting It Together), we will enhance our understanding through engaging in a series of simulations, debates and discussions, thus deepening the feel for ideas about power and the political process more generally.

A final section of the class will focus on ways groups and individuals who “lack” power may nonetheless attempt to transform their situations.

In sum, the learning objectives for this class are as follows:

- Identify key theories and models political scientists have used to understand political power and its role in the policy process.
- Compare/contrast the advantages and disadvantages of these theories and models and to apply them to current and controversial issues.
- To identify the debates, arguments and factors underlying some of the most current and controversial issues faced by modern day Americans.
- Locate yourself on a continuum: where do you stand on these important current controversies and why?
- Locate yourself on a continuum: which theory of power do you think is most applicable to the U.S. today?
- Incorporate other and alternative viewpoints into your ideas.
- Identify and apply the criteria which would improve your oral communications skills.
**Required Reading**
There is only one required text for this class. But don’t get excited! Additional readings (set of articles or book chapters) will be provided and will be available on Blackboard.

The required textbook is *Issues for Debate in American Public Policy* (CQ Press, 10th edition). It is available in the campus bookstore and at Mary Jane Books.

**Course Requirements:**
- Two Midterms: 2/10, short exam (half of class) – 10%; 3/26, midterm (whole class) – 15%  
- Final (5/10, 10:30 am – 12:30 pm) – 20%.  
- Seven 1-2 page short papers – 20% (one paper in November slightly longer—approximately 4 pages), 20%.  
- Attendance/participation/reading quizzes—20%.  
- Two oral presentations, one to a group and one to the class as a whole, 5%, 10% respectively.

**Attention:** The short papers will ask you to either react to class material or conduct preparatory research for the debates/simulations. They are intended to be short and get you thinking. The reaction papers will be due the class after we have discussed the issue you want to write about. Except for the longer one, they will be graded “plus,” “check” or “minus.”

**Notes**

**Attendance:** This course has a great deal of in class and collaborative work. You have to come to class. Each person is allowed one unexcused absence. Any other absence must be excused by the instructor before the absence or excused afterwards based on a medical note. Any unexcused absence after the first one will result in a half grade penalty per absence. Really! Repeated late arrivals will result in a warning and then also result in a half grade penalty per absence.

**Oral Discourse:** Taking this course fulfills the university’s general education requirement for oral discourse. (See [http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/general_education.html](http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/general_education.html) For more details of the requirements.)

**Reaction Papers:** The short papers will ask you to either react to class material or conduct preparatory research for the debates/simulations. They are intended to be short and get you thinking. The reaction papers will be due the class after we have discussed the issue you want to write about. Except for the longer one, they will be graded “plus,” “check” or “minus.”

**Papers should be turned in via e-mail** ([friedman@albany.edu](mailto:friedman@albany.edu)) **and by hard copy.**

- Length: 1 to 2 pages  
- No additional reading necessary unless otherwise specified.  
- cite info or quotes used  
- Include bibliography even if it’s just the text.

**Plagiarism:** The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Plagiarism is the use of someone else's work, words, or ideas as if they were your own without giving the original author credit by citing him or her. If you
have any questions about plagiarism, please contact me before submitting assignments for grading. Plagiarism violations will result in disciplinary action.

**Reading Schedule**—reading load somewhat heavier first month of class—schedule subject to change given progress and topic interest

**Part I: Definitions and Distribution of Power (1/20-2/12)**

* 2 short papers due
* First midterm: 2/10

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<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>1/22-1/29</td>
<td>Three Faces of Power</td>
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| 1/22 | The pluralist model: *the first face of power*  
Dahl (2005), *Who Governs?*, chapters: 11, 19, 24 |
Group discussion: read one article, and be prepared to comment on one other group’s article |
| 1/27 | Agenda Setting and Elite Control: *the second face of power*  
| 1/29 | False Consciousness (manipulating interests): *the third face of power*  
John Gaventa (1980), *Power and Powerlessness*, chapter 3 |
| 2/1-2/8 | Debates: The three faces of power applied (CQ researchers: pluralist vs. elite issues) |
| 2/1 | Discipline in Schools |
| 2/3 | Financial Bailout |
| 2/5 | Reproductive Ethics |
| 2/8 | Catch up and Review |
| 2/10 | Test #1 |
| 2/12 | No Class |

**Part II: Policy Process (2/17-2/24)**

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| 2/17-2/19 | Factors impacting public policy:  
T. R. Dye (2008), *Understanding Public Policy*, chapters: 1, 2, 12 |
| 2/22 | Goals: Deborah Stone (1997), *Policy Paradox*, chapters: 2 (equity) plus one other chapter from part two (security, liberty, efficiency) |
| 2/24 | Decision-making and GROUPTHINK: I. L. Janis (1982), *Groupthink*, chapters: 1 (for everyone), and read either 2 or 6 |


* 2 short papers due (due date is the class after we discuss the issue) on 2 of the 5 issues;

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<td>Student Aid</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/1</td>
<td>Preventing Cancer</td>
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<td>3/3</td>
<td>Middle-class Squeeze</td>
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3/5-3/8 Practice simulation: either environment (text, Carbon Footprint and Confronting Warming) or guns (text, Gun Rights, Wrongful Convictions
3/10 Debate Wrap up --what has been learned?-- prepare for simulations

**Part IV: Power in Action II: Putting it Together as policymakers (simulations)**

* Your longer (4-page paper due) either on Congress (3/19) or executive branch/foreign policy (4/14). Note: regardless of which paper you choose you are responsible for the preparatory work of the class simulation).

* Opportunity for an additional short paper

* Midterm, 3/26

3/12-3/15 Election simulation
3/17-3/22 The Role of Congress
Simulation: Making better policy (either on environment (text, Reducing Your Carbon Footprint; Confronting Warming)or gun rights (text, Gun Rights and Wrongful Convictions)
3/24 Review
3/26 Test #2

4/7-4/16 A Closer Look at Foreign Policy and Foreign Policy Making
4/7 Introduction
E. R. Wittkopf (2003), *American Foreign Policy*, chapter 11
R. H. Davidson and W. J. Oleszek (2010), *Congress and Its Members*, chapter 15
4/9-4/14 Collecting information:
CQ Researcher debates on Global Jihad (on Blackboard), Homeland Security, Guantanamo Base Plan and Mexico Drug War
4/16 Wrap up

**Part IV : From Powerlessness to Power: Representing Disadvantaged Groups**

4/21 New Definitions of Power (Wes lecture on Foucault)
4/26 CQ Researcher: Women in Sports (Blackboard)
4/28 CQ Researcher: Affirmative action
4/30 Wrap up, questions and review
5/3 Review and conclusions

**Final exam as scheduled by university**: Monday, 10-May, 10:30am - 12:30pm