

WWS 593S: SEMINAR IN POLITICAL AMBITION

Fall 2019
T 6PM -9PM
Robertson 012

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Office Location: 208 Fisher
Office Hours: TW 10AM-12PM
and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Americans are very skeptical of politicians and their ambitions. Nevertheless, democratic theorists—including the framers of the American constitution—have long envisioned an important role for political ambition in the proper functioning of democratic government. This course will examine the following topics:

- **Who** pursues political office? We will examine patterns in candidate emergence, party recruitment, and success at winning office. How does a potential candidate's race, gender, and social class shape decisions to run and prospects for winning? What biases in outlook and policy preferences result from these patterns?
- **Why** do people pursue political office? What motivates people to seek political office? Have the mix of motivations changed over time?
- **How** do officeholders build and consolidate power once in office? What resources, personal attributes, and strategies enable officeholders to become political leaders or successful policy entrepreneurs.
- How should we **assess** the effects of political ambition? Why are Americans so suspicious of ambition as a motivation for political engagement and leadership? Why have political theorists viewed political ambition as necessary to democracy? Do the decisions of ambitious politicians provide voters with meaningful democratic choices?

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- John Lewis, *Walking With the Wind*
- David Maraniss, *First in His Class*
- Selected readings available on course reserves and JSTOR

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Three short essays (4-5 pages, 20% each)	60%
Presentation (10-12 minutes)	20%
Participation	20%

SHORT ESSAYS:

Students should select three weeks to contribute short essays on the readings. Essay length should be 4-5 double-spaced pages.

When a student opts to write on a particular week's readings, the essay is due **before the class starts**. Short essays cannot be turned in after the class discussing those readings meets. Please email your paper as a PDF to frances.lee@princeton.edu.

For each week, I have provided three different essay prompts from which students can choose. Essays should offer clear, organized points in response to these prompts. However, if there is a topic you would like to address that is not covered in these prompts, please email me in advance with the question(s) you would like to address.

READING ASSIGNMENTS:

Reading assignments are specified on a calendar on this syllabus. It is necessary to do the assigned reading *before class* in order to participate in discussion.

PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE:

Students will receive a grade based on their participation. The quality, not the quantity, of participation is what is assessed, but active participation in class discussions is strongly encouraged.

Attendance is required, and unexcused absences will negatively affect your participation grade. Attendance will be taken at each class meeting. Excused absences must be approved in advance.

As the course meets only once a week on six occasions, unexcused absence will lower your course participation grade. The following penalties for unexcused absences apply:

1 unexcused absence	10 points penalty on participation grade
2 unexcused absences	20 points subtracted from participation grade
3+ unexcused absences	failing participation grade

PRESENTATION

Students will give a presentation analyzing a U.S. politician (either past or current). What appears to have motivated them to seek office? What methods did

they use to gain office? Once there, what techniques did they employ to consolidate their hold on power? The presentation should conclude reflecting on the significance of this politician's contribution to American policymaking.

SCHEDULE OF DISCUSSION TOPICS & ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1 (11/5)

The political vocation: What personal qualities and resources are needed for political leadership? Who should serve as a legislative representative? What are the moral hazards of political leadership?

READ: Selections from Max Weber's "Politics as a Vocation," from *The Vocation Lectures*, eds. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, translation by Rodney Livingstone. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, pp. 32-44, 49-58, 66-72, 75-94 (course reserves)

Michael Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 2 (Winter, 1973): 160-180
(<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2265139>)

Alexander Hamilton, *Federalist #35*. Reading assignment begins with the last sentence of the fourth paragraph into the essay, with "Let us now turn to the examination of objections...."
(https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed35.asp)

SHORT ESSAY TOPICS:

1. In *Federalist #35*, Alexander Hamilton writes, "The idea of an actual representation of all classes of the people, by persons of each class, is altogether visionary. . . . [T]he thing would never take place in practice." Explain Hamilton's logic. Is he right to dismiss the "mirroring" ideal of representation as unrealistic?
2. In "Politics as a Vocation," Weber analyzes the occupations and social sectors available for recruitment into politics. To what extent are his analyses helpful for understanding pathways into politics in the contemporary US?
3. Both Weber and Walzer confront a central ethical challenge in politics: that good ends can be (and often are) achieved by unethical means, while good intentions and ethical actions can result in bad outcomes. Explain why politics poses this ethical dilemma so acutely. Illuminate your discussion with contemporary examples.

Week 2 (11/12)

Who seeks power? Are people of different ideologies, social classes, and genders equally likely to run for office? How do prospects for success affect the mix of candidates available to voters? How do biases in political ambition affect democratic representation?

READ: Gary Jacobson and Samuel Kernell *Strategy and Choice in Congressional Elections*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981, chapters 3-4, pp. 19-34; 49-59. (course reserves)

Danielle M. Thomsen, "Ideological Moderates Won't Run" *Journal of Politics* 76 (July 2014): 786-797.

