This course examines the primary institutions of U.S. national governance – how they act, interact, and are influenced by factors within and beyond them. Four national institutions are the main focus of reading and class discussion: Congress, the presidency, courts, and bureaucracies. Other important forces (i.e. public opinion, parties and elections, the media, interest groups) are of concern in this course mainly due to their influence on these four institutions. We employ various perspectives and case examples to gain practical insight into the behavior of, and the challenges facing, authoritative institutional actors. Major themes addressed include power (why some actors, interests, ideas and values fare well in this institutional milieu, while others fare less well) and change (the conditions under which any given state of affairs proves durable or temporary, easily replicated or difficult). Intended to promote effective functioning in professional settings, the course also contains a significant memo-writing component described in greater detail below.

Eight books are required for this course. In addition, various shorter items will be available on Canvas. The reading load is demanding but reasonable, accessible and often entertaining. You will be expected to keep up with the reading and, ideally, to complete each week’s reading before the class to which it pertains. This is important to assure fruitful discussion. You are advised that the written examination will concentrate on this material, including any items made available during the semester! I should note that the Canvas course space may also include some items not required but made available for those who may wish to examine for themselves an item mentioned in class discussion. All required reading, and only required reading, appears on the syllabus.

**Final Grade Calculation:** Policy Memoranda (50%); Exam (30%); Participation (20%). There is obviously a rigor problem in grading for class participation. The practice in this course is to administer “rough justice” along the following lines: regular attendance and participation (A); regular attendance but with little or no participation (B); irregular attendance and little or no participation (B-). Lower grades are reserved for persons who “bail out” more demonstrably.
Office Hours and Communications: Hours to be arranged by appointment. E-mail will constitute a regular means of student-instructor communication. However, whenever possible, the instructor will make available time immediately after class for individual discussion.

POLICY MEMORANDA

Along with class participation and the final examination on the reading, students will be graded on a series of four policy memoranda submitted at fixed intervals. Each memorandum (except the Action Memo) should be a 4-to-7 page double-spaced exposition written for a professional colleague or superior who needs the information or analysis. (Memos in the “real world” are single-spaced but double-spacing facilitates the detailed editing and comment that are an essential part of course instruction. However, the Action Memo described below is to be single-spaced.) Each memorandum should succinctly address the assigned topic and be written with clarity and care. (Each student should have a copy of my updated “memo on memos” and I will provide a copy to anyone who needs it.)

All of any student’s memoranda should deal with the same policy issue (e.g. immigration reform, health care reform, or climate change). You might also concentrate on some narrower component of such matters (e.g. visa-approval procedures, Medicare spending, specific alternatives to fossil fuel use). Each memo should be self-contained, permitting a reader to digest it separately from all other sources. The issue should be currently active and prominently involve the national government of the United States (although other levels of government will often be relevant). Please submit each in the assigned sequence, on the scheduled date, and in the colored folder distributed for memo collection and submission.

It is advisable to select an issue that already interests you and about which you already have some knowledge. If you have difficulty settling on a topic, try reading a major newspaper for several consecutive days (or browsing recent issues of the National Journal or CQ Weekly, two policy-focused weekly magazines accessible online). You must obviously research the issue carefully but your memoranda should not use footnotes or a formal bibliography. Where appropriate cite sources in parentheses in the text and offer a final page entitled “References” where you list all such sources, including any that may have proved useful but which you did not explicitly cite in the body of the memo. Do not lift whole chunks of the memorandum from web sites. Remember that, even today, some sources (especially books) remain unavailable on-line and others (e.g. proprietary databases and at least one prominent national newspaper, The Wall Street Journal) may not be freely available. Fortunately students may avail themselves of both the course assistant and (on a limited basis, as she is able to make herself available) Judy Markowitz of the McKeldin Library staff. It is anticipated that the September 12 session with Ms. Markowitz will address most questions.
You must submit five items (a brief opening proposal and four memos) during the semester. Please submit each in the assigned sequence, and on the scheduled dates indicated below. A single sheet of paper handed to the instructor will suffice for the proposal stage. Memo submissions should be made in both of two ways. One way is via the colored folders handed out on the first day of class. Retain all your memos, as you accumulate them, in this folder, hole-punched and with the most recent submission on top. The second mode of submission is via e-mail as a Word attachment. This dual submission method affords the instructor enhanced flexibility in reacting to student submissions and helps guard against both plagiarism and misplaced memos. (Please do NOT keep course handouts in your folder.)

The five items include the following:

**Statement of Issue Selection** – Submit a brief typed statement (one-page maximum) indicating the issue you will examine in the series of memoranda. The instructor must be able to judge from your statement whether the issue you have chosen conforms to the requirements specified for the course. **Due September 19**

**Memorandum #1: Issue Description and Background** – The first memorandum will describe the issue and options facing policymakers. It explains why the issue is important and where matters stand at present. The memorandum should provide relevant background information, including past developments that bear on the current status of the issue. You should offer the most relevant available quantitative information that would assist a reader in grasping the size, scope, complexity, severity, uncertainty or other significant measurable aspects of the issue. (However you will not have to undertake anything remotely resembling original primary research.) Finally, your memo should clearly offer a summary preview of actions or decisions that might be taken in the months ahead. **Due October 3**

**Memorandum #2: Political Analysis** – Discuss the main organized interests active in the issue. Who are they? What do they want? What are they doing to get it? What particular opportunities or constraints (including institutional opportunities and constraints) do these groups face? Is public opinion a factor? The more you can tell about (and compare) the strategies/tactics of the groups and the larger political environments they face, the stronger will be your memorandum. You may wish to examine web sites maintained by the groups, assessing the quality and effectiveness of their presentations and arguments. (If you do this, append relevant printouts to your memo.) **Due November 7**

**Memorandum #3 and #4: Policy Recommendations Memo and Action Memo** – The Policy Recommendations Memo should present and defend a course of action. In your judgement, what should be the preferred outcome or option? Why? To the extent possible you should try to integrate political analysis into
your policy analysis. Do this by thinking through how the reform you propose seems likely to advantage or disadvantage particular interests or ideas going forward. Remember that enacting a piece of legislation, transforming administrative procedures, or promulgating new regulations rarely settles anything permanently and always has subsequent political and policy implications. For example, if Congress were to (at your suggestion in Memo 3 and 4) outsource weapons-system acquisition to a nonpartisan board of experts, this would greatly transform (but surely not end) the politics of weapons acquisition. More generally, any policy-design (or re-design) proposal affects an array of future opportunities, incentives and audiences. And this, in turn, promotes a new status quo that renders some future events more likely and others less so. The Policy Recommendations Memo should accompany a **one-page single-spaced** Action Memo drafted for a plausible superior. It should distill all the concerns accumulated in your prior writing, reducing them to a format that a president, cabinet secretary or member of Congress might read if contemplating imminent action in your area of interest. Clarity, brevity, precision, persuasiveness, sensitivity to relevant political considerations – all should characterize every memo but most especially the Action Memo. **Due December 12**

If you wish to revise a graded memo in the hope of receiving a higher grade, be advised that:
- each student will be limited to **one** revision throughout the semester;
- revised memos can earn at most a one-notch increase in grade (e.g. from a B- to a B);
- only the first two memos can be revised for re-grading, and;
- revised memos must have received an initial grade of B+ or lower.

**COURSE BOOKS**


John W. Kingdon, *America the Unusual* (Thomson-Wadsworth)

William T. Gormley, Jr. and Steven J. Balla, Bureaucracy and Democracy: Accountability and Performance (Sage/CQPress)
Jonathan Rauch, Government’s End: Why Washington Stopped Working (Public Affairs)

SCHEDULE OF READINGS, DISCUSSIONS, AND MEMORANDA
An (h) next to an item indicates a handout to be made available on Canvas.

September 5: Course Introduction and Policy Process Overview
Kingdon, entire
Wilson, chapter 16
“Issue Agenda” (h)
“Basic Distinctions Among Systems of Public Choice” (h)
“Path Dependence” (h)
“Concepts of Society” (h)
“Strategies for Imposing and Avoiding Losses” (h)
“Hypothesized Effects of Institutions on Loss Imposition” (h)

September 12: Memo Research Guidance Session in McKeldin Library 6101 (Judy Markowitz)
The absence of assigned reading for this date allows students an opportunity to catch up or forge ahead in the course reading and to solidify their choices of memo topic. Students are advised to make effective use of the time.

September 19: Influences on Policy -- Parties, Polls and Elections
John Judis, “Race Didn’t Decide the Election,” Los Angeles Times (November 9, 2008). (h)
Pew Research Center on the People & the Press, Beyond Red v. Blue – (sections 1, 2, and 3 only) also available on-line at http://people-press.org/2011/05/04/beyond-red-vs-blue-the-political-typology/
Michael McDonald, “Five Myths About Turning Out the Vote,” The Washington Post (October 29, 2006). (h)
Michael W. Link and Robert W. Oldendick, “Good Polls, Bad Polls: How Can You Tell?” (h)
Tailored excerpt from It’s Even Worse than It Looks by Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein (h) [Note: This item is not on Canvas and will arrive via email.]
British Election Results, 2005 (h) *Due: Selection of Memo Series Topic*

**September 26: Influences on Policy -- Interest Groups**
Rauch, entire

**October 3: Influences on Policy – Policymakers and Their Needs**
Heymann, pp. 1-169. *Due: Memo #1* (please submit in folder and as a Word attachment)

**October 10: Entrepreneurs and Coalitions – A Practitioner Perspective**

**October 17: Entrepreneurs and Coalitions: Political Science Perspectives**
Arnold, chapters 1-6.
Barbara Sinclair, “Leading the New Majorities,” PS: Political Science and Politics (January 2008): 89-93 (h) and “Barack Obama and the 111th Congress: Politics as Usual?” *Extensions* (Spring 2009) (h)

**October 24: Legislative Policymaking -- Case Studies in Policy Change**
Arnold, chapters 7-9.
Wilson, chapter 13.

**October 31: The Search for Presidential Success**
Wilson, chapter 14.
Gormley and Balla, chapter 3.
“Key Contrasts in the American Presidency” (h)
Brendan Nyhan, “Prisoner of Circumstance” (h)

**November 7: Managing and Maintaining Agencies and Programs**
Wilson, chapters 1-12.
Gormley and Balla, chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5.
*Due: Memo #2* (please submit in folder with the graded first memo and as a Word attachment)

**November 14: Crisis, Response, and Reform**
Wilson, chapters 17-20.
Gormley and Balla, chapters 6 and 7.

**November 21: Aftermath – What Happens After Reform Happens**
Patashnik, entire.
November 28 – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

December 5: The Influences on Courts
Greenhouse, entire

December 12: The Influence of Courts and Final Remarks
Selected SCOTUS cases (h)
Due: Memos #3 and #4 (Please submit in the folder with all prior memos and as one Word attachment)

FINAL EXAMINATION

A take-home final exam will be distributed by email on December 12. The completed exam will be due as a single Word attachment on Friday, December 20 by noon.