Political parties have played a crucial role in the development and operation of American democracy. In our fragmented and decentralized political system, parties are one way to consolidate power and serve as one of the key intermediary organizations that connect individuals to the political system. Some even claim that parties are indispensable to American politics. E. E. Schattschneider once wrote, “Political parties created democracy, and ... modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties” (1942, 1).

Despite the fact that political parties play a central role in politics, they have often been the objects of criticism. Americans tend to hold them in low esteem. Throughout American history, reformers have tried to weaken political parties by creating measures to replace the various functions that parties typically perform. Some of those ‘more desirable’ alternatives include, but are not limited to: direct primaries, civil service merit systems for public employment, secret ballots, initiatives, referenda, and the public funding of candidates. Many of them have been adopted and have shaped the American party system to this day, differentiating it from party systems in other countries.

To proponents, political parties are important in organizing political action and framing choices. To opponents, however, parties are seen as the cause of tiresome partisan bickering, the catalyst for manufacturing unnecessary political conflict, and a hegemony over political life that undermines democratic principles.

In this course we will be engaged in a normative discussion of the roles that political parties should play in American politics as well as an empirical discussion about the current and past states of the parties. We start with an overview of political parties: what are political parties and what do they do? And what is the American party system? Following V.O. Key’s (1958) framework, we then move on to examine the role and behavior of each strand of the party tripartite:

- **Party as an organization**: an institutionalized coalition under political party names, which includes party leaders and the activists at the local, state, and national levels
- **Party in the electorate**: a coalition of citizens who identify with the party
- **Party in government**: a group of candidates for public offices and politicians who hold office under a party label to engage in policy-making when in office

We will also look at how parties are involved in the electoral process and how they compete with each other in what constitutes as the American party system. And given current events, we will discuss developments in the ongoing elections. Along the way, we will critically evaluate the success and failure of parties as democratic institutions.
Course Materials

We will use three assigned books, all of which are available for purchase at the University Bookstore. The Hershey book is also available in digital form for a 180-day subscription at about half the retail price. Students interested in exploring this arrangement should use the following link: http://www.coursesmart.com/home?portal=coursesmart


There are additional readings from book chapters, articles, and online sources that will be available at learn@UW.

Course Requirements

Your grade is determined by a combination of two exams (50%) and three short writing assignments (50%). In order to pass the class, you must complete all requirements. Incompletes will be given only in rare circumstances.

- **Exams** (50%): Both exams are in-class and will cover all topics through the last lecture before the exam. The format of the exams will be a brief essay and short IDs.
  - 1st exam (25%): Monday, October 29th
  - 2nd exam (25%): Friday, December 14th

- **Writing Assignments** (50%): Below is a brief description of each assignment. I will distribute additional details in class.
  - Tyranny of the two-party system critical response (10%): Due Friday, September 28th. Based on your analysis of the assigned chapters in Disch’s book, plus other relevant readings for the course, you will indicate your agreement or disagreement with Disch’s argument in a 500-600 word essay.
  - Public opinion data analysis (15%): Due Monday, November 12th. Using an online resource, you will produce a brief study of public opinion as it related to political parties (3-4 pages). For example, you might look at a group of issues and see how they affect people’s views toward one party or the other. Or you might look at a group of demographic characteristics to see if they influence support for third parties. Or you might want to see how being a “strong” partisan rather than an “independent” affects one’s perception of the political system overall.
  - The 2012 Election Analysis (25%): Due Friday, December 21st. The purpose of this research paper is to demonstrate your newly acquired knowledge about contemporary parties and electoral politics this semester (6-7 pages). It requires you to analyze the 2012 election campaign and its results at the senatorial
and presidential level in one of the 49 American states other than Wisconsin, and the implications of those results for the parties in that state.

**Ground Rules**

- Lectures will not always cover the same material as the readings. Both reading materials and attending classes on a regular basis are necessary to do well in the course.
  - **Attendance**: While there is no official component for attendance in the final grade, I will take attendance in every class. It will be taken into account at the margins in determining final grades. That is, students’ borderline grades could be bumped up based on great attendance.
  - **Participation**: I will lecture but the class will also be conducted as a discussion section to the extent possible in this medium-sized class. The primary impetus and energy in this classroom will come from you, the students. Please come prepared to discuss the reading materials each class; this means arguing about them in a thoughtful manner with your fellow classmates. Discussions should be respectful of others’ views, but in no way does this suggest that we paper over our differences with others. We can learn from each other precisely to the extent that we can understand our disagreements.

- **Grading policy**
  - Numerical grades can be interpreted as below. Grades are not curved, but there may be some upward adjustment of final grades if I believe the grade distribution is excessively low. However, you should not assume such an adjustment will take place. I do not in any case adjust grades downward.
    - 93-100 = A
    - 88-92 = AB
    - 83-87 = B
    - 78-82 = BC
    - 70-77 = C
    - 60-69 = D
    - Below 60 = F
  - If you believe there has been a grading error for either a paper or an exam, I strongly encourage you to come and speak with me, but only under the following conditions:
    - At least two days have elapsed since the work has been handed back to students;
    - No more than two weeks have elapsed since I have returned the work to students;
    - You provide in writing an explanation of what you think was wrong with the grading and why you think it should be reconsidered; and
    - You are polite and respectful.
  - There is NO extra-credit work in this course.
○ Quizzes: If I sense general slackness among students, I may give quizzes at any time during the semester. They will consist of short questions to determine if you are keeping up with the readings and be included as an additional grading component.

○ Missing exams: Students missing an exam will receive a grade of zero. There will be NO makeup exam. If a true emergency situation arises, you should contact me before the scheduled test day.