(<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1017/S0022381614000243>)

Jennifer Lawless, "Female Candidates and Legislators," *Annual Review of Political Science* 18 (May 2015): 349-366.
(DOI: 10.1146/annurev-polisci-020614-094613)

Gbemende Johnson, Bruce I. Oppenheimer, and Jennifer L. Selin, "The House as a Stepping Stone to the Senate: Why Do So Few African American House Members Run?" *American Journal of Political Science*, 56 (April 2012): 387-399 (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23187107>)

Nicholas Carnes, *White Collar Government: The Hidden Role of Class in Economic Policymaking*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), chapter 6, pp. 137-151. (course reserves)

Andrew Hall, *Who Wants to Run?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019, chapter 4, pp. 57-77. (course reserves)

SHORT ESSAY TOPICS:

1. To what extent does Jacobson & Kernell's "strategic politicians" thesis shed light on the candidates who ran (and declined to run) for Congress in 2018?
2. Is it possible to "fix the broken mirror" (Carnes 2013) so that Congress is more representative of the American public in terms of social background and identity?
3. Critically assess the arguments by Thomsen and Hall that contemporary American politics systematically discourages moderates from running for office.

Week 3 (11/19)

Motivations: Living "for" politics vs. Living "off" politics. Case study in motivations – Bill Clinton.

READ: David Maraniss, *First in His Class: A Biography of Bill Clinton* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), pp. 9-20; 38-148; 225-245; 265-286; 319-338, 352-367; 375-390.

SHORT ESSAY TOPICS:

1. What divisions did Clinton have to face in the Democratic party? How did he attempt to bridge those divides?
2. What personal qualities did Bill Clinton possess that fitted him well for political success? What were his key weaknesses?

3. Weber asks, "What kind of man must one be if he is to be allowed to put his hand on the wheel of history?" He answers that one needs three qualities (1) passion, (2) a feeling of responsibility, and (3) a sense of proportion. Evaluate Bill Clinton on these three dimensions.

Week 4 (11/26)

Motivations, continued. Living "for" politics vs. Living "off" politics. Second case study in motivations – John Lewis.

READ: John Lewis with Michael D'Orso, *Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1998), prologue, pp. 1-422.

SHORT ESSAY TOPICS:

1. What divisions did John Lewis have to face in the civil rights movement? How successful was he at bridging those divides?
2. What personal qualities did John Lewis possess that made him influential in the Civil Rights Movement? What were his key weaknesses?
3. Weber asks, "What kind of man must one be if he is to be allowed to put his hand on the wheel of history?" He answers that one needs three qualities (1) passion, (2) a feeling of responsibility, and (3) a sense of proportion. Evaluate John Lewis on these three dimensions.

Week 5 (12/3)

Amassing power: How do leaders build and consolidate power? How do leaders gain power beyond what is formally granted to them in institutional rules? How and where can they find opportunities for influence even in unpromising circumstances (such as, minority party or junior status)?

READ: Robert A. Caro, *Master of the Senate*. New York: Random House, chapters 17, 24-25, pp. 383-419; 557-596. (course reserves)

Meg Greenfield, *Washington*. New York: Public Affairs, 2001, chapter 2, pp. 23-54. (course reserves)

Henry Waxman with Joshua Green, *The Waxman Report: How Congress Really Works*. New York: Twelve, chapter 6, pp. 127-142 (course reserves)

SHORT ESSAY TOPICS:

1. Analyze how Lyndon Johnson cultivated power. In particular, explain how he transformed the post of "assistant leader" from a "nothing job" into a meaningful source of Senate power?
2. Journalist Meg Greenfield identifies two common strategies of building power in Congress—that of the "head kid" and the "good child." Briefly explain this distinction. In what ways is Greenfield's account of acquiring power similar or different from Caro's analysis of LBJ's rise to power in the Senate?

3. What insights can be gained from Caro and Waxman about how and when a legislative minority party can achieve its objectives despite its disadvantaged status?

GROUP 1 PRESENTATIONS DUE

Week 6 (12/10)

Taking stock of political ambition: Is political ambition needed? Does it pose a threat? Why are Americans so skeptical of political ambition?

READ: Douglass Adair, "Fame and the Founding Fathers," in *Fame and the Founding Fathers*, ed. Trevor Colbourne. New York: W.W. Norton, 1974, 3-26, (course reserves)

James Madison, *Federalist #51*
(<http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa51.htm>)

Abraham Lincoln, "The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions: Address Before the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois," 1838
(<http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/lyceum.htm>)

John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, *Stealth Democracy: Americans' Beliefs about How Government Should Work*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, chapters 5-6, 107-159. (course reserves)

SHORT ESSAY TOPICS

1. In his *Lyceum* Address, Abraham Lincoln views political ambition as a threat to American government. Why does he view it as such? Why does James Madison come to a different conclusion about the role of ambition?
2. Drawing upon Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, explain why the American public is so skeptical and fearful of political ambition. Are Americans justified in taking this suspicious attitude?
3. Adair argues that the leading figures of the American revolution were motivated by a desire to win lasting fame for themselves. How does Adair's transformative quest for fame differ from the ambitions of politicians described in Madison's *Federalist* 51?

GROUP 2 PRESENTATIONS DUE