Syllabus for Political Parties

Richard M. Skinner, Rollins College
POLITICAL SCIENCE 350A: POLITICAL PARTIES

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Political parties are a fundamental means of political participation in the United States and a major way that political leaders mobilize citizens for action. In our system of federalism and separation of powers, parties help bring together officeholders to make policy. While parties are not mentioned in the Constitution, they are as central to our government as the Presidency or the Congress.

Yet Americans often express their dissatisfaction with “partisanship.” They deride political parties as corrupt and divisive. By contrast, political scientists tend to view political parties favorably for their role in mobilizing voters and overcoming the divisions inherent in our system of government. Parties also provide a means for ordinary people to hold politicians accountable.

For many years, observers saw political parties as losing their traditional importance in our system. But this trend, if it ever existed, appears to have reversed. While many voters express negative opinions of the political parties, Americans identify more closely with them than they have since the 1950s. Party identification remains the single best predictor of voting. Congressional parties have become more polarized than they had been in a generation. Recent presidents, such as Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, have projected more partisan and ideological images than their predecessors.

In this class, we will examine the roles that political parties play in the American political system. We will study the history of American political parties, beginning with the battle between Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton over the nation’s future, through the development of mass political parties under Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren, the changes wrought by Progressivism and the New Deal, and the fluctuation of partisanship in recent years. We will then examine how parties shape elections for both candidates and voters and how they shape the relationship between Congress and the President.

COURSE GRADE:
Midterm: 25%
Final Exam: 30%
Bibliography 5%
Rough draft 10%
Research Paper: 20%
Attendance and Participation: 10%
ATTENDANCE: Attendance is mandatory. Each unexcused absence beyond the third will lower your final grade by one-third of a letter. Please notify me in advance of any unavoidable absences, especially those due to ill health. I will not allow people to take exams except on designated exam days, except in extraordinary circumstances, supported by a note from a doctor, dean, clergyperson or similar circumstances.

LATE PAPERS: After the first 24 hours after a deadline, late papers will be penalized one-third of a letter per day. No late papers will be accepted after the class following a deadline.

BOOKS:

James Reichley, The Life of the Parties.
Alan Abramowitz, The Disappearing Center
John F. Bibby and L. Sandy Maisel, Two Parties or More?
Stephen Wayne, The Road to the White House 2008

RESEARCH PAPER: Students must write a 10-to-15 page research paper about a subject concerning political parties. I expect to hear from you frequently about your progress.

Topic due September 9. Simply inform me (preferably by e-mail) what topic you will study. I must approve your topic. When choosing a topic, I recommend that you consult with me early and often.

Prospectus due September 23. Your prospectus should be 1-2 pages long and explain why you have chosen this topic, why it is important, and how you intend to conduct your research.

Bibliography due October 7. Your bibliography should list those works you intend to use in writing your research paper. Explain the importance of each work and how it fits into your overall project. I expect that you will list at least 5-6 books or articles.

Rough draft due November 11.

Research paper due December 2.

ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION: I expect that you attend every class and do all the assigned reading. I also expect that you participate in class discussion and all other activities.
All other readings will be on electronic reserve

August 24: Orientation

August 26: Parties in the American System
   Hetherington and Larson, chs. 1-2
   Reichley, ch. 1

August 31 – September 7: The Creation of American Political Parties
   Reichley, chs. 2-4

September 9-14:: The Nineteenth Century
   Reichley, ch. 5-8
   Wayne, ch. 1

September 16-21: Progressivism and the New Deal
   Reichley, chs. 9-13

September 23-28: Challenges to the Parties; A New Partisan Era?
   Reichley, chs. 14-21
   Green and Coffey, chs. 1, 16-19
   Abramowitz, ch. 1

October 5: Midterm

October 7-19: Parties & Elections
   Hetherington and Larson, chs. 4 & 6
   Green and Coffey, chs. 6-8, 10
   Wayne, ch. 2
   Abramowitz, chs. 2-6

October 21-28: Presidential Nominations & Elections
   Hetherington and Larson, ch. 3
   Wayne, chs. 3-8
   Green and Coffey, chs. 3-4, 9

November 2-4: Third Parties & Independent Candidacies
   Bibby and Herrnson (entire)
   Green and Coffey, chs. 14-15

November 9-11: Party-in-government – Congress
   Hetherington and Larson, ch. 5
   Green and Coffey, chs. 20-21
   Abramowitz, ch. 7
November 16-18: Party-in-government – Presidency
    Green and Coffey, ch. 20

November 23-30: Party in governance
    Abramowitz, ch. 8

December 2: Parties and American Democracy
    Hetherington and Larson, ch. 7
    Wayne, ch. 9

FINAL EXAM: December 6, 8-10 AM