

Syllabus

How Washington Really Works

**George Mason Govt 467
University of Pennsylvania Pol. Sci. 398**

Fall, 2024

**Fridays, Noon – 4:00 PM
Penn Biden Center, Suite 600
101 Constitution Ave. at C Street, NW
Washington, D.C.**

Professors

**Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel (Penn) (zemanuel@upenn.edu)
Office hours by appointment**

**Steven Pearlstein (GMU) (spearls2@gmu.edu)
Office hours: Mon 3-4:15 / Wed 10:30-12 (Fairfax)
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Teaching Assistants

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Course Description

The purpose of this course is to provide students with an understanding of how decisions and policy are really made in Washington. Through six case studies, the course will explore modern American policy debates, politics and institutional dynamics, with a particular focus on the personalities, motivations, and ambitions of elected leaders. The role of interest groups, think tanks and media will also be examined. The course will use Socratic-style lectures, class discussions, and weekly class speakers to explore these issues. In the final weeks of the course, students working in groups of politically-like-minded colleagues will be tasked with crafting comprehensive, politically-realistic policy proposals to lower health care costs, reduce poverty and regulate big tech. Enrollment is by permission of the instructor. Students must have familiarity with, and interest in, modern American history, politics and government.

Two Schools, One Course

This course will be offered jointly to students from both the University of Pennsylvania and George Mason University and co-taught by one professor from each school. The course will be held on neither campus, but at the Penn Biden Center located at the base of Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. Students from both schools will attend the same class sessions, read the same materials and be evaluated in the same manner.

Course materials—this syllabus, some of the assigned readings and videos, lecture slides, discussion threads, presentation group assignments and periodic announcements—will be available through Canvas, the course platform used by Penn to which Mason students will also have access.

On many days Penn students will be provided Amtrak tickets to attend all class sessions held at the Biden Center. Trains will leave from Philadelphia's 30th St. Station around 9:45 am and from Washington's Union Station shortly before 5:00 pm. Students should meet teaching assistants at the station 30 minutes before departure.

On days of certain class trips (see schedule below), Penn students will travel to and from Washington by bus that will leave at 9:00 am from the Penn Bookstore on Walnut Street. Mason students will also travel on the bus from the Biden Center to the site of those trips and dinners at professors' houses.

Mason students can reach the Penn Biden Center by Metro. It is a short walk from the Metro Red Line stations at Judiciary Square or Union Station. Garage parking is expensive and street parking is not always easy to find and time limited. Professors' houses are near the Cleveland Park station on the Red Line.

Class Sessions

Class sessions will be held in the large conference room of the Biden Center that overlooks the US Capitol. Students should alternate weekly between sitting at the large table at the center of the room and sitting in the chairs arrayed along the sides of the room. Please do NOT sit at the conference table two weeks in a row. Upon entering the conference room, students should retrieve their name cards from the conference table and either place them on the table in front of them or raise them when they want to speak during the class session. That's how we'll get to know each other's names. Return name cards to the table at the end of each class session.

Each weekly session will normally begin at noon with a short quiz on the week's assigned reading. The quiz will be followed immediately by an hour-long lecture by one of the professors on that week's case study. Students are expected to have done the assigned reading and video viewing for the week and be ready to respond to questions posed by the professors. You may be called on whether you raise your hands or not.

After the lecture, we will normally break for a complimentary boxed lunch, with options for those with dietary restrictions and preferences. There are various locations around the Biden Center and the sixth-floor lobby for small groups to gather and eat. You should use this time to get to know fellow students (particularly those you don't already know) and meet with your presentation groups. When finished, leave the area around you as clean as you found it.

After lunch, we will reconvene in the conference room for an hour-long discussion about that week's case study moderated by the professors. The discussion will begin with several questions posed in advance by the professors and posted on Canvas the week before. You should keep these questions in mind while doing the assigned reading.

After a short break, we will hear a guest speaker from the Washington policy community. Professors will "interview" the guest for about 30 minutes, followed by questions from students. Students are expected to come to class with probing, thoughtful questions for guests. On weeks of class trips (see schedule below), we will hear from speakers as part of the visit.

