Course Objectives

This course introduces graduate students to the field of American politics and many of the POIR faculty who study questions relevant to politics in the United States. This is an enormous field and the readings cover only a small portion of the research areas in this field. The readings encompass selected “classics,” as well as examples of recent research in selected sub-fields of American politics. The readings are selected to encourage students to follow the development, criticism, and refinement of different theories and ideas.

During the course we will constructively review, analyze and critique research through class discussions and written assignments. Our goal is to explore the major lines of inquiry and research questions that are asked in the field of American politics. By the end of the course, each student should:

- Master the content of and compile a complete set of comments on the required readings that will serve as a guide for your qualifying examinations,
- Understand and critique the theoretical, methodological and empirical foundations of significant parts of the field,
- Complete a research proposal on a topic in American politics.

Requirements and Evaluation:

1) Participation. The seminar is based on the exchange of ideas in a collegial, open, and active group discussion. All students are expected to read and reflect upon the required readings and come to class prepared each week to analyze and discuss the readings in great detail.

2) Three Short Comment Papers and Leading Seminar. During the first class meeting, students will sign up for three different seminar topics (at least one must be for a week in which there is no faculty guest). For each topic, the student will write a comment paper and lead the seminar discussion. The comment paper (no longer than 5 pages double-spaced) should analyze the major debates in the week’s literature. Each comment paper should include a brief summary and comparison of the readings (noting the theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions of each work) and your critical analysis of the major debates in the subfield. Include the full citation information for each reading at the beginning of the brief summary. In your analysis of the subfield, include discussion of the major questions/debates on the week’s topic; substantive critiques of the readings; how the readings relate to one another and help to explain (or not) contemporary problems in American politics, and avenues for further research. Students are responsible for circulating a copy of each week’s comment papers to every member of the class prior to the beginning of the class meeting.
Leading seminar requires that you do more than the required reading so that you can raise new issues, set the required reading in a broader context, and delve into interesting questions. Emphasize your critical and comparative analysis of the readings in addition to providing a summary of the material. Think about creative and engaging ways to communicate what needs to be learned and to motivate the other students to participate.


The research proposal is the major written assignment for the course. This assignment is designed to prepare you for conducting research and for writing a dissertation proposal. You should start thinking about your research topic now. It will take some time for you to develop a topic relevant to the course themes, to find the relevant scholarly publications, to pose researchable hypotheses, and in some cases to obtain permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for conducting research on human subjects. Your research proposal may be on any topic broadly related to American politics, but will need to be approved by me. The proposed research needs to be doable given graduate student time and resources. We will be discussing your projects during the semester and each student will give a formal presentation of their research proposals on December 1. The research proposal is divided into the following assignments:

1) Research Topic and Annotated Bibliography (10%) Due: September 29. Submit a one page description of the research topic/question and a compiled list of an initial 5 sources that are relevant to the research topic. Write 2-3 sentences summarizing each reading and how you might use it (e.g. theory, method, empirical findings) for your topic. Include full citations in University of Chicago style format (used by American Political Science Association publications).

2) Research Question, Literature Review and Hypotheses (10%) Due: October 27. Submit a 5-8 page description of your research project, including:
   a. A clear statement of your research question(s). What is the question you are addressing, why is it important, how does it contribute to current knowledge, what is the larger theoretical question that motivates your proposed project? These are the “So what?” and “Of what is this an example?” questions that you will need to be able to answer for any study that you conduct.
   b. A literature review that discusses the main arguments in past research that have motivated your project and helped to generate some particular hypotheses that you might be testing. Explain how you will build on and contribute to what is already known. This section should be based on the material from the annotated bibliography and additional sources that you have discovered.
   c. A list of specific hypotheses that you propose to address in your study. These should be developed from your thoughts about the literature that you have read.
   d. A complete list of references using University of Chicago style format.

