

POLITICAL SCIENCE 225
POLITICAL INTEREST GROUPS
Syllabus: Spring Semester 2007
Mr. McFarland

Requirements: There will be two lectures per week: Tuesday and Thursday, 2:00–3:15. The main class requirement is a ten-page paper, counting 40% of the grade. The topic of the paper will be the analysis of an interest group. Detailed instructions as to writing the ten-page paper will be handed out to the student. The paper will be due at the end of the twelfth week of class (April 12). In addition there will be two in-class essay examinations, covering the reading and the lectures. The midterm will be at the end of the seventh week of class (March 1); the second examination will cover the last half of the class and will be held during the scheduled time for the final. However, both exams will count 25%, which means that the “final” will have the same weight as a midterm. In addition, at the end of the fourth week of class (February 8), all students will be required to submit a one page discussion of their selection of an interest group for the paper. This will be part of the last 10% of grade allocation, which in some cases will include class participation.

Interest Groups may be defined as organizations which seek to influence public policy. Many organizations have a principle purpose other than to influence public policy, but may seek to influence public policy as a secondary purpose. This second category would include business corporations and nonprofit organizations, such as occupational organizations, universities, hospitals, and churches. In additions, federalist governments such as states and cities seek to influence the policies of the national government. Some interest groups are called “associations,” such as groups of like-minded individuals who seek to influence government, or trade associations, groups of commercial entities seeking to advance a common economic interest.

As political organizations, interest groups are distinguished from political parties, which are organizations seeking to influence public policy through gaining the election of public officials. Interest groups, on the other hand, seek to influence public officials after they are elected, or seek to influence members of the executive branch or independent agencies who are appointed, not elected. There exists overlapping categories between political parties and interest groups, as interest groups may seek to influence elections through campaign contributions or provision of other resources to favored politicians. Political movements are a third category of political action; they seek to influence public policy by a variety of methods, but by definition use a broader variety of noninstitutional tactics (e.g. demonstrations) than parties or interest groups.

Lobbying and lobbyists refer to action to influence public policy on the behalf of interest groups, other organizations seeking to advance interests, or sometimes individual action to influence government. These terms refer to the symbolic image of waiting in the lobby to address legislators as they enter or exit an assembly chamber; such persons seek to speak to the decision-maker or to hand over a letter or petition. The study of lobbying is thus a part of the study of political interest groups. Lobbying is now an occupation involving perhaps 100,000 full-time

personnel in the United States, including state and local government, with another 200,000 support personnel such as group administrators and policy researchers. Thousands of others lobby part-time or just occasionally as part of their job, such as CEO of a business. Of course few lobbyists are actually waiting in the political lobbies or even in the legislative committee rooms; they generally visit offices of officials or communicate with the media.

Lobbying in Washington works through network systems of processing information sent to decision-makers to influence their decisions. Physically lobbying occupies decentralized spaces, larger than the U.S. legislature and Washington federal courts, but less space than the executive branch as a whole in Washington, although more than smaller federal departments. There are about 35,000 Washington lobbyists who are registered; thousands of others do not register for technical legal reasons. Lobbying agents spend at least two billion dollars in Washington to influence federal government decisions.

Political participation: the political science convention in the study of American politics is to identify four types of institutional political participation: (1) voting, (2) election campaigning, (3) interest group petitioning of government officials, (4) direct contacting of government officials, not mediated through an interest groups. These four categories are normally applied to individual acts of political participation, but they can be applied to entities such as business corporations, except for the voting category. A fifth category of participation is action in political movements; it differs in that it is not institutional. Thus, in addition to voting and working in political campaigns, citizens may engage in political participation through interest groups. Citizen political participation through interest groups is obviously important and potentially influential, even though it may not have quite as much impact as voting in elections. Interest-group participation is highly important in that it influences the behavior of governmental officials in their actions between elections.

This class emphasizes American politics and political participation. However, interest groups exist worldwide as obviously citizens and organizations seek to influence government policies, no matter in what country on earth. Furthermore, with the development of internet technology, persons are forming transnational networks to act internationally to influence governments and policies other than their own (e.g. Amnesty International).

This class proceeds as follows. The first goal is to define and describe the activities of interest groups and lobbying. The teaching goal is simply to make the student more aware of the activities of interest groups and lobbyists that are seeking to influence the government policies affecting our lives. American public culture and the political culture of almost every nation avoids the discussion of interest group activity, since it involves the discussion of self-interested and materialistic goals in conflict with political ideals embodied in political systems. The goal is to open up the student's eyes to interest groups, and to realize more fully the major role interest groups and lobbying play in our politics.

The second goal is to familiarize the student with the major problem posed by interest groups for democracy. Groups perform a function of communicating citizens' and organizational interests to government officials, giving them more information. However, due to the inherent difficulties of cooperation based in human nature, some groups are easier to organize than other groups. This

biases the information sent to government officials. Furthermore, organized special interests can form coalitions with government officials to gain their way, even against the interests of the majority. The problem is : the few defeat the many. If this happens too frequently in making public policy, democracy is corrupted into forms of elitism, rule by special-interest cliques, each controlling its own turf without regard to the public interest. The instructor has concluded that there are techniques to organize groups such as environmental lobbies, which have some chance to form countervailing power to the special-interest coalitions. My argument is that we need to organize such citizens lobbies, which although not always 100 percent correct, are needed to balance the power of the special-interest coalitions, known as “iron triangles” in the political vernacular.

After the midterm, following a textbook we do a sequential rundown of the role of interest groups and lobbying through the activities and branches of American national government: elections, Congress, the executive branch, the judiciary, plus a discussion of the power of business, separate from the discussion of the iron triangle problem. After the discussion of business power, we discuss social movements and how they spin off political lobbies, which often oppose business in seeking regulation of business. At this point there will be a lecture on current efforts in Congress to devise regulations of lobbying activity in reaction to recent lobbying scandals.

We somewhat briefly treat interest groups outside of the United States by discussing corporatism, a mode of organizing interest groups from the top which is different from the relatively fragmented group organization in the United States. The instructor developed the concept of “cooperative pluralism,” indicating the possibility of limited cooperation between environmental and business groups, a limited form of corporatism. Beyond this, there will be a lecture on the political science theory of transnational political networks.

After this we will treat the major current idea in political science about participation in groups (not just interest groups)—civic engagement. This idea refers to the observation that social cooperation relies upon the face-to-face interaction of persons in social groups, through which they come to trust one another to engage in common action in the pursuit of group goals. The extent of such interpersonal trust is called “social capital.” The argument is that a fund of social capital is necessary to the workings of democracy, since otherwise public action will degenerate into an anarchy of self-centered individualism. According to leading political scientist Robert Putnam, the amount of civic engagement in American is declining, as rather than participate in face-to-face social interaction, over the last 50 years Americans are spending more time watching television, and simply commuting back-and-forth to work from suburban residences. Finally, the instructor makes his argument that the civic engagement argument is important, but that there is a need for types of political participation that do not meet the civic engagement criteria. Organizing and support for environmental lobbies, for instance, does not rely on face-to-face interaction among supportive citizens, but through individual checkbook contributions, and to some degree, action at a distance through communications on the internet.

There are three textbooks for the class, and copies have been available at the Student Union bookstore. If they run out, they should be back in stock soon.

David Lowery and Holly Brasher, *Organized Interests and American Government*, McGraw-Hill
Anthony J. Nownes, *Total Lobbying: What Lobbyists Want (and How They Try to Get it)*,
Cambridge University Press
Christopher Bosso, *Environment, Inc.: From Grassroots to Beltway*, University Press of Kansas

e-Mail: amcfarla @ uic.edu
Office Hours, 11-12 AM, 1123 BSB
Office phone, 312-413-3776

Extensive directions for writing the ten-page paper will be handed out.

Class examinations will be essay examinations, with a small part for short identifications, such as fill-in-the-blank.

Class Schedule

January 16	Introduction .Definitions.
January 18	Descriptions of interest groups. <i>Organized Interests</i> , 1-28
January 23	Public policy lobbying. <i>Lobbying</i> , 1-56.
January 25	Public policy lobbying, land use lobbying. <i>Lobbying</i> , 57-147.
January 30	Lobbying and government contracts. <i>Lobbying</i> , 148-218.
February 1	The logic of collective action. Finish the lobbying book. A few students may want to read Mancur Olson's <i>The Logic of Collective Action</i> , but this book is not required.
February 6	The logic of collective action (continued) Subgovernments or "iron triangles." <i>Organized Interests</i> , Ch. 2.
February 8	Submit statement of your paper topic. Subgovernments or "iron triangles."

- February 13 Subgovernments versus countervailing power
Start reading *Environment, Inc.*, pp. 1-47.
- February 15 Countervailing power. Public interest groups. Environmental lobbies.
Continue reading *Environment, Inc.*
- February 20 Environmental lobbies.
Continue reading *Environment, Inc.*
- February 22 Interest groups: pluralism, multiple elitism, neopluralism.
Finish reading *Environment, Inc.*
- February 27 Neopluralism and democracy.
- March 1 **MIDTERM** examination.
- March 6 Interest groups and campaign finance.
Organized Interests, Ch. 4.
- March 8 Interest groups and the Congress
Organized Interests, Ch. 5.
- March 13 Interest groups and the Congress.
Organized Interests, Ch. 5.
- March 15 Interest groups and the Executive Branch/Independent Agencies.
Organized Interests, Ch. 6.
- March 20 Interest Groups and the Judiciary.
Organized Interests, Ch. 7.
- March 23 Business power and interest groups in America.
Work on paper.
- March 26 to March 30. Spring Break.
- April 3 Social movements and interest groups.
Work on paper.
- April 5 Corporatist interest groups of Europe.
Work on paper.
- April 10 Cooperative pluralism experiments in the United States.
Work on paper.

- April 12 **PAPER DUE DATE.**
Transnational citizen networks.
- April 17 Robert Putnam's theory of civic engagement.
- April 19. The theory of civic engagement.
- April 24. Instructor's theory of innovative civic participation.
- April 26 To be announced or lecture catch-up.
- May 1 Reform proposals.
Organized Interests, Ch. 8.
- May 3. Summaries and generalizations.

The "final" exam time will be announced. This exam will cover material after the first midterm and will count 25% of the grade.