○ Late papers: Papers must be turned in on time by the beginning of class on the due date. A late paper will have one letter grade deducted for each late day.

○ Honors credit: If you plan to receive honors credit for the course, please consult with me within the first two weeks of the semester.

• Courtesies: I expect that everyone will be on time for class and be aware of what kind of behavior is acceptable in class. Please do not solve crossword puzzles, send text messages, etc. during class.

○ Laptop policy: Recent studies find that students who bring laptops to class perform worse on average than non-laptop users, and are much more likely to be distracted during class. Yet, I believe laptops, if used properly, can accommodate different styles of learning and thus I do not prohibit the use of laptops in class. You may use a laptop only for note-taking purposes and not for any other purpose. If you plan to use a laptop in class, please sit in the front rows on the right side (facing the blackboard) of the classroom. This is so that both your classmates and I can police your use of the laptop for legitimate purposes.

• Email policy: I will do my best to respond to email messages quickly and thoroughly. However, emails received after 9pm will not be answered until the next day. I do this not to be unavailable but to ensure that I can still have a life! To make sure that I see your message, please put “PS424” in the subject line so that it will be filtered to the proper mailbox. As I will be holding regular office hours on Mondays and Wednesdays, please use emails for questions which can be answered by a yes or no or a short sentence. If you have any concerns or problems during the course, I strongly encourage you to come and speak with me during office hours or to make an appointment.

• Academic dishonesty: Do NOT plagiarize. Any form of cheating or plagiarism will be subject to harsh penalties as outlined by university policies on academic misconduct. If you are not sure about what constitutes plagiarism, you can refer to the UW System Academic Misconduct Guide [http://students.wisc.edu/doso/acadintegrity.html], consult the Writing Center [http://writing.wisc.edu], and/or ask me for help.

• Special needs: I wish to fully include persons with special challenges in this course. Please let me know if you need any special accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, or assessments for this course to enable you to fully participate. Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the information you share with me. You may also contact the McBurney Disability Resource Center, 1305 Linden Drive, 608) 263-2741, if you have questions about campus policies and services. If you qualify, please present your Verified Individual Service and Accommodation (VISA) plan and all necessary documents to me within the first two weeks of class, and I will work with you to make arrangements.
Schedule

All readings listed in the schedule are required and occasionally I may direct to you some recommended readings. This is only a guide to the pacing of the material and is subject to change. Topics are assigned dates, but we might stray from the schedule at times. Thus, please stay tuned for my in-class announcements and emails about the schedule. You should aim to get the assigned readings done for each subtopic before the first date listed. The Hershey book is our main textbook. When there are more than one readings assigned for a topic, please read chapters from the Hershey book first.

I. PARTIES AND PARTY SYSTEMS

(i) Why Political Parties? (Sept 7, 10)
   - Hershey. Chapter 1.

(ii) Why Two Major Parties? (Sept 12, 14)
   - Hershey. Chapter 2.
   - “An Unreasonable Man (2006)” (Documentary film, Sept 17, 19)

II. THE POLITICAL PARTY ORGANIZATIONS

(i) Local and State Party Organizations (Sept 21, 24)
   - Hershey. Chapter 3.

(ii) National Party Organizations (Sept 24, 26)
   - Hershey. Chapter 4.

(iii) Party Activists: Who are They and Why are They Involved? (Sept 28, Oct 1)
   - Hershey. Chapter 5.
   - Guest speaker: Dave Nelson (Sept 28)

Sept 28: Tyranny of the two-party system critical response due

Oct 3: Getting ready for public opinion data analysis
   - How to use the Survey Documentation Analysis (SDA) web-based software

III. THE POLITICAL PARTY IN THE ELECTORATE

(i) Party Identification: What Role Do They Play? (Oct 5, 8)

(ii) Who are the Democrats and Republicans, Now and Before? (Oct 10, 12)
- Hershey. Chapter 7.

(iii) Party Images in the Electorate (Oct 15, 17)

- Hershey. Chapter 8.

Oct 26: Catch up and/or review for the exam

Oct 29: 1st Exam

IV. POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

(a) Primary, Caucus, and Convention: How do Parties Choose Candidates? (Oct 31, Nov 1)
- Hershey. Chapters 9 and 10.
- Professor Byron Shafer’s blog posts on the 2012 national party conventions: [http://users.polisci.wisc.edu/bshafer/](http://users.polisci.wisc.edu/bshafer/)

(b) Political Campaigning: How Do Rules Technologies, and Strategies Interact? (Nov 5, 7)
- Hershey. Chapter 11.

(c) Controlling Money in Politics (Nov 9, 14)
- Hershey. Chapter 12.

Nov 12: Public opinion analysis due
- Guest speaker Craig Gilbert (Political reporter, Washington Bureau Chief for Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and JSOnline)
V. POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE GOVERNMENT

(i) The Legislative Parties: What is Their Influence? (Nov 16, 19)

(ii) What Influence Party in the Executive and Judiciary? (Nov 21, 26)
- Hershey. Chapter 14.

Nov 23: No Class (Thanksgiving)

(iii) Parties and Governance: What Role for Parties? (Nov 28, 30)
- Hershey. Chapter 15.

VI. AMERICAN POLITICAL PARTIES IN AN AGE OF POLARIZATION
(Dec 3, 5)

VII. THE AMERICAN PARTY SYSTEM: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES
(Dec 7, 10)
- Hershey. Chapter 16.

December 12: Catch up and/or review for the exam

December 14: 2nd Exam

December 21: The 2012 election analysis due