

Illinois State University  
Department of Politics and Government

**POL 214: U.S. POLITICAL PARTIES and INTEREST GROUPS**  
Fall 2009

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Class Meetings: T, TH 2:00-3:15 PM  
Location: 207 Schroeder Hall



***Course Description***

Political parties and interest groups have long served important functions as key “linkage institutions,” or political fixtures that facilitate interactions between the citizenry and government of the United States. Nevertheless, recent political developments – including especially the protracted 2008 presidential election season – have raised serious questions about parties and interest groups’ rightful place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century American political system. A primary objective of this course is to provide a forum for exploring the reasons behind the current state of affairs and think about whether and how it might be reformed. To this end, we’ll spend the first half of the course considering how the party system and interest group sector have developed over the course of American political history to produce the situation we’re familiar with today. Along the way, we’ll zero in on several of their essential features, including the three facets (“PIG, PIE, and PO”) that make up all political parties, the United States’ two-party tendency and its consequences for “3<sup>rd</sup> parties,” and the relative “irresponsibility” of the American party system. In the second half, we’ll take up three contemporary areas of controversy: The presidential nomination process, campaign finance, and the influence of special interest lobbyists on Congress.

***Learning Outcomes Goals***

This course was designed to promote the Politics and Government Department’s four learning outcomes goals (LOGs) for its undergraduate program: enhanced understanding of and ability to evaluate political institutions and processes (LOG #1) and improved research, written and oral communication, and civic engagement skills (LOGs #2, #3, and #4, respectively). In their course-specific formulation, POL 214’s objectives include:

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Means for its achievement</b>
Gain a broad and sophisticated understanding of the American political party system and interest group sector	1. In-class lectures, discussions, and activities about U.S. party and interest groups’ historical development, essential features, and domains of controversy 2. Completion of two take-home exams
Develop an in-depth knowledge of at least two national interest group organizations	Completion of the interest group research project
Improve research, communication, and civic engagement skills	1. Completion of the interest group research project 2. Completion of two take-home exams

## ***Requirements and Grading***

POL 214 has three requirements: Engagement and participation in the classroom, satisfactory completion of two take-home exams, and satisfactory completion of all components of a semester-long, multi-stage research and writing project.

### *1. Engagement and Participation (500 points)*

This requirement entails consistent, active, and insightful participation in class discussions and activities. Regular attendance and completion of reading assignments are expected as necessary prerequisites for fulfilling these criteria, but do not satisfy the requirement in and of itself. You are strongly encouraged to meet with me at least once during the course of the semester for a progress report.

### *2. Two Take-Home, Open-Book Exams (250 points for each exam; 500 points total):*

- Midterm      Hard copy due at the **start of class on Thursday, October 15**
- Final         Hard copy due on **Monday, December 7 at 4:00 PM**

Both exams will call for you to reflect, in written form, on current political events and discourse in light of course concepts and frameworks. Additional information about these exams will be provided in class.

### *3. Interest Group Research Project (100 points for each of 10 project components; 1000 points total)*

Thanks to a grant from ISU's Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology (CTLT), we'll be participating in a semester-long project designed to help you enhance the breadth and depth of your knowledge about interest groups in the United States by conducting research, writing in various formats, and giving presentations on several individual interest group organizations. Additional information about this project will be provided during the second week of class.

## *Grading Scale*

A maximum of 2000 total points can be earned in this course. Letter grades for the course will be assigned according to the following scale:

<b>Points Earned</b>	<b>Letter Grade</b>
1800-2000	A
1600-1799	B
1400-1599	C
1200-1399	D
0-1199	F

## *Policies*

- Plagiarism, cheating, and all other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this course. All submitted work must be your own and any use of outside sources must be properly cited.
- Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented disabilities. Contact the ISU Office of Disabilities Concerns, 350 Fell Hall, phone: 438-5833; 438-8260 (TDD).
- The Julia N. Visor Academic Center (formerly the University Center for Learning Advancement) provides a variety of free academic support services for ISU students. See <http://www.ucollege.ilstu.edu/mentoring/visor/> for more information.

## *Texts*

There are no required books to be purchased for this course. There are five required readings (two for 8/20; one each for 9/10, 9/24, and 11/10), which will be made available as PDF files uploaded to Blackboard.

## *Schedule*

### **I. Overview**

Tuesday, August 18 – Introduction to Political Parties and Interest Groups

Thursday, August 20 – Early Republic Viewpoints

*Reading assignment (to be completed before class):*

1. Publius [James Madison], *Federalist Paper #10* (1787)
2. Alexis de Tocqueville, “Political Associations in the United States,” chapter 12 from *Democracy in America*, vol. 1 (1835)

Tuesday, August 25 – **Interest Group Project Training**

Thursday, August 27 – **Interest Group Project Training \*\*in 213C in Milner Library\*\***

Tuesday, September 1 – The Problem of Collective Action

Thursday, September 3 – No Class

*Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association in Toronto*

### **II. How Did We Get to Where We Are Today?**

Tuesday, September 8 – The First Party System

Thursday, September 10 – The Second Party System

*Reading Assignment (to be completed before class):*

- “The Country Demands the Existence of Parties,” chapter 2 (pp. 33-45) from Joel H. Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838-1893* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991).

Tuesday, September 15 – Sectional Conflict and the Third Party System

Thursday, September 17 – Voting and Elections in the Golden Age of Parties

Tuesday, September 22 – Party System Reform in the Progressive and New Deal Eras

Thursday, September 24 – The Rise of the Interest Group Sector

*Required reading (to be completed before class):*

Daniel J. Tichenor and Richard A. Harris, “Organized Interests and American Political Development,” *Political Science Quarterly* 116:4 (2003) pp. 587-612.

Tuesday, September 29 & Thursday, October 1 – **First Interest Group Presentations**

Tuesday, October 6 – Why “3<sup>rd</sup> Parties” Tend Not to Flourish in the US: The Case of 1948

Thursday, October 8 – 1960s: McGovern-Fraser Reforms and the “Interest Group Explosion”

Tuesday, October 13 – The Contemporary Party System and Interest Group Sector

Thursday, October 15 – **Midterm Exam Due at the Start of Class!**

### III. Some Contemporary Issues and Controversies

Tuesday, October 20 & Thursday, October 22 – Presidential Nomination Process Backgrounder

Tuesday, October 27 – Should the Nomination Process Be Reformed?

Thursday, October 29 – **11:59 PM: Deadline to Post Opinion Essay on Blackboard**

Tuesday, November 3 and Thursday, November 5 – Campaign Finance Backgrounder

**Nov. 5 @11:59 PM: Deadline to post peer review comments on opinion essays**

Tuesday, November 10 & Thursday, November 12 – Campaign Finance: Recent Developments

*Reading Assignment (to be completed before class):*

Excerpts from the majority opinion in *FEC v. Wisconsin Right to Life* (2007)

Tuesday, November 17 & Thursday, November 19 – Are Lobbyists Good or Bad for America?

**Nov. 19 @11:59 PM: Deadline to post revised opinion essay on Blackboard**

November 21 – November 29: Thanksgiving Break!

Tuesday, December 1 & Thursday, December 3 – **Second Interest Group Presentations**

Finals Week

*Monday, December 7*

@ 4:00 PM: **Deadline to submit final exam** – bring a hard copy to my office (405 SCH) or leave it for me in the Politics & Government Dept. office (401SCH)

@ 11:59 PM: **Deadline to post letter to the editor on Blackboard**

*Thursday, December 10*

@ 11:59 PM: **Deadline to email your reflection composition to [sgelbman@ilstu.edu](mailto:sgelbman@ilstu.edu)**