COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the ways that citizens, firms, and institutions struggle to gain representation through organized interest groups in the United States. We attempt to negotiate an understanding of groups that neither quixotically champions their representative functions nor cynically decries their supposed omnipotence. Instead, we situate groups within a larger context of multiple actors and institutions vying for political influence. We use an organizational perspective to evaluate this behavior. The course begins by establishing several frameworks for evaluating interest group politics. We then explore how groups face dilemmas of collective action and (sometimes) overcome them through the formation of social movements and lobbying organizations. We consider how groups form relationships with political parties and other political elites in Washington, DC. We evaluate group strategies for lobbying Congress and achieving influence over elections, bureaucratic decision making, and judicial processes. The course concludes and by evaluating the place of interest groups in the broader American political system.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. *Class Participation.* Students are expected to participate in class. To prepare for class, students should read materials provided through CTools by the instructor for that day. While in class, students should regularly offer comments and participate in class discussions. Strong participation is based not on the *quantity* of student comments and participation, but on the *quality* of those comments and that participation. Participation grades will not depend directly on attendance, but excessive absences will make it difficult for students to participate actively. 150 points

2. *Short Assignments.* Students are expected to complete 8 short writing assignments, ranging in length from 250 words to 750 words, adding to a total of 4,250 words (17 pages) for the entire
semester. Students will select one or more interest groups of their own choosing as a basis for writing short analyses that draw upon the concepts and theories of the course. Assignments are listed on the course outline and should be submitted to CTools on the day that they are due. 150 points.

3. **Midterm Exam.** An in-class, closed-book midterm exam will be given in class on Monday, February 17. The exam will consist of short-answer questions and will emphasize theoretical concepts and their application. 200 points

4. **Final Exam.** An in-class, closed-book final exam will be administered in 1245 North Quadrangle on Wednesday, April 30 from 4pm-6pm. The exam will be a mix of short-answer and essay questions based on the reading materials, lectures, and discussions during the semester. 200 points.

**GRADES**

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**ACADEMIC HONESTY**

All students are required to abide by the academic honesty guidelines of the University of Michigan. Among other things, this means: (1) Students must submit only their own, original work in fulfillment of course requirements; (2) Consulted works must be cited using an accepted documentation style; and (3) Students must provide truthful representations to the professor on issues such as reasons for missing class. The professor reserves the right to clarify how this policy applies on specific assignments prior to the commencement of those assignments. Students requiring additional clarification are strongly urged to consult with the professor before submitting questionable work. Violating this policy may cause a student to suffer severe grade penalties, failure of the class, academic probation, and/or expulsion.

**SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS**

If you think you need an accommodation for a disability, please notify the professor at least two weeks prior to the time when the accommodation will be needed. Some aspects of this course, the assignments, the in-class activities, and the way the course is usually taught may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you notify the professor of your needs, we can work with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to help us determine appropriate academic accommodations. SSD (734-763-3000; http://www.umich.edu/sswd) typically recommends accommodations through a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form. Any information you provide is private and confidential and will be treated as such.
COURSE OUTLINE

PART ONE: Frameworks of Interest Group Politics

1. **Wednesday, January 8.** Introduction to the Course

   **Required Readings**

   **Recommended Readings**

2. **Monday, January 13.** Interest Groups, the Constitution, and American Political Culture

   **Required Readings**


   **Recommended Reading**

3. **Wednesday, January 15.** The Development of Interest Groups

   **Assignment #1 – History.** Select an interest group of your own choosing. Visit the Web page of that organization to investigate the history of its founding. Write one paragraph that summarizes the circumstances under which the organization was founded. Write a second paragraph in which you briefly analyze the major political factors that prompted the organization’s founding. Your brief paper should be about 250 words and is worth 10 points. Please submit it to CTools by 11pm on Tuesday, January 21.
Required Readings


Recommended Readings


4. **Monday, January 20** – No Class for Martin Luther King Day

5. **Wednesday, January 22**. Collective Action in Small Groups

   Assignment #1 – History. Due on Tuesday, January 21 at 11pm.

   Required Reading


6. **Monday, January 27**. Collective Action in Large Groups

   Required Readings


PART TWO: Inside Interest Groups

7. **Wednesday, January 29**. Attracting Members

   Assignment #2 – Membership. Select an interest group of your own choosing, which may or may not be the same one as in Assignment #1. (The idea is for you to choose the same group. However, this is not required.) Visit the organization’s Web site to investigate its requirements for membership. Write one paragraph in which you explain the requirements for membership in the organization. Write a brief analysis in which you speculate as to why the organization has chosen the membership requirements that it has. If you were consulting
for the organization, what adjustments would you recommend in its membership criteria, if any, and why? Your brief paper should be about 500 words and is worth 10 points. Please submit it to CTools by 11pm on Sunday, February 2.

Required Readings


Recommended Reading


8. Monday, February 3. Organizational Identity

Assignment #2 – Membership. Due at 11pm on Sunday, February 2.

Assignment #3 – Identity. Select an interest group of your own choosing, which may or may not be the same one as in Assignments #1 and #2. (The idea is for you to choose the same group. However, this is not required.) Conduct a brief search of newspaper articles about your group using InfoTrac, LexisNexis, Google News, or another search engine with which you are familiar. Select and read a few news stories that mention your organization. Write a short assessment of the nature of the identity of your organization. What is your analysis of the major problems with the organization’s identity? How might those problems be addressed by the organization? What constraints does the organization face in addressing those problems? Your brief paper should be about 750 words and is worth 25 points. Please submit it to CTools by 11pm on Sunday, February 9.

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


9. **Wednesday, February 5.** Group Cohesion

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Reading**


10. **Monday, February 10.** Governance and Leadership

**Assignment #3 – Identity.** Due on Sunday, February 9 at 11pm.

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**

11. **Wednesday, February 12.** Institutionalization: When Social Movements become Interest Groups

- Students will have the opportunity to ask questions about the upcoming midterm exam during class.

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**Review Session for Midterm Exam**

- Review session will be held at 6pm on Wednesday, February 12 in 753 Dennison.

12. **Monday, February 17.** MIDTERM EXAM in class

**PART THREE: Parties, Groups, and Elections**

13. **Wednesday, February 19.** Issues, Agendas, and Political Conflict

**Assignment #4 – Issues.** Select an interest group of your own choosing. Search for a wide range of information about your organization using both Internet-based and library-based information sources. How would you describe the issue focus of your organization? Do these issues rest on major cleavages or minor cleavages? How has this position (vis-à-vis the cleavages) changed over time? What is your assessment of how the issue focus of your organization affects its political circumstances? Your brief paper should be about 750 words and is worth 25 points. Please submit it to CTools by 11pm on Tuesday, February 24.

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Reading**


**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


15. **Wednesday, February 26.** Group Strategies in Elections

**Assignment #4 – Issues.** Due on Tuesday, February 24 at 11pm.

**Assignment #5 – Campaign Finance.** Select an interest group of your own choosing. Go to www.opensecrets.org and view all information about the group’s electoral participation. Write one paragraph about your evaluation of the status of the group in the electoral arena and what evidence supports that view. Is your organization a major player, a minor player, or somewhere in between? Write a second paragraph in which you explain briefly why the group has that status. Your brief paper should be about 250 words and is worth 15 points. Please submit it to CTools by 11pm on Tuesday, March 11.

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


16. **Monday, March 3.** NO CLASS for Spring Break.

17. **Wednesday, March 5.** NO CLASS for Spring Break.

**PART FOUR: Interest Groups in the Legislative Process**

18. **Monday, March 10.** Lobbyists

**Required Readings**


Recommended Readings

19. Wednesday, March 12. Lobbying and Policy Change

Assignment #5 – Campaign Finance. Due on Tuesday, March 11 at 11pm.

Assignment #6 – Lobbying. Select an interest group of your own choosing. Go to http://soprweb.senate.gov/index.cfm?event=selectfields and view all information about its lobbying activities. Write one paragraph about your evaluation of the status of the group in the lobbying arena and what evidence supports that view. Is your organization a major player, a minor player, or somewhere in between? Write a second paragraph in which you explain briefly why the group has that status. Your brief paper should be about 250 words and is worth 15 points. Please submit it to CTools by 11pm on Tuesday, March 23.

Required Readings

Recommended Readings

20. Monday, March 17. Framing

Assignment #7 – Framing. Select an interest group of your own choosing and select one issue on which that group works. Explain two possible framings for that issue. Which framing is more advantageous for your group and why? How might your group be able to promote the acceptance of that framing? What might be some barriers that would prevent the acceptance of that framing? Your brief paper should be about 750 words and is worth 25 points. Please submit it to CTools by 11pm on Sunday, March 30.
Required Readings


Recommended Readings


21. Wednesday, March 19 – Online Organizing

- Guest Lecture by Anna Galland, Executive Director, MoveOn.org

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


22. Wednesday, March 24. Outside Lobbying

Assignment #6 – Lobbying. Due on Tuesday, March 23 at 11 pm.

Required Readings


Recommended Reading

23. Wednesday, March 26. Nonprofit Organizations

Required Reading

24. Monday, March 31. Issue Networks

Assignment #7 – Framing. Due on Sunday, March 30 at 11pm.

Required Readings


Recommended Reading


25. Wednesday, April 2. Coalitions

Assignment #8 – Coalitions. Select an interest group of your own choosing and identify one coalition of which it is a member. Information about that coalition membership may be available on the Web, but gathering it may require you to contact the organization with an e-mail and/or a phone call. Provide a brief analysis of your organization’s participation in that coalition. Why do you think that your organization participates in this coalition? What role
does it likely play (e.g., core, specialist, tag along)? What are the advantages of your organization’s participation in the coalition and what are the drawbacks? How do you think that other organizations in the coalition view your organization, and why? Your brief paper should be about 750 words and is worth 25 points. Please submit it to CTools by 11pm on Sunday, April 13.

Required Readings


Recommended Reading


PART FIVE: The Multi-Institutional Environments of Interest Groups

26. **Monday, April 7.** The Presidency and Interest Group Liaison

Required Reading


27. **Wednesday, April 9.** Bureaucratic Rulemaking and Regulation (Case: Environmental Lobbying)

Required Reading


Recommended Readings


28. Monday, April 14. Friends of the Court (Case: Souter Replacement on Court)

Assignment #8 – Coalitions. Due on Sunday, April 13 at 11pm.

Required Readings


29. Wednesday, April 15. Lobbying on Foreign Policy

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


CONCLUSION: Interest Groups and the Political System

30. Monday, April 21. Interest Groups and Representation

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


31. Wednesday, April 30. 4pm-6pm. FINAL EXAM.