For most of you, this seminar begins your formal research training in the field of American politics. While many students have had undergraduate courses in U.S. government and history, the study of political science at the graduate level is quite different from what you did as an undergraduate. The purpose of this course is to help you make the transition from consumers of knowledge about the U.S. political system to producers.

The scholarly literature we will cover does not exhaust the full range of theoretical and methodological approaches within the area. No single class could possibly be this comprehensive. When selecting material for each week, I sought to include both “classics” and more recent work. My hope is that by the end of the course, seminar members will: i) be well grounded in some of the major questions in this subfield; ii) possess more acute “academic x-ray vision” to see through and interpret scholarly literatures in political science; iii) appreciate how research programs evolve; and, iv) be better prepared to make their own contributions. These are our objectives. Welcome to the course! I am looking forward to an engaging semester.

Course Materials

The following books are widely available for purchase. Ample used copies should be available at the major on-line vendors. Where possible, I have put HSSE’s copy on reserve. We will read all or much of each work. I would recommend buying at least the “classics,” which I identify with an asterisk.

Aldrich, Why Parties?*
Arnold, The Logic of Congressional Action
Blais, To Vote or Not To Vote
Cain et al., The Personal Vote
Canes-Wrone, Who Leads Whom?
Dahl, A Preface to Democratic Theory *
Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy *
Fiorina, Retrospective Voting in American Elections *
Green et al., Partisan Hearts and Minds *
Huntington, Who Are We?
Levendusky, The Partisan Sort
Lewis-Beck et al., The American Voter Revisited *
Lowi, The Personal President
Mayhew, Congress: The Electoral Connection *
Neustadt, Presidential Power *
Nie et al., The Changing American Voter *
Olson, The Logic of Collective Action *
Page and Shapiro, The Rational Public *
Popkin, The Reasoning Voter *
Rosenberg, The Hollow Hope
Schattschneider, The Semisovereign People *
Schlozman et al., The Unheavenly Chorus
Theiss-Morse, *Who Counts as an American?*
Truman, *The Governmental Process*
Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinions* *

We will also read a number of selected book chapters and scholarly journal articles. These materials are on reserve or available electronically.

**Seminar Expectations and Requirements**

This course is designed primarily for first or second-year graduate students in political science. There are no prerequisites, though I take for granted that students have become familiar with political science as an academic discipline through courses such as POL 600. I do not anticipate giving any “incompletes.” I also assume all students have taken or are taking POL 501, our introductory seminar on empirical analysis, or its equivalent. An appendix to this syllabus lists various class policies. Your main responsibilities include the following:

Seminar participation and “talking points (30% of your grade).” One of the first things you will learn (or have learned) in graduate school is that in seminars there is no place to hide! I expect each of you to read the assigned material thoroughly and participate actively in our weekly discussions. By “reading the material thoroughly,” I mean that you will read with pen in hand, be mindful of each author’s theoretical perspective and assumptions, strive to understand both the empirical and normative dimensions of each work, and attempt to place the authors in a wider social scientific context. Do not read passively. Do not simply skip over the more difficult sections of any piece. Do not put a book or article down unless you know the central questions being addressed and can reconstruct the main arguments. This will take a fair amount of time, perhaps more time than you imagine at the outset. Once you have completed a reading, ask yourself the following question: “Could I explain to a bright first-year graduate student who is not in this seminar what the author is attempting to do, and why?”

To get the ball rolling each session, I will randomly nominate individuals to present the main point(s) of some of the authors. These presentations will not need to be long; fifteen or twenty minutes will suffice. After these remarks, members of the seminar will join in critiquing the material for the week.

For weeks when you do not write a reaction essay (described below), I would like you to submit a brief “talking points” memo for discussion. These memos should not be longer than one single-spaced page. This will allow you to note a particularly important topic worth going over in the seminar or critique one of the authors for the week. Please submit your memo to me electronically or in my mailbox at least three hours in advance of our seminar meetings.

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Three “reaction essays,” collectively worth 30 percent of your seminar grade. Students should choose any three weeks in which to write a short “reaction essay” (five to six pages should suffice). As the name implies, these essays are your opportunity to respond to one or more authors covered in a given week. You might, for example, note the strengths and/or weaknesses of the research design and analysis in a piece, or pose a theoretically relevant question that went unaddressed or under-addressed by the authors. Ideally these essays will serve as a springboard for your larger “field essay” assignment (see below). Do keep in mind that there is no need to summarize the readings for that week. These essays are due by noon on Monday prior to the class for which they were written. Please keep a copy of your papers, since you may be called upon to present them during the seminar.
Field essay, due on the Monday of finals week. Each student will turn in a “field” essay approximately fifteen to twenty pages in length, worth 30 percent of the grade for the seminar. For this assignment, you should (a) pick a specific research topic in American politics, (b) identify the principal questions within this literature, (c) discuss the major findings to date, noting any ambiguities or significant disagreements among authors, and (d) highlight possible paths for future research. (You might thank me for this assignment in a couple years, when it comes time to submit literature review papers for your doctoral prelims.) The following are good examples of field essays:


Note: Students who took POL 610 in a previous semester can opt to pursue a research project rather than a field essay. Such a switch must be done in consultation with me.

Special MLK holiday “Scope of the Subfield” scholarly audit. Traditionally, “American Politics” has been the dominant subfield in the discipline of political science, at least in the United States. Some evidence for this can be seen in the number of job opportunities for entry-level assistant professors (click here: http://www.apsanet.org/media/2012-13eJobsreportonlineJune7.pdf).

In this assignment, you will “audit” four of the most widely-read journals in our profession: APSR, JOP, AJPS, and BJPS. In our first seminar meeting, I will assign specific issues to each of you. This audit will focus on the following questions: How many articles or research notes in these journals investigate theories of political behavior or outcomes solely in the United States? How many pieces are comparative, with the U.S. being one of the country cases? Give both the raw counts and percentages.

Then identify how many of the articles on American politics present findings from original analyses of empirical data. Select any one of these pieces and critique the presentation of the results. What is the “unit of analysis”? Is a causal model posited (e.g., Variable A leads to Outcome B)? If so, what is the dependent variable in this model? Does the article give a sufficient amount of information so that the investigation could be replicated by someone who is not directly connected to the project – such as you!? If any details about the coding of key variables or the setup of the empirical models are missing, compose an email to the author(s) requesting further information. (But please do not actually contact any authors!)

This audit, worth 10% of your grade in POL 610, is due by noon on January 21, the day after the MLK holiday. You can submit either an electronic version or hardcopy.
Weekly Schedule

January 13. Orientation to the seminar

January 20. No seminar meeting: MLK, Jr. Day! There are lots of special campus events today. Attend some if you can, and then put the finishing touches on your scholarly audit.

January 27. Here we take a close look at the “Madisonian” theory of representation underlying the U.S. Constitution, both its normative and empirical elements. How well does this theory hold up to systematic scientific scrutiny? What elements are missing from it?


February 3. What does it mean to be an American? What are the core elements of American national identity and political culture? How have patterns of migration and generational replacement affected political culture in the United States?


February 10. Political awareness, sophistication, and ideology within the American mass public: are American citizens sharp enough about politics to make effective representation possible?

February 17. Voter turnout in the United States: is it ever rational to take part in elections?


February 24. Voting choice: when citizens go to the polls, how reasonable are the choices they make? What is the nature of partisanship and party support in the United States?


March 10. Interest group mobilization and the “pressure system” in American politics: to what extent do interest groups in the US facilitate or impede effective representation?


March 24. What is the best way to understand long-term political dynamics – realignment, evolution, or something else?


March 31. Members of Congress work hard to foster strong ties with constituents. What do these connections imply about the potential for effective representation in the US?


See you at the MPSA meeting later this week?

April 7. Is Congress as an institution able to craft coherent and effective national policy?


April 14. Is the president powerful enough, and powerful in the right ways, to foster effective representation?


April 21. The Supreme Court in American politics: to what extent, if at all, can the judiciary help facilitate political representation in the US?


Week of April 28. One-on-one discussion of final projects!
Appendix: Course Policies

Adapted from the template recommended by the
Purdue University Center for Instructional Excellence

- During class, please turn off anything that beeps, rattles, buzzes, lights up, or does anything else that could be distracting. In a typical seminar meeting, we will take a short break after the first 60-75 minutes. This will allow you to check messages or take care of anything else.

- I often work in my office outside of the regular office hours listed on the first page of this syllabus. In general, if the office door is open, I am fair game for colleagues, students, and other visitors. If the door is closed, that likely means that I am working on research projects or preparing for class meetings.

- When students contact me by email about a course assignment, an activity, or to set up an appointment, I am usually able to respond within twenty-four hours.

- Final grades for the seminar will include a “plus” or “minus” when appropriate. “Incompletes” can be given only under truly exceptional circumstances and must be arranged well before final grades are submitted.

- The leaders that political scientists study might not always display the highest ethical standards in the pursuit of power. Henry Kissinger once remarked that “90% of all politicians give the other 10% a bad reputation.” In contrast, we academics are duty bound to go about our business with unfailing honesty and integrity. As a reminder, here is the university policy on scholarly ethics –

  Purdue prohibits "dishonesty in connection with any University activity. Cheating, plagiarism, or knowingly furnishing false information to the University are examples of dishonesty." [Part 5, Section III-B-2-a, University Regulations] Furthermore, the University Senate has stipulated that "the commitment of acts of cheating, lying, and deceit in any of their diverse forms (such as the use of substitutes for taking examinations, the use of illegal cribs, plagiarism, and copying during examinations) is dishonest and must not be tolerated. Moreover, knowingly to aid and abet, directly or indirectly, other parties in committing dishonest acts is in itself dishonest." [University Senate Document 72-18, December 13, 1972] Any violation of this university policy will result in an “F” for the course.

- The following policy on attendance will also apply in this course –

  Students are expected to be present for every meeting of the classes in which they are enrolled. Only the instructor can excuse a student from a course requirement or responsibility. When conflicts or absences can be anticipated, such as for many University sponsored activities and religious observations, the student should inform the instructor of the situation as far in advance as possible. For unanticipated or emergency absences when advance notification to an instructor is not possible, the student should contact the instructor as soon as possible by email, or by contacting the main office of the Department of Political Science. When the student is unable to make direct contact with the instructor and is unable to leave word with the instructor’s department because of circumstances beyond the student’s control, and in cases of bereavement, the student or the student’s representative should contact the Office of the Dean of Students.
• And here is another policy that hopefully will not be relevant this semester --

Purdue University recognizes that a time of bereavement is very difficult for a student. The University therefore provides the following rights to students facing the loss of a family member through the Grief Absence Policy for Students (GAPS). GAPS Policy: Students will be excused for funeral leave and given the opportunity to earn equivalent credit and to demonstrate evidence of meeting the learning outcomes for missed assignments or assessments in the event of the death of a member of the student’s family.

• This is the policy on violent behavior --

Purdue University is committed to providing a safe and secure campus environment for members of the university community. Purdue strives to create an educational environment for students and a work environment for employees that promote educational and career goals. Violent Behavior impedes such goals. Therefore, Violent Behavior is prohibited in or on any University Facility or while participating in any university activity.

• Regarding students with disabilities, here is our policy --

Purdue University is required to respond to the needs of the students with disabilities as outlined in both the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 through the provision of auxiliary aids and services that allow a student with a disability to fully access and participate in the programs, services, and activities at Purdue University. If you have a disability that requires special academic accommodation, please make an appointment to speak with me within the first two (2) weeks of the semester in order to discuss any adjustments. It is important that we talk about this at the beginning of the semester. It is the student's responsibility to notify the Disability Resource Center (http://www.purdue.edu/drc) of an impairment/condition that may require accommodations and/or classroom modifications.

• Concerning emergencies, this is the policy we will follow --

In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances beyond the instructor’s control. Relevant changes to this course can be obtained by contacting the instructor via email or phone. You are expected to read your @purdue.edu email on a frequent basis.

• Finally, a nondiscrimination policy --

Purdue University is committed to maintaining a community which recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters tolerance, sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among its members; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his or her own potential. In pursuit of its goal of academic excellence, the University seeks to develop and nurture diversity. The University believes that diversity among its many members strengthens the institution, stimulates creativity, promotes the exchange of ideas, and enriches campus life.

Purdue University prohibits discrimination against any member of the University community on the basis of race, religion, color, sex, age, national origin or ancestry, genetic information, marital status, parental status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, or status as a veteran. The University will conduct its programs, services and activities consistent with applicable federal, state and local laws, regulations and orders and in conformance with the procedures and limitations as set forth in Executive Memorandum No. D-1, which provides specific contractual rights and remedies. Any student who believes he or she has been discriminated against may visit www.purdue.edu/report-hate to submit a complaint to the Office of Institutional Equity. Information may be reported anonymously.