During the final three weeks of the course, class sessions will be entirely given over the group presentations by students, along with a guest speaker.

Use of computers, cell phones and other recording devices are not permitted during class sessions.

Special Tours and Dinners in DC

On several Fridays during the semester, tours and talks have been arranged for the Capitol, the Supreme Court and the Air and Space Museum (see class schedule below). On two of those days—the first session in September and the last one in December—you are also invited for an informal dinner at the professors houses in Washington. For those first and last sessions, Penn students will travel to and from Washington by bus, and all students will travel by bus from the Biden Center to site visits and professors' houses.

Reading and Quizzes

On most weeks, there will be a short quiz – multiple choice or short answers—whose sole purpose is to determine if you have done the assigned reading for the week. Fair Warning: the assigned reading and viewing for this course is very "lumpy." On the weeks of the case studies, there is considerable amount of reading – so much that it can't be done at the last minute. On other weeks, it is much lighter or there is none at all. This unevenness will require you to plan your work well in advance, an important life skill to learn.

Most of the assigned books for this course are written by journalists who understand Washington and can write a compelling narrative that is at once sophisticated and accessible to general readers. Whenever possible, we have eliminated non-essential portions of books from the assigned reading. Because that was not always possible, however, you should learn to skip over

less relevant passages that get too far into the weeds or shed little light on the way Washington works. Knowing when and how to skim is another good life skill to learn.

Group Presentations

Early in the course, after completing a brief questionnaire, students will be divided into nine presentation groups based on your political leanings and your relative interest in three topics: health care, poverty and tech policy.

The task for each group will be to come up with an effective five-point policy proposal on one of those three topics for a hypothetical presidential candidate. The plan should be both politically viable and consistent with the group's ideological leanings (You will receive more guidance on presentations later in the semester.) During each of the final three class sessions, the three groups assigned to that week's topic will give a 30-minute presentation explaining their proposals. Group members will then respond to questions from professors and other students. All group members should have at least some speaking role in the presentation.

Groups will be evaluated on their presentations based on the thoroughness of research, the clarity and sophistication with which they define the problem, the soundness and sophistication of their proposals to solve it, the political logic behind the proposals and the quality of the oral and graphic presentation. For the presentations, groups may use up to 12 slides. Each group should provide a one-page printed summary of their plan that the rest of the class can use to follow along with the presentation.

Although groups should try to operate by consensus, each should select one student to moderate its deliberations, assign tasks and communicate with the teaching assistant assigned to assist that group.

Presentation groups can meet during lunch on Fridays and online outside of class on Zoom. Teaching assistants will help set up those online meetings. There will also be time for an in-person group meeting at the end of the class session on September 22, and again on zoom on Oct. 6, the Friday before what was formerly known as the Columbus Day weekend.

Each group will receive a grade and a written evaluation of its presentation.

Final Policy Memos

For their final papers, students will write their own 15-page "policy memo" (excluding charts and graphs) on the topic of their group's presentation. The paper should be in memo form and directed to a hypothetical, like-minded presidential candidate you've chosen to work for. Like your group presentation, it should define the problem, outline a five-point plan for solving it and include a discussion of the policy and political tradeoffs and logic behind the plan. If your proposal involves public spending, you should estimate the **annual** spending and how you propose to pay for it, either in new tax revenue or reduced spending for existing programs.

Please note that your memo need not be the same as the presentation group plan. Rather, it should reflect your own personal concerns, analysis, policy preferences and political calculus. Memos can also incorporate feedback to the group presentations as well as additional thought and research. Criteria for the papers will be the same as for the presentation. Memos will be due Dec. 7, and should be submitted through Canvas (Penn students) or as a Word attachment to an email to Prof. Pearlstein (Mason students).

As an interim step, you should submit a detailed outline/summary of your memo a week after your group's presentation. Professors will respond with written comments and suggestions on the outline.

Class Discussions and Free Expression

Discussion and debate are at the heart of this course, and the course will only be successful if all students contribute to that discourse. At least 15% of each student's grade will be determined by the quality and quantity of your class participation.

Courses about public policy and politics inevitably involve sensitive and controversial topics about which reasonable people disagree. Students are likely to read or hear opinions that are different from their own. Part of becoming an educated person is learning how to engage with divergent perspectives. In class and during group discussions, all students should feel free to express thoughts and opinions that may be at odds with those of professors or other students, or which challenge currently prevailing views on campus. The only requirement is that you express your views in a way that is respectful of the values, opinions, and reasoned arguments of others in the class. We are all continuously trying to formulate our settled positions. Any student unwilling to accept these basic rules of free, open and respectful discussion should not enroll in this course.

Course Evaluation

Attendance and Class Participation	25%
Quizzes	20%
Group Presentations	20%
Policy Memo	35%

Class Schedule

(= Penn students by bus, not train)**

Aug. 30**

Introduction

Video: “All the Way,” directed by Jay Roach (see Canvas for details on how to access)

BBQ at Professor Pearlstein’s house in Washington Red Line/Cleveland Park

Sept 6

Lyndon Johnson and the Civil Rights Act of 1957

Reading: Robert Caro, *Master of the Senate, The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, Ch. 8, 15, 25, 30, 33, 34, 37-41 (Vintage)

Speaker:

Sept 13

Lecture on Thinking About Policy and Politics

Reading: something on immigration

Initial Presentation Group Meetings

Visit to US Capitol:

Speaker:

Sept 20

John Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962)

Reading: Michael Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight, Kennedy, Khrushchev and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War*, (Vintage), Chapters 1-5, 8-10, 13

Speaker:

Sept. 27

**George Bush, Joe Biden and Nomination of Clarence
Thomas to the Supreme Court**

Reading: Jane Mayer and Jill Abramson, *Strange Justice, the Selling of Clarence Thomas*, (Houghton Mifflin)

Video: “Clarence and Ginni Thomas: Politics, Power and the Supreme Court,” PBS Frontline on YouTube

Visit to Supreme Court @ Noon

Speaker:

Oct. 4

**No In-Person Class
Presentation Group Meetings via Zoom**

Oct. 11

Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich and Welfare Reform (1996)

Reading: Jason DeParle, *American Dream: Three Women, Ten Kids and the Nation’s Drive to End Welfare* (Penguin), Chapters 1, 4-9, 12, Epilogue

Speaker:

Oct. 18

George W. Bush, Barack Obama and the 2009 Auto Bailout

Video: “Live Another Day, The Untold Story of the Bankruptcy of General Motors and Chrysler,” Amazon

Reading: Steven Rattner, *Overhaul, An Insider’s Account of the Obama Administration’s Emergency Rescue of the Auto Industry* (Mariner)

Speaker:

Oct. 25

Barack Obama and the Passage of Obamacare

Reading: *The Ten Year War: Obamacare and the Unfinished Crusade for Universal Coverage*, Jonathan Cohn (St. Martin's)

Speaker:

Nov. 1 **Barack Obama and Obamacare, continued**

Reading: Articles

Visit to CNN Election HQ (Steve)

Guest Speaker:

Nov. 8 **Group Presentations: Poverty**

Reading: Matthew Desmond, *Poverty, By America*, Ch. 1-5, 7, 8, (Crown)

Guest Speaker: TBD re: presidential election

Nov. 15 **Group Presentations: Tech Regulation**

Reading: TBD

Speaker: TBD re: Congressional election

Poverty Memo Outlines Due

Nov. 22 **Group Presentations: China Policy**

Reading: TBD

Speaker: A

Tech Memo Outlines Due

Nov. 29

No Class – Thanksgiving Weekend

Tech Policy Memo Outlines Due

Dec. 6**

**Wrap-up – Why Washington No Longer Works:
Recent failure of Senate immigration compromise**

Course Evaluation

Visit to Air & Space or African American Museum

**Farewell Dinner at Professor Emanuel's house in
Washington (Red Line/Cleveland Park)**

Dec. 13

Policy Memos Due