

Ethics in American Politics
POS 4264
Spring 2024

Professor Beth Rosenson
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Office Hours: Wednesdays 11:45-1:45 and Thursdays 11:15-12:15

Course Overview

The problem of unethical behavior involving elected officials is a perennial concern in American politics. Since the early days of the Republic, policy makers and ordinary citizens have sought to control unethical conduct such as bribery and treason. In recent decades, the focus of concern about political ethics has shifted to the problem of "conflicts of interest" between elected officials' private interests and their public duties, and to the regulation of campaign finance. This course will examine theories of political ethics, important episodes of corruption, and the regulation of political ethics through elections and legislation. The main focus will be on the ethics of legislators, but we will also look at presidents, governors, and other public officials.

Some of the main questions the course will address include: How does political ethics differ, if at all, from private ethics? What causes corruption? What have been the aims of good-government reformers? What sorts of ethical issues does the American campaign finance system pose? Should unethical behavior be addressed at the ballot box rather than through new laws? What are the limits of ethics regulation? What defenses of politicians can be mounted against the various criticisms that are often made of them, for example that they are overly concerned with winning reelection, that they are too partisan, and that they are overly ambitious and dishonest? What constitutes political courage, and what other virtues are important for public officials to have?

Disability Statement

Students requiring accommodations must first register with the Dean of Student's Office, Disability Resource Center. The Dean of Student's office will provide documentation which the student will then give to the instructor:
<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc>.

Recording of Sessions

Our class sessions may be audio-visually recorded for students in the class to refer back and for enrolled students who are unable to attend live. Students who participate with their camera engaged or utilize a profile image are agreeing to have their video or image recorded. If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video image recorded, be sure to keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Likewise, students who un-mute during class and participate orally are agreeing to have their voice recorded. If you are not willing to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the "chat" feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live. The chat will

not be recorded or shared. As in all courses, unauthorized recording and unauthorized sharing of recorded materials by students or any other party is prohibited.

Course Requirements/Breakdown of Points for Assignments

FIRST PAPER, due January 30 (5-7 pages): 18 points, 20% of grade
QUIZ #1, February 20: 18 points, 18% of grade
QUIZ #2, March 26: 18 points, 18% of grade
SECOND PAPER, due April 9 (5-7 pages): 18 points, 18% of grade
THIRD PAPER, due April 16 (2 pages), 2 points, 2% of grade
FOURTH PAPER, due April 30 – can submit earlier if you want (10-12 pages): 26 points, 26% of grade

MISSED WORK

Make-up exams will only be given if discussed in advance with the professor or if there are unusual circumstances that make the student unable to take the exam on time.

THE HONOR CODE

On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: *"On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment."* For more information on the honor code, see: [HTTP://www.dso.ufl.edu/SCCR/honorcodes/honorcode.php](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/SCCR/honorcodes/honorcode.php)

RECORDING OF LECTURES

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A "class lecture" is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To "publish" means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student

within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

GRADING SCALE

A	94 and above	C	74-76
A-	90-93	C-	70-73
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	84-86	D	64-66
B-	80-83	D-	60-63
C+	77-79	E	Below 60

A C- will not be a qualifying grade for major, minor, Gen Ed, Gordon Rule or College Basic Distribution credit.

For information on the grading scale, see either [HTTP://www.isis.ufl.edu/minusgrades.html](http://www.isis.ufl.edu/minusgrades.html) or [HTTP://registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationgrades.html](http://registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationgrades.html).

Students must write four papers for the class. Topics will be announced in advance and sent via the class list-serve. Papers are due AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS on the day they are due. Late papers will be penalized by half a grade for each day late (e.g. from a B+ to a B if one day late, from a B+ to a B- if two days late).

Students are expected to attend all classes. Material will be covered in lecture that is not necessarily covered by the readings, and it may appear on the quizzes. Participation is strongly encouraged. You will get more out of the class if you see yourself as an active participant rather than as a passive note-taker.

Books For Purchase

Four books and one coursepack are required for purchase. The books are also on course reserve. The coursepack needs to be ordered online and will be shipped to you for free. Link to purchase coursepack:

<https://shopbookit.com/products/pos-4264-spring-2024-ethics-in-american-politics-professor-rosenson>

Books/Coursepack Required For Purchase (First four on course reserve as well)

- 1) Dennis F. Thompson, *Ethics in Congress* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1995)
- 2) John F. Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage* (Harper Collins (HarperPerennial): 2006)
- 3) Michael Beschloss, *Presidential Courage* (Simon & Schuster, 2008)
- 4) Stephen Medvic, *In Defense of Politicians* (Routledge, 2013)
- 5) **Required coursepack on sale at Bookit, Link will be provided to order.**

I. Introduction and Course Overview

January 9

II. Theories of Political Ethics and of Political Corruption Does Political Ethics Differ From Ethics in Private Life? How Have Conceptions of What is Ethical in Politics Changed Over Time?

January 11, 16, 18

January 11

Readings

Theories of Political Ethics and Corruption

* Dennis Thompson, *Political Ethics and Public Office* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 96-122 (ITEM 1 IN COURSEPACK)

* Dennis Thompson, *Ethics in Congress*, chs. 1 (REQUIRED TEXT)

January 16, 18

Readings

Political Ethics and Private Ethics

Jan. 16

* Dennis Thompson, *Ethics in Congress*, chs. 2-3 (REQUIRED TEXT)

Jan. 18

* Dennis Thompson, *Political Ethics and Public Office* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 123-147 (ITEM 2 IN COURSEPACK)

* Molly Sonner and Clyde Wilcox "Forgiving and Forgetting: Public Support for Bill Clinton During the Lewinsky Scandal," *PS: Political Science and Politics* (1999), Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 554-557 (journal available through UF library website)

January 23

Readings

Changing Conceptions of What is Unethical in Politics

* Beth Rosenson, "Unethical Political Behavior Viewed Through the Lens of U.S. House Ethics Investigations, 1798-2011" *Public Integrity*, Summer 2014, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 227-242 (journal available through UF Library website)

III. What Causes Corruption? Where Does it Come From? Why Does it Vary Across Different States (and Countries)?

January 25

Readings

* George C. S. Benson, *Political Corruption in America* (Lexington, Mass: D.C. Heath, 1978), pp. 211-237 (ITEM 3 IN COURSEPACK)

* Beth Rosenson, "The Effect of Political Reform Measures on the Perception of Corruption," *Election Law Journal* (2009), Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 31-46 (journal available through UF Library website)

*****PAPER 1 DUE JAN. 30*****

IV. Corruption and Reform Before 1920: Federal, State and Local Governments

February 1

Readings

A. Federal and State Corruption

* George C.S. Benson, *Political Corruption in America* (Lexington, Mass: D.C. Heath, 1978), pp. 73-87 (ITEM 4 IN COURSEPACK)

* Robert T. Roberts and Marion T. Doss Jr., *From Watergate to Whitewater: The*

Public Integrity War (Westport: Praeger Press, 1997), pp. 9-21 (ITEMS 5 and 6 IN COURSEPACK)

February 6

Readings

B. Machine Corruption

* Michael Johnston, *Political Corruption and Public Policy in America* (Westport: Praeger, 1997), pp. 36-71 (ITEM 7 IN COURSEPACK)

* William Riordan, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* (N.Y: E.P. Dutton, 1963), pp. xxiii-20 (ITEM 8 IN COURSEPACK)

V. Electoral Responses to Corruption: Can Corruption be Addressed Adequately Through the Ballot Box? How are Legislators Affected by Scandal?

February 8

Readings

* Scott Basinger, "Scandals and Elections in the Post-Watergate Era." *Political Research Quarterly* (June 2013), Vol. 66, Issue No. 2, pp. 385-98 (journal available through UF library website)

*Adam J. Newmark, "Surviving Political Scandals: Why Some Transgressions End Political Careers and Others Do Not," *Social Science Quarterly* (June 2019), Vol. 100, Issue 4, pp. 1268-1283 (journal available through UF library website)

VI. Addressing Corruption Through Legislation: The Progressives and the Post-Watergate Era

February 13

Readings

A. The Progressive Era, 1888-1920

*Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, *Progressivism* (Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc.), pp. 26-66 (ITEM 9 IN COURSEPACK)

****NO CLASS FEB. 15 (will hold class if necessary but as of now, no class)**

*****QUIZ #1 – FEBRUARY 20*****

February 22

Readings

B. Watergate and its Aftermath: Ethics at the National Level

* James D. Carroll and Robert N. Roberts, "If Men Were Angels: Assessing the Ethics in Government Act of 1978." *Policy Studies Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Winter, 1988-89, pp. 435-447 (journal available through UF library website)

* House ethics rules: available at

<https://ethics.house.gov/sites/ethics.house.gov/files/documents/Final%20Version%20of%20the%20Highlights%20Overview%20Booklet%202015.pdf>

* Beth Rosenson, "The Trumps' Conflict of Interest Issues," *The Conversation*, April 19, 2017, available at <https://theconversation.com/explainer-the-trumps-conflict-of-interest-issues-75761>

* Video on Jack Abramoff to be shown in class

February 27

Ethics Regulation at the State Level, and Abroad

Readings

* Beth Rosenson, *Shadowlands of Conduct* (Georgetown University Press, 2005), chapter on independent ethics commissions (to be emailed to list serve)

* Donald J. Maletz and Jerry Herbel, "Some Paradoxes of Government Ethics Revisited." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 1998, pp. 20-25 (ITEM 10 IN COURSEPACK)

* Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, "Controlling Corruption Through Collective Action." *Journal of Democracy*, January 2013, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 101-115. Available at: <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Mungiu-Pippidi-24-1.pdf>

VII. Campaign Finance: What Does Money Buy and How Should Campaign Donations Be Regulated?

Feb. 29, March 5

Feb. 29: What Does Money Buy and Where Do Candidates Get Their Money From?

Readings

* Rick Hasen, "What Does Money Buy In Politics?" (from his Book *Plutocrats United*) (to be posted on Canvas in Announcements)

* David Magelby, "Change and Continuity in the Financing of the 2016 Federal Election," in David Magelby, ed., *Financing the 2016 Election* (Brookings Institution, 2019), pp. 1-6, 9-17 and 21-33 (to be posted to Canvas in Announcements)

March 5: Public Financing

Readings

* David Donnelly, Janice Fine, and Ellen S. Miller, "Going Public," in *Campaign Finance Reform*, Anthony Corrado, Thomas E. Mann, Daniel R. Ortiz, Trevor Potter and Frank J. Sorauf, eds. (Washington D.C.: Brookings: 1997), pp. 364-370 (ITEM 11 IN COURSEPACK)

* Video on clean election reform to be shown in class - <https://wvcag.org/video-clean-elections-changing-the-face-of-america/>

VIII. Understanding Why People Hate Congress, Part I

March 7:

Reading

* John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, *Congress as Public Enemy* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 1-20 (To be posted to Canvas in Announcements).

****SPRING BREAK: MARCH 12 and 14****

VIII. Why People Hate Congress, Part II: Defending Politicians and Medvic's Response To Critics of Politicians. Or, Why Politicians May Not Be As Bad As People Think

March 19, 21

Readings

March 19

* Stephen Medvic, *Defending Politicians*, chapters 1, 2 (REQUIRED TEXT)

March 21

Medvic, chapters 4, 6, and 7 (REQUIRED TEXT)

*****QUIZ 2 - MARCH 26*****

X. Beyond Ethics and Campaign Finance Laws: Virtues of The Ethical Politician (Prudence, Political Courage, and Moral Integrity)

March 28-April 23

March 28

A. Prudence, Cases of Exemplary Public Administrators, Ethical Leadership

Readings

*J. Patrick Dobel, *Public Integrity* (Johns Hopkins: 1999), ch. 10, pp. 193-211 (ITEM 12 IN COURSEPACK)

April 2

Readings

*Terry Cooper and N. Dale Wright, eds., *Exemplary Public Administrators* (Jossey Bass: 1992), ch. 10 on William Ruckelshaus (pp. 241-267) (ITEM 13 IN COURSEPACK)

*Terry Cooper and N. Dale Wright, eds., *Exemplary Public Administrators* (Jossey Bass: 1992), ch. 12 on Marie Ragghianti (pp. 304-323) (ITEM 14 IN COURSEPACK)

April 4
B. Courage: Legislators, Presidents and Others
Readings

*John F. Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage*, ch 1-3 (REQUIRED TEXT)

*****PAPER #2 DUE APRIL 9*****

Courage: Legislators, Presidents and Others
Readings

April 11
Readings

*Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage*, chapter 4, 6, 8

*John McCain, *Why Courage Matters* (Random House: 2004), pp. 3-12 and 86-105 (To be posted to Canvas in Announcements).

*****APRIL 16: PAPER 3 DUE (1 to 2 page write up of a current legislator you consider to be courageous and why– for class discussion) *****

Presidential Courage

April 18

Readings

* Michael Beschloss, *Presidential Courage* (REQUIRED TEXT), chapters on Truman (Chapters 25-28), John F. Kennedy (Chapters 29-32),

April 23

Beschloss, *Presidential Courage*, chapter on Reagan (Chapters 33-36) (REQUIRED TEXT).

***** April 30: FINAL PAPER DUE (CAN SUBMIT EARLIER IF YOU WANT)*****