

POLI 4032: Interest Groups in American Politics (3 credit hours)

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Catalog description: Interest group politics; effect of voluntary organizations on political behavior.

The course requirements include reading the books and articles, watching video presentations, writing reports, participating in discussion forums, studying, and taking two exams. This is an online course that moves very quickly with assignments due throughout the semester, so it is very important that you pay close attention to due dates and to check the Moodle site regularly. I provide updates and reminders through the "Latest News & Announcements forum." Occasionally I will send emails, but do not expect email reminders of upcoming deadlines. Again, it is imperative that you check the course in Moodle regularly.

Adding the Course Late

If you add the course after the first day of the semester, it is your responsibility to make up any work that you missed. Assignments that are past due must be completed within one week of your adding the course. If quizzes have closed or if submissions are no longer accepted through Moodle, you must contact me for instructions on how to complete this work. Requests made more than one week after adding the course are usually not granted.

Graduate Credit or Honors Credit

For students taking this course for graduate credit or for those who wish to receive special Honors credit, it is the student's responsibility to contact me during the first week of classes to make appropriate arrangements.

Course Outcomes and Module Learning Objectives

This course covers the following specific measurable outcomes and learning objectives. All assessments are aligned to these outcomes and objectives.

Course Outcomes

When you complete this course, you will be able to:

Module Topics and Learning Objectives

The following is a breakdown of module topics and their associated learning objectives.

1. Identify and assess causal claims involving various aspects of interest groups.
2. Examine the role of interest groups in the larger political process.
3. Demonstrate how interest groups vary and how these differences matter for how groups organize and gather resources.
4. Identify the strategies and techniques used by interest groups and understand the conditions that influence their use of particular strategies and techniques.
5. Assess the influence of interest groups on various stages of the public policy process.
6. Evaluate specific reforms aimed at curbing problematic aspects of interest groups and their influence.

Module 1: The What, Why, and How of Studying Interest Groups

1. Define what “interest groups” are, point to some of their various strategies and activities, and note their functions in the U.S. political system (Course Outcomes 2-5)
2. Consider the views of the Founders (as indicated by Madison in Federalist #10) as well as others concerning the role of interest groups (CO 2, CO 5)
3. Identify the perspective used by social and behavior scientists to study interest groups (CO 1-6)
4. Describe the key statistical indicators used by researchers and apply this knowledge by reading and interpreting a study of interest groups (CO 1-6)

Module 2: Mobilization and Maintenance

1. Describe the population of interest groups in the U.S., indicate how the number and distribution of groups have changed (over the past 50-60 years), and point to some of the explanations for these changes. (CO 1, CO 3, 4)
2. Explain competing perspectives about how interest groups form and why people decide to join interest groups (be able to describe the major categories of inducements used for attracting members). (CO 1, 3, 5,6)

Module 3: The Role of Interest Groups in Political Campaigns

1. Describe the relationship between interest groups and political parties and point to ways that interest groups can affect activities of parties. (CO 1, 2, 4, 5)
2. Indicate the various strategies and techniques that interest groups use to influence elections and identify some of the factors that affect their choice of particular strategies and techniques. (CO 1, 2, 4, 5)

Module 4: Financing Policies

1. Explain how the rules governing campaign finance at the federal level have changed over time and what effect this has had, giving special attention to the Supreme Court case of Citizens United. (CO 1, 2, 5, 6)
2. Assess the influence of campaign funding on the political process by demonstrating how money affects various aspects of policymakers’ behavior. (CO 1, 2, 4, 5)

Midterm Exam

Module 5: Lobbying

1. List and describe the various strategies and activities that lobbyists use and indicate how lobbyists can be effective at influencing public policy. (CO 1, 2, 4, 5)
2. Point to some of potential ethical dilemmas associated with lobbying (e.g., "revolving door"), indicate how government attempts to regulate lobbying, and explain the effectiveness of these rules. (CO 1, 2, 4-6)

Module 6: Grassroots Efforts

1. Describe “public lobbying” (or “grassroots lobbying”) and how this tactic can be effective in influencing public policy. (CO 1, 2, 4, 5)
2. Consider the multiple ways that interest groups influence decision making beyond legislatures (e.g., executive and judicial branches). (CO 1, 2, 4-6)

Module 7: Policy Effects

1. Explain what is meant by an “issue network” and indicate how it facilitates policymaking. (CO 1, 5)
2. Assess the influence that interest groups ultimately have on the policy process, those factors that condition this influence, and the consequences on the types of policy that results. (CO 1-6)

Final Exam

Materials and Resources

Required Materials

The following materials are required for this course:

Berry, Jeffrey M., and Clyde Wilcox. 2009. *The Interest Group Society*, 6th edition, New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. ISBN-13: 978-1138691742

In addition to textbook, a large share of the reading load includes articles and reports. Each is free and available for download from the internet or through the LSU library. Note that a few of these readings are quite brief, and will take only a few minutes to read, but many are longer research articles that will take an hour or more to fully digest. Recognize that we will give significant attention to the research articles, so it is imperative that you carefully read and take notes on them. Reading constitutes a substantial portion of the work for this course, so make certain that you plan accordingly.

All links in this course will open in a new window.

Technical Information and Assistance

Technical Requirements

If you have questions about the functionality of your course, review the GROK article [LSU Online Technical Requirements](#) to make sure you have the right equipment and software.

If you have any technical problems or questions, email the ITS Help Desk at servicedesk@lsu.edu or call (225) 578-3375. Be sure to mention your name, course number, and section.

Grading Scale and Course Work

Your grade in this course will be determined by the specific activities and assessments described in this syllabus. In the following subchapters you will find details about each type of activity and assessment, as well as the grade breakdown and grading scale. Specific expectations for each graded item are included

within these subchapters. Make sure you read all of the instructions! Please note that all due dates and times are in Central Standard Time (CST).

Each module requires a minimum of approximately twelve to thirteen hours of in-class work (viewing and completing activities in Moodle) and approximately six to seven hours of out-of-class work (readings, research, study time). This means you will complete approximately nineteen hours of total work per week.

Special note:

Federal Financial Aid regulations require the confirmation of course participation in order for students to receive financial aid. In this course, this is achieved by documenting student completion of an academic activity by the last day to add courses for credit or change sections, which is usually the fifth day of class. This activity is designated "AEA" in Module 1. Failure to complete this activity within this time period may result in a delay in the disbursement of financial aid funds.

There is also a required academic activity due on the last day of class to ensure student engagement throughout the full term.

Grading Scale and Course Work

Grade Breakdown and Grading Scale

Your performance in the course is determined by the grades earned on five written reports, three discussion forums, an interest group project and two exams (a midterm and a final).

Grade Breakdown	
Brief reports (5)	25%
Interest Group Project	20%
Midterm Exam	25%
Final Exam	30%
Total	100%

LSU GRADING SCALE

The following grading scale applies.

Note: I generally round final averages. In other words, if your final average is an 89.5 you will receive an A-. If your final average is 89.4 your letter grade is a B+.

97%–100% = A+
93%–96% = A
90%–92% = A-
87%–89% = B+
83%–86% = B
80%–82% = B-
77%–79% = C+

73%–76% = C
70%–72% = C-
67%–69% = D+
63%–66% = D
60%–62% = D-
0%–59% = F

Reports

There are five brief reports and an interest group report that in combination count for 42% of the course grade. The due dates for uploading these reports through the Moodle site are listed in each module checklist. Remember that these are individual assignments that you must complete without the assistance of others. The due dates for the assignments vary throughout the semester. It is your responsibility to keep track of the deadlines and complete the assignments on time. I recognize, however, there are legitimate reasons for missing a deadline. If you experience a significant problem that prevents you from submitting a report, it is your responsibility to let me know about it in a timely manner and to provide appropriate documentation (e.g., doctor's note).

Exams

There are two 2-hour exams (a mid-term and a final). You have a narrow window of time in which to take each exam (usually 48 hours). These are essay exams and you are free to use your textbook, the articles, and your notes. However, recognize that you will only have 2 hours to take the exam, so it is imperative that you study in advance in order to do well. While you may use the reading materials and notes, you may not rely on the assistance of others. Makeup exams will not be given unless the instructor is notified in advance and agrees that the absence is a university-excused absence (Note PS-22).

My advice for these exams is to prepare for them as would for a traditional closed-book exam. I suggest making certain to have very detailed notes for each chapter and article completed well in advance. Prior to the exam, carefully review the learning objectives for each module and review the points I raised in the module summary. These learning objectives and summaries provide clear guidance as to the important topics you need to know and how they fit together. Spend time reviewing these materials in the days leading up to the exam until you feel you have a firm grasp of the material. When it is time to take the exam, you will be ready, and if there are a couple of questions you can't answer, you'll probably have time to look those up in your notes.

Course Policies

The following policies apply throughout your enrollment in this course. For specific questions about these policies, please contact either your instructor or the appropriate office listed in the subchapters.

Engagement and Participation

Please check into your Moodle course frequently to keep track of your work. Participation obligations involve specific points of engagement in course activities and interaction with other course members. Your active engagement in discussion forums or other required collaborative activities constitutes your participation in this course. You are expected to contribute and collaborate according to the requirements of the specific activities and assessments described in this syllabus.

Timely communication is an e-learning best practice. Check your LSU email and the News and Announcements Forum on the course front page daily to make sure you do not miss any communications from your instructor or classmates. Contact the instructor in advance if you are going to miss an assignment or turn in work late. This will give the instructor sufficient time to allow for discussing an alternative schedule.

Policy on Deadlines

In an effort to provide a level playing field, I take deadlines very seriously, and hold everyone to an identical standard. If you encounter a problem that prevents you from meeting a deadline, please contact me. I understand that problems can arise, and I will accommodate difficulties that you may encounter. But please be prepared to provide documentation. Finally, please note that that all listed times on the schedule are calibrated to the *Central Time Zone*.

If you encounter a problem that prevents you from meeting a deadline, please contact me. I understand that problems can arise, and I will accommodate difficulties that you may encounter. Please note that most job-related issues are not considered acceptable excuses (although see university regulations concerning military duties, official university-sponsored events, etc.). A penalty for handing in the paper late is assessed based upon the circumstances, but generally involves a *substantial loss of points* (5 points for missing the deadline, and 5 points for each 24-hour period thereafter). Recognize that for reasons of fairness to other students in the class, credit cannot be given at the end of the semester for missed exams or papers not handed in. In other words, when you experience a significant problem that prevents you from meeting a deadline or taking a test, it is your responsibility to let me know about it in a timely manner and to plan for completing the missed work.

Academic Integrity

Academic Misconduct

Students in LSU Online courses must comply with the LSU Code of Student Conduct. *Academic misconduct* includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, falsifying academic records, and/or any act designed to give unfair academic advantage to the student. Preventing academic misconduct requires learners to take ownership of their individual work for individual assignments and assessments. Learners who violate the LSU Code of Student Conduct will be referred to Student Advocacy & Accountability. For undergraduate students, a first academic violation could result in a zero grade on the assignment or failing the class and disciplinary probation until graduation. For a second academic violation, the result could be suspension from LSU. For graduate students, suspension is the appropriate outcome for the first offense.

To read more, please visit the [LSU Code of Student Conduct page](#).

Unauthorized Assistance

All work must be completed without assistance unless explicit permission for group or partner work is given by the faculty member. This is critical so that the professor can assess your performance on each assignment. Read the syllabus and assignment directions carefully. When in doubt, e-mail your instructors or ask in a discussion forum. Seeking clarification is your responsibility as a student. Assuming group or partner work is okay without permission constitutes a violation of the LSU Code of Student Conduct.

Accessibility

A learner with a disability is entitled by law to equal access to university programs. Two federal laws protect persons with disabilities in post-secondary education: the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Pub. L. No. 93-112, as amended), the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (Pub. L. No. 101-336) and the ADA Amendments Act (Pub. L. No.110-325). LSU A&M is committed to ensuring that its websites, online courses, and all online materials are accessible to people with disabilities.

If you have accessibility needs that we can help with, visit the [LSU Disability Services page](#) and register for accommodations before you begin your course work. If you have questions about accessibility for specific tools and external materials used in this course, please see the "Materials and Resources" and "Technical Information and Assistance" sections in this syllabus.

Note: All links in this course will open in a new window.

Netiquette

Communication in the online classroom comes across differently than the communication we are accustomed to through academic writing and face-to-face classroom discussion. Use online etiquette guidelines like the ones listed in the document below to craft your communication.

You can also read [The Core Rules of Netiquette](#) by Virginia Shea (1994) to understand the human aspect of online communication.

Diversity Statement

Diversity is fundamental to LSU's mission and the University is committed to creating and maintaining a living and learning environment that embraces individual difference. Cultural inclusion is of highest priority. LSU recognizes that achieving national prominence depends on the human spirit, participation, and dedicated work of the entire university community. Through its Commitment to Community, LSU strives to create an inclusive, respectful, intellectually challenging climate that embraces individual difference in race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, age, spirituality, socioeconomic status, disability, family status, experiences, opinions, and ideas. LSU proactively cultivates and sustains a campus environment that values open dialogue, cooperation, shared responsibility, mutual respect, and cultural competence—the driving forces that enrich and enhance cutting-edge research, first-rate teaching, and engaging community outreach activities.