3) Final Research Proposal (40%) Due: December 1. Based on earlier comments and your own thoughts, submit a revised and finished research proposal.
   a. Title page
   b. The revised versions of Sections 2 a-d described above PLUS add the following three sections inserted before the reference list:
c. A detailed description of the methods you will use to study your question along with an appendix that includes any specific measures that you will use,
d. A discussion of potential challenges and how you will attempt to address them.
e. A brief conclusion about what you expect to find and what this will contribute to current literature.

Evaluation

Final evaluation of your work will be based approximately as follows:

10% Participation (including attendance and participation in class discussions)
30% Three Short Comment Papers and Leading Seminar (10% each)
10% Research Topic (1 page, due September 29)
10% Research Question, Literature Review, and Hypotheses (5-8 pages, due October 27)
40% Research Proposal and Presentation (15-20 pages, due December 1)

All written assignments must be double-spaced with regular fonts and margins, proofread, spell-checked, and paginated. All written assignments are due at the beginning of class on the assigned dates.

Academic Integrity

Being in academe affords one the time to ask questions, develop expertise, and formulate one’s own ideas about interesting topics. As participants in this pursuit of knowledge and understanding, we read, ponder, discuss, argue and write. While our goal is to contribute some new theoretical insights, methodological technique, or empirical evidence, we always draw upon others’ work. As such, we write in our own words giving credit to others’ words and ideas by citing their work. All assignments are to be the student’s original thoughts and writings after reading and reflecting upon others’ scholarship. Cite all sources in your assignments by using the APSA Style Manual available online at: http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/DocAPSA.html Please consult with me or refer to SCampus for any academic integrity questions. http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/forms/AcademicIntegrityOverview.pdf

University Disability Policy

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30am-5:00 pm, Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Readings

The following new and “classic” books have been ordered and are available for purchase through the university bookstore. Reading these books is required; purchasing them is not. These books and other readings are on reserve at Leavey Library, available through blackboard or the
library system's electronic resources).

- Dahl, Robert. *A Preface to Democratic Theory*
- Downs, Anthony. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*
- Iyengar, Shanto and Donald Kinder. *News That Matters, Updated Edition*
- Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Government*
- Neustadt, Richard. *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*
- Orren, Karen and Stephen Skowronek. *The Search for American Political Development*
- Schattschneider, E.E. *The Semisovereign People*

Available Online:
  [http://memory.loc.gov/const/fed/fedpapers.html](http://memory.loc.gov/const/fed/fedpapers.html)

**Weekly Schedule**

**August 25**  
Introduction

**September 1**  
Labor Day, No Class

**September 8**  
American Political Culture and Ideology (Guest: Robert Labaree, VKC Lib.)

Required readings:


Recommended readings:


September 15

Political Power

Required readings:


Recommended readings:


September 22  
Representation and Public Opinion (Guest: Professor Jane Junn)

Required readings:
Public Opinion:

Representation:
Burke, Edmund. “Speech to the Electors of Bristol, 1774.”
Recommended readings: Public Opinion


Recommended readings: Representation


September 29

Elections and Voting—Some Classics

Required readings:


Recommended readings:


Research Topic Due. At beginning of class, students will present and discuss their research ideas.

October 6  Emotional Campaigns

Required readings:


**Recommended readings:**


Required readings:

Green, D. and R. Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice*, Chapters 2 and 3.

Recommended readings:

October 20

The Role of Information in Politics (Guest: Professor Dennis Chong)

Required readings:


Recommended readings:


October 27

American Political Development (Guest: Professor Jeb Barnes)

Required readings:


Literature Review Due. Students will discuss briefly how their research builds on and contributes to existing work.

November 3

The Executive Branch: Presidency and Bureaucracy
Required readings:

Presidency:

Bureaucracy:

Recommended readings:


November 10  Congress (Guest: Professor Christian Grose)

Required readings:


Recommended readings:


November 17          Research Proposal Time

This week please sign up for individual appointments with me to discuss your research proposal and presentation.

November 24          The Courts (Guest: Adam Feldman)
Required readings:


Feldman, Adam. TBA.

Recommended readings:


**December 1**

**Student Presentations of Research Proposals**

**Research Proposal Due at beginning of class.**