

# POLS Y200: Contemporary Political Topics

## Getting Engaged! A Hands-On Approach to Civic Leadership IU South Bend, Spring 2010

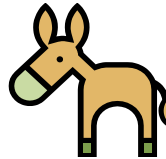
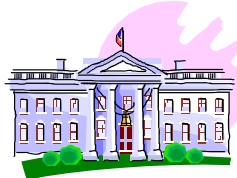
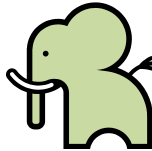
Instructor Contact Information:  
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Fall 2010 Office Hours:  
11:30-12:30 T & R  
*and by appointment*  
2181 Wiekamp Hall

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### Course Description:

Got an issue you care about? Want to make a difference? Define your problem. Gather information to sway policymakers. Build coalitions for success. Get to know the media. Find resources to support your initiative. Savor your victory. Learn from your defeat. This experiential learning course will put you in direct contact with civic groups and policymakers and will engage you in hands-on projects designed to teach you everything you need to know about identifying and solving a community problem.



### Course Objectives:

1. To prepare you to participate in democracy as a participant, not a spectator.
2. To prepare you to shape campus, local, state, and federal policies.
3. To prepare you, through hands on experiences and case studies, to interact directly with decision makers and make them respond to your hopes and concerns.
4. To develop the skills most critical to effective citizenship: defining the problem; gathering facts; identifying decision makers; determining public opinion; persuading decision makers; using deadlines, trends, and cycles to your advantage; building coalitions; engaging the media; raising funds; and capitalizing on victory and rebounding from defeat.
5. To overcome the perception that ordinary citizens cannot change public policy by showing you what a single person or group of people can accomplish.
6. To generate lively discussions and make you eager to compete in the democratic arena time and time again throughout your life.

## Assigned Reading:

- Graham, Bob with Chris Hand. 2010. America The Owner's Manual: Making Government Work for You. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- The New York Times*
  - Hard copy available on campus. Reduced-price subscriptions and home delivery available. Online access also available at <http://www.nytimes.com>
- The South Bend Tribune, The Elkhart Truth, The LaPorte Herald Argus*, or your local newspaper.
  - [www.southbendtribune.com](http://www.southbendtribune.com)
  - [www.etruth.com](http://www.etruth.com)
  - <http://heraldargus.com>
- Other readings as assigned by the instructor.



## Course Schedule:



### **Week 1**

August 31

### **Introduction to the Course**

The first session will include an introduction to the course and the instructor and a review of the syllabus.

September 2

### **No Class**

Professor Bennion will be at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting in Washington, DC. **Use this time to think about a problem you would like to solve.** This may be a problem on campus, in your neighborhood, on your city/town, or in your home state. If you select a national problem, be sure to think carefully about how much access you will have to national decision-makers and how local action might make a difference in solving this problem.

### **Before you begin to define a problem, read:**

- Contents ix – xiv
- Preface xv – xvii
- Prologue 1-16
- Introduction 17-28
- **HOMEWORK #1 DUE Tuesday, September 7<sup>th</sup>**

**Week 2**  
September 7/9

### **Defining the Challenge that Active Citizenship Can Solve**

Come to class prepared to share one or two problems that you would like to work toward solving. Be sure to define the problem in political terms and in public terms. You will be sharing your ideas with the class and forming groups to address the problems of greatest interest and relevance to POLS Y200 students. Students will hold brainstorming sessions with their groups on Thursday.

**Before you come to class read:**

- **Chapter 1: What's Your Problem?**
- **HOMEWORK #2 DUE Tuesday, September 7<sup>th</sup>.**

**Week 3**  
September 14/16

### **Gathering Information to Sway Policymakers**

On Tuesday we will discuss the importance of gathering information to influence policymakers. We will discuss the importance of credibility and comprehensiveness, and teams will develop their research plans. On Thursday, team members will share the information they have gathered and seek feedback from team members before conducting additional research.

**Before you come to class read:**

- **Chapter 2: Just the Facts, Ma'am**
- **HOMEWORK #3 DUE Tuesday, September 14**

**Week 4**  
September 21/23

### **Presenting Information to the Class**

Groups will present the information they have gathered to fellow class members who will ask questions and push each other to develop a full range of answers to potential questions.

- **PRESENTATION #1: Thursday, September 23**

**Week 5**  
September 28/30

### **Identifying Who in Government Can Fix Your Problem**

On Tuesday we will discuss the federal system of government and the division of power between national, state, and local governments. We will also discuss university politics, including the decision making authority of regional campuses and who makes decisions at Indiana University South Bend. Students will begin to identify the people who most likely have authority to fix their selected problem. By Thursday, students will have complete contact information for relevant decision-makers and will have contacted decision makers to **schedule appointments to meet with relevant decision makers on or before Week 9**. Students should also continue to gather research on their chosen topic.

**Before you come to class read:**

- **Chapter 3: The Buck Stops Where?**
- **HOMEWORK #4: Tuesday, September 28**

**Week 6**  
October 5/7

### **Gauging and Building Public Support for Your Cause**

We will discuss ways of determining levels of support for a particular policy. As you read this week, begin designing a strategic plan for your group to use to determine public opinion and gather public feedback on your issue. Which of the techniques discussed in the textbook will you employ? What other tactics will your group use to gauge public opinion? In class this week you will develop a plan and make arrangements to implement your plan. All groups will present their plan to the class on Thursday, October 7<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Before you come to class read:**

- **Chapter 4: Testing the Waters**
- **HOMEWORK #5 DUE Tuesday, October 5**
- **PRESENTATION #2: Thursday, October 7**

**Week 7**  
October 12/14

### **Public Support Inventory: Carrying Out Your Plan**

This week each group should work diligently to carry out your plan for gauging opinion and building support for your cause. Tuesday will be a group work day. Report back to the group. What have you done? What do you still need to do? On Thursday, you will present your preliminary findings to the class. On Thursday, after class, your group may wish to run a focus group or conduct an opinion poll in the 1:00 p.m. or 2:30 p.m. POLS Y201 class. Let Professor Bennion know if you wish to pursue this option. Students pursuing this option may present their research design, rather than findings, in class. Findings for other public support inventories should be presented as well.

- **PRESENTATION #3: Thursday, October 14**

**Week 8**  
October 19/21

### **How to Persuade the Decision Maker: Time to Practice!**

This week groups will prepare for their meetings with decision makers. Groups should complete the “Connecting with the Decision Maker” exercise on page 143 before class on Tuesday. We will use the “Playing the Decision Maker” role play exercise in class to prepare for group meetings with decision makers. Be sure to incorporate any additional public opinion data you have gathered since last Thursday.

#### **Before you come to class read:**

- **Chapter 3: The Buck Stops Where?**
- **HOMEWORK #6 DUE: Tuesday, October 19**

**Week 9**  
October 26/28

### **Meeting with Decision Makers**

**This week groups will meet with decisions makers.** Group members must work together to: define and build their relationships with appropriate decision makers, following all guidelines in the textbook, including: following the chain of command, respecting professional staff, knowing the decision maker before lobbying, understanding internal politics and dynamics, staying informed and credible, maximizing face-to-face opportunities with decision makers, and not letting the perfect be the enemy of the good.

**Week 10**  
November 2/4

### **Using the Calendar to Achieve Your Goals**

This week groups will finalize a timeline for future efforts to form coalitions, meet with decision makers, testify at public meetings, attract media and build public support. Use feedback from decision makers to plan additional work needed to make a difference in your chosen policy area.

#### **Before you come to class read:**

- **Chapter 6: Timing is Everything**
- **HOMEWORK #7 DUE: Tuesday, November 2**

**Action Timeline Due at the Beginning of Class on Thursday (11/4).**

**Week 11**  
November 9/11

### **Coalitions for Citizen Success**

This week groups will begin to build a coalition by (1) listing groups or individuals who are most likely to be allies, (2) identifying human resources (including experts) needed for ultimate success, and (3) contacting potential allies to determine how and by what criteria they will decide whether to support your issue. If possible, groups should schedule a meeting with coalition partners. Write a strategy memo outlining potential allies endorsement practices and history of political activism. In that memo, use insights from Chapter 5 to make recommendations about how to pursue possible endorsements. (Groups may also choose to research possible opponents to the solution they are advocating. Why do they oppose you? Is compromise a possibility? Prepare a report for members of your alliance, including recommendations for which existing coalition members—and potentially new ones— could influence those likely opponents).

#### **Before you come to class read:**

- **Chapter 7: All for One, and One for All**
- **HOMEWORK #8 DUE: Tuesday, November 9**
- **Strategy Memo Due Friday 11/12**

**Week 12**  
November 16/18

### **Finding Resource to Support Your Initiative**

This week you will brainstorm to determine what goods or services you will need to facilitate your initiative, as well as their approximate costs. Draft an initial budget. Include in-kind goods and services donated to your cause. You will also make a list of potential supporters. Starting with your colleagues, campus leaders, coalition partners, and closest allies, and making sure at all times to comply with any applicable rules, laws, or regulations, ask each of them to make a contribution to your efforts. Don't forget to contact your coalition partners to see if they can help provide necessary resources. Be prepared to provide an update on your success in gaining coalition partners and raising resources (Thursday, November 18).

**(Reading assignment listed on page 6 of the syllabus).**

**Before you come to class read:**

- **Chapter 9: The Price of Progress**
- **HOMEWORK #9 DUE: Tuesday, November 16**

**Week 13**  
November 23

### **Engaging the Media**

On Tuesday, we will talk with a local newspaper editorial writer who will explain what influences the newspaper's editorial opinions, and how the newspaper determines which op-eds and letters to the editor to publish. Following this presentation, all groups will write an op-ed arguing the case for their citizen initiative and will submit it to the newspaper for consideration.

We will talk with a local broadcast reporter and/or assignment editor who will explain that influences the station's decisions about what events to cover, and discuss tips for attracting media coverage and talking with reporters. Following this presentation, groups will develop a media strategy. Each group must also compile a list of relevant radio, print, and broadcast reporters.

**Before you come to class read:**

- **Chapter 8: All Your News is Fit to Print**
- HOMEWORK #9 DUE: Tuesday, November 23**

**Week 14**  
Nov. 30-Dec. 2

### **Working with Your Coalition to Engage the Media and Decisionmakers**

**Submit your group's VOP and LTE to Professor Bennion no later than NOON on Monday, November 29<sup>th</sup>.** She will provide you with feedback so that you may submit these to the newspaper(s) on Tuesday.

**Bring your media strategy and detailed media plan with you to class on Tuesday.** Groups should **put this plan into ACTION before Sunday, December 5<sup>th</sup>.** Take detailed notes on reporters' reactions to your requests for media coverage.

Also, contact decision makers. Invite them to attend and be a part of your culminating event.

## Week 15

### **Culminating Event: WEEK OF ACTION!**

**This is it!** You have spent the semester defining the problem; gathering facts; identifying decision makers; determining public opinion; persuading decision makers; building coalitions, and engaging the media. Now it is time for you to host a final culminating event. One that allows you to publically define the problem, share the facts you have gathered, and use your coalition and media contacts to influence public opinion, lobby decision makers, and get other ordinary citizens involved in your cause.

#### **ASSIGNMENT:**

Host a fundraiser, public forum, class visit, rally, march, boycott, sit-in, petition drive, letter-writing campaign, campus visit, speak-out, lobbying trip, or other event designed to raise awareness and solve the problem you have wrestled with all semester. **YOU CAN DO IT!** You can make a difference!

## Week 16

**Final project portfolio due to Professor Bennion.**

### **Course Requirements:**

**PARTICIPATION.** This is an active-learning course. All students are expected to attend class regularly and contribute to class discussions. Your group is counting on you! **Please do not miss class.** Missing class means missing critical brainstorming sessions. Participation grades will be calculated using both attendance and participation records. (26 class sessions; 100 points total)

**HOMEWORK.** Homework is due at almost every class session. **Submit the ANSWER KEY at the beginning of class each week.** Keep the complete homework assignment for in-class review. In your homework, you will begin the critical thinking process. Work must be submitted on time. We will review the homework in class. **Late work will NOT be accepted.** Please pay attention to the following important rules:

**Weekly Homework Assignments:** (10 assignments; 20 points each; 200 points total)

- Students should submit this assignment at the beginning of class each day.
- Late homework will not be accepted.
- Students must do their own work. **Do not solicit answers from others.**
- In case of absence, homework may be submitted before class. (Limit 2)

## Grading Scale:

*total points earned/500 points possible*

Based on percentages:

98-100 = A+	93-97 = 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-

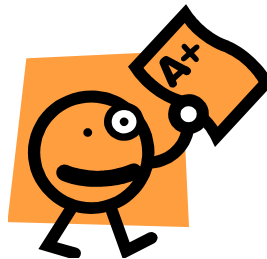
Grades are not automatically rounded up. Purchase your own “grade insurance” by completing an extra credit project. Any mark below 60 represents a failing grade.



## Grade Insurance:

Oncourse assigns grades based on a minimum point threshold. An 89% is a B+, as is an 89.5% and an 89.9%. You must meet the minimum threshold (i.e. 90% = A-) *without rounding* to earn a specific grade. Grades are not automatically rounded up. Do you cringe at the thought of missing a higher grade by one-tenth of a percent? **Take control!** Purchase your own “grade insurance” by completing an extra credit project.

Students earn a 1% bonus for a satisfactory (high quality) project.  
Students may complete 0-3 projects for a maximum grade bonus of 3%.



## Posting of Grades:

All grades will be posted on the Oncourse website.  
You are encouraged to check the online gradebook regularly.  
Notify the instructor immediately if you discover problems with your online gradebook.



### **Americans with Disabilities Act Accommodations:**

If you have special learning needs, please let me know. All arrangements for special testing conditions, notetakers, or other services must be made through Disabled Student Services. Please call Disabled Student Services at 520-4479. The instructor will follow all recommendations of the Office of Disabled Student Services and will sit down with each student to discuss the recommendations and accommodations that best meet a student's individual needs.

### **Cheating and Plagiarism:**

**Students' work must be their own.** Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Any person caught violating the rules as spelled out in the *Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct* (1996: 17-18) will receive a failing grade in the course.

If you do not have a copy of the *Code* see the instructor or purchase a copy at the bookstore.

**This course operates on an honor code.** Students who take this course pledge that they will not solicit nor provide answers to the homework assignments or examinations. *Students must also report violations of the honor code to the instructor.*

Homework assignments are designed to test each student's individual understanding of the assigned readings. Homework is assigned to facilitate discussions informed by the course readings and to reward students for completing the reading before each class session. Students may work together on homework assignments, but may not copy each other's answers. Working together does not mean dividing the labor. All students working together should discuss all homework questions before selecting the best answer. Soliciting or providing answers to the homework questions will be considered a violation of the honor code and will result in a failing grade.

The take-home exam is designed to test your understanding of the issues discussed in class as well as your critical thinking and writing skills. If you are concerned about your ability to perform well on this essay exam, you should speak to the instructor about writing assistance that would *not* constitute a violation of the honor code. All examination answers must be derived from your own synthesis of the course readings, class discussions, and your original ideas. *Ideas* taken from the assigned readings should be paraphrased and cited. *Words* taken from the assigned readings should be quoted and cited. You may have a friend or tutor proofread your work, but **the arguments & writing on the exams must be your own.** *If you have questions, speak to the instructor.*

### **Modifying the Syllabus:**

The instructor reserves the right to modify the syllabus to reflect changes in the academic schedule, emerging opportunities, or student needs. Students are responsible for changes as announced in class and posted to Oncourse.

### **POLS Y201 Extra-Credit Options:**

*Students are welcome to complete up to THREE of the following extra credit assignments. Each high-quality assignment will boost your final course grade by one percentage point.*

- Attend an instructor-approved (pre-approved) event and write about what you learned about American politics or some contemporary social/political debate. Want to attend a specific event for extra credit? Talk to the instructor.

***OR***

- Write a 400 – 500 word commentary for the American Democracy Project weblog or respond (in 150 - 300 words) to TWO ADP weblog entries (<http://www.iusb.edu/~sbadp>)

***OR***

- Track public opinion on one of the issues discussed in this course. Report your findings in a 2-3 page paper. Document your sources. What do the majority of Americans believe? How have attitudes changed over the past three decades?

***OR***

- Create your own public opinion poll to measure public opinion on one or more of the issues discussed in this class. Administer your survey to at least 20 individuals. Explain how you collected your data. Summarize your findings in 2-3 pages. Include charts, graphs, and words.

***OR***

- Watch a political news program. Write a brief (2-3 page) paper describing: 1) the topic of the show, 2) the persons appearing on the show, 3) the main arguments advanced by various speakers, and 4) your own reactions to these arguments. Include a statement of your new, informed, opinion on the issue(s) highlighted by the show. (Program must be pre-approved).

***OR***

- Read a newspaper article related to the subject matter of this course. Write a brief (1-2 page) paper describing: 1) the topic of the article, 2) what you learned by reading the article, 3) how the article relates to what you have learned in this course, and 4) your own reaction to the article.