Course Description:

This course will teach students to think critically about the relationship between the public and elected officials. Students will learn the key theories of political participation, how elected officials behave, and why politicians behave as they do. Specifically, students will gain insight into who participates in government, what activities they engage in, and why they do so. We will also cover the other side of the relationship to see how legislators vote and what model of governing they follow.

In a new twist on this issue, students will be discussing the impact that new technologies have on the ways we interact with our elected officials and vice versa. These issues will be pulled from today’s headlines to see what politicians are doing as we speak. Students will be expected to adapt the ideas of constituency from our texts to what politicians are doing today via new technologies such as Twitter, youtube, and other internet sites.

Class Meetings:

Session 1: Who Participates in Government and Why?
- Introduction and course overview
- What are the sources of public opinion?
- How does the public obtain information?
- What factors affect who participates in government?
- In what ways does the public participate in government?
- Trends in political participation
- Political Participation exercise

Session 2: Legislators and Constituents
- How do legislators connect with voters?
- How do legislators vote?
- The role of interest groups
- The role of parties

Session 3: The Presidency and the Public
- How does the President set the agenda?
- The effect of public opinion on the Presidency
The effectiveness of public appeals
The Presidency and new technologies

Session 4: The Courts, Bureaucracy and the Public
The impact of public opinion on the Supreme Court
The influence of juries on government
Course wrap-up and review

Requirements:

1) In-class participation: A small, but important, portion of your grade will be based on attendance, alertness, and participation in class discussions. When new topics are introduced, students will be expected to discuss the ideas presented in class, answer questions from the professor, and ask questions (if applicable).

2) Blackboard discussions: Since the time you have in Washington is limited and busy, I do not expect you to read the works we are discussing while you are here. I may give a few handouts or short pieces to review but the bulk of the reading will be done after you return home.

At the end of the syllabus is a list of readings that are relevant to this course. I will talk about many of them in class but I would like for you to have an opportunity to read portions of them for yourself. I will set up a Blackboard discussion for the 4 weeks after your return home. You will need to participate in 3 of the 4 weekly discussions. This entails reading the readings and commenting on them on Blackboard. Your entries do not have to be made at any particular time but they must be in by the end of each week they are due (which will be posted on Blackboard). The readings will also be made available on Blackboard.

The nature of the entries should be substantive and demonstrate that you have read the material. They do not have to be long, just a few paragraphs, but should be more than just a sentence or two. I will start each week with a discussion of my own so that you can see the type of commentary that I am looking for.

3) Political participation project and paper: After you return home, you are to engage in some form of political participation. Options include: writing a letter to your Member of Congress or other elected official about an issue of importance to you, writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper on an issue you read about in the news, attending a public meeting (e.g., school board, city council, public transportation meeting, etc.), attending an event hosted by an elected official, or other similar types of activities. In keeping with the theme
of the course, some of these activities may be done online if there is a virtual town hall meeting or something of the sort.

Let me know in advance of the activity what you will be doing so that I can make sure it is appropriate for the class. After you have completed this activity, you are to write a 3-5 page paper about your experience. What did you learn? What were you surprised about? Do you feel like your voice was heard? If you went to a public event, describe who attended and what happened. Did your experiences match up with what we learned about in class? If you wrote a letter to the editor or elected official, I would like you to also include a copy of your correspondence and any response you may have received. If you attended an event, please provide some sort of notice about the meeting whether it’s an email, website link, newspaper notice, etc.

3 Credit Students ONLY:

4) Final paper on Congressional or Presidential behavior: For those students who are taking the class for three credits, there is an additional paper that you must complete. For this paper, you will be expected to draw upon the class discussions, reading, and your experience with the political participation project to write about Congressional or Presidential behavior.

We will talk more about the possible paper topics at the end of class. The paper should be about 6-8 pages long. The three paper topics that you can choose from are as follows: 1) Why do citizens participate/not participate in government? 2) How to legislators interact with their constituents? Do constituents’ preferences matter? Why or why not? or 3) How to presidents influence policy? What role does the public play in the process?

Communication: Students must have access to Blackboard. Announcements about readings and syllabus updates will be sent using Blackboard to your university email address. Make sure your email address is updated on Blackboard so that you do not miss any important information. You will need to access Blackboard to upload your comments on the weekly readings and your papers. Also, the readings will be available on Blackboard. Contact me if you have any problems accessing Blackboard.

Academic Integrity: In this classroom, students are expected to adhere to the University’s academic integrity code, which specifically prohibit cheating and plagiarizing. The University’s academic integrity code can be found online at: http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.htm. Please see me or email me if you have any questions or are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism or cheating.

Grading Scale:

This course is graded on an A-F scale. A grade of an “A” will be awarded to those students whose work is superior, demonstrates mastery over the topics covered in class,
and conveys thoughtful reflection in written assignments. Assignments are turned in on time and such a student is attentive and interested in class. A “B” grade will be awarded to students who turn in good work. A grade of a “C” will be awarded for average work. Substandard, incomplete, or otherwise unacceptable work will receive either a “D” or an “F.”

1 Credit Course Requirements and Grading Scale

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<th>Requirement</th>
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<tr>
<td>Paper on Congressional or Presidential Behavior</td>
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Readings:

Below are the readings that I will be referring to throughout the course. I understand that you won’t have time to read them while you are in D.C. However, over the 4 weeks following class time, you should read the articles and chapters for each week they are assigned.

Week 1:


Week 2:

Week 3:


Week 4:

