

**UNIVERSITY OF JORDAN**  
**AMERICAN STUDIES PROGRAM (M.A.)**  
**2403709 Pressure Groups in the United States**  
**Prof. Patricia Siplon**  
**Spring Semester 2012**

Office: Faculty of International Studies, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor  
(with Prof. Debi Abu Alganam)  
Email: [psiplon@smcvt.edu](mailto:psiplon@smcvt.edu)

Office hours: Mon 3-5, Wed 4-5  
Class meeting: Monday 5-8 PM  
teaching Hall 3, Faculty of Int. Studies

**Course Description:** This course examines pressure and interest groups in the United States and their impact on the domestic and foreign policy of the country. This includes an analysis of the major pressure groups in America today in a number of relevant fields, including the economic sector, domestic politics, minority rights and foreign policy, as well as an investigation of the methods used by these groups to advance their agendas. Because parties and elections are extremely important factors in the methods used by pressure groups (and because 2012 is a major election year), we will also focus on these important elements of the American political system. In order to help in our analysis students will be asked to analyze an interest group (or sector of interest groups) and present their paper and findings at the end of the semester.

**Course Goals and Student Outcomes:**

1. To introduce and/or reinforce core information about political institutions, particularly pressure groups and elections, and history. This information will be provided through lecture and readings, and student knowledge of the written material will be tested through a midterm and final examination, and integrated into the paper they write.
2. To help students see the inherent barriers to change in the American political system, and to understand why pluralism, while an ideal in some senses, may be anti-democratic in others. We will begin the course with lecture and readings on the pluralist vision of the framers and throughout the course, will trace the ways that this vision has played out in contemporary American politics..
3. To encourage student interest in, and strengthen evaluation skills of the role of interest groups in current events related to American domestic and foreign policy. Student research papers and presentations, as well as class discussion, will be used to investigate and share information on how interest groups are affected American policy.
4. To refine English language skills in writing and discussion. The midterm and final exams will be essay format (with some short answer on terms), and all students will complete a research paper assignment and presentation as part of the course. Additionally, students will make presentations of their research and be expected to be active participants in discussion.

**Course Readings:**

Most readings will be on-line, with links or pdf's copies of articles provided via email by the instructor. However, students will be expected to buy one book, listed below:  
Mearsheimer, John and Stephen Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux 2007.

**Course Requirements and Policies:**

1. Attendance and participation: in order to work as designed, this class will require active student participation in discussion. Good attendance is required for a strong performance in this course, particularly since class is held only once a week. Students are expected to inform the instructor in advance if they have a legitimate reason for missing class and are responsible for missed material. **Students may not miss more than two classes in order to receive a passing grade.**
2. Late work: Unless a deadline extension has been asked for and granted in advance, late work will be penalized a full letter grade for each day is late.
3. Paper submissions: students are expected to retain a backup copy (photocopy or on disc) of all written paper assignments. In the case of a lost paper or dispute, students will be expected to produce a backup copy.
4. Preparation: This class requires that the reading and any questions given in the previous class must be completed in advance of class discussion. Students who come to class without these answers or clearly not having done their reading will have points deducted from their attendance and participation grade.
5. Cheating. Students may not consult each other during exams, and must do their own work on all assignments. In writing, any time more than a sentence comes from another source **it must be attributed to that source.** We will go over this in class, and once we do, students are warned that cheating, either copying from one another or plagiarism from a source are grounds for failing the course.
6. Grades: Student grades will be based on the following factors:

Midterm exam .....	30%
Attendance and participation.....	10%
Paper and presentation assignment .....	20%
Final exam .....	40%

**Week One, February 6**

Topic (T): Introduction  
Reading Assignment (RA): Syllabus

**Week Two, February 13**

T: The Original Vision of Pluralism in America and Review of American Political Institutions (Single Member Districts)  
RA: Federalist 10, available at [http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fed\\_10.html](http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fed_10.html)  
Legislative process flowchart, available at [http://www.lexisnexis.com/help/CU/The\\_Legislative\\_Process/How\\_a\\_Bill\\_Becomes\\_Law.htm](http://www.lexisnexis.com/help/CU/The_Legislative_Process/How_a_Bill_Becomes_Law.htm)  
Kollman, *The American Political System*, pp. 142-169

**Week Three, February 20**

T: Parties in the United States  
RA: Kollman, *The American Political System*, pp. 400-412, additional TBA

**Week Four, February 27**

T: Elections in the United States  
RA: Kollman, pp. 421-445, Additional TBA

**Week Five, March 5**

T: The Role of Economic Interest Groups in the United States and the *Citizens United* Decision  
RA: TBA

**Week Six, March 12**

T: Workshop in Researching Congressional Districts and the Interests within Them  
RA: In this class period, we will practice researching US Congressional Districts and interest group activities. We will look at the districts themselves and the people who represent them. We will also look at source material for interest group themselves and of "watch dog organizations" that track spending on the candidates.

**Week Seven, March 19**

*T: In-class midterm exam*

**Week Eight, March 26**

T: Decision Points within the System: the Legislative Process, Executive Orders and Court Decisions  
RA: TBA

**Week Nine, April 2**

T: Social Movements in the United States, Part I

**Week Ten, April 9**

T: Social Movements in the United States, Part II  
RA: TBA

**Week Eleven, April 16**

T: Foreign Policy Pressure Group Case Study: the Israel Lobby (Part I)  
RA: Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby*, pp. 3-198

**Week Twelve, April 23**

T: Foreign Policy Case Study: the Israel Lobby (Part II)  
RA: Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby*, pp. 199-355

**Week Thirteen, April 30**

T: Domestic Policy Case Study: To Be Decided by the Class  
RA: TBA

**Week Fourteen, May 7**

T: Putting Together the Pieces: a Look at Lobbying Activities in the Cases Researched  
RA: None

*Research Paper Due*

**Week Fifteen, May 14**

T: Review for Final Examination

**FINAL EXAM: Date and Time to Be Announced**