I. Course Description

This seminar in Political Behavior will provide an examination of mass political behavior in the United States, with a focus on voting behavior, elections, and political participation. We will cover the basic works in a number of the subject areas of the subfield, considering the major questions, critiques, and alternatives in each topic. The reading, at times, will be heavy, and you should plan on reading throughout the week. Your reward for this hard work will be a fairly comprehensive knowledge of the intellectual issues and conflicts in the voting behavior field. This knowledge should set the stage for your own further exploration of the subject, both in keeping up with the literature and in your original research.

II. Course Requirements

(1) Class Participation: Class participation will be composed of weekly discussion papers, class participation, and participation in roundtables. The weekly papers are intended to provoke thoughtful consideration of some aspect of the week’s readings. They are to be short, around 1 single spaced page. The goal of these papers is to point out some important issue in the readings. This could be a single point raised by one author or perhaps a theme common to several of the readings. Other possibilities include juxtaposing and commenting on alternative explanations or approaches to a substantive topic, criticizing the methodologies used and proposing other strategies of research, criticizing the conceptualization or measurement of a particular construct, suggesting new questions and hypotheses for research, or developing similarities or contrasts with themes covered in previous weeks. Other angles are possible of course, but the paper should address the issue, then consider its implications. What questions does it raise and how might you approach the resolution of those questions? In addition, the papers need to include a question that can be used to stimulate discussion during the seminar meeting that week. These papers will be used as the basis for discussion, and you may be called upon to present your ideas for class consideration. They are due by noon Tuesday of each week. Emailing them to me is fine.

In addition, students will also be required to serve as roundtable participants for class meetings during the semester. I will explain the sign up process the first day of class, but for most weeks 2 of you will be the main roundtable participants. The other members of the seminar will be expected to participate as well, but the roundtable participants will be responsible for describing the assigned readings for that week, thus setting the stage for discussion of the readings. Roundtable participants should probably meet sometime in the week before to decide how to divvy up the readings. This is your collective action problem. You don’t need to write papers, but you should certainly prepare notes for your presentation. Be sure to describe and explain the research problem, relevant background theory, hypotheses, method of analysis, and the findings. In general we’ll leave it to the larger seminar group to comment on the soundness of the evidence or the larger significance of the research, among other things, but it’s certainly okay if you want to comment on other aspects of the research. During weeks you are a roundtable participant, you will NOT be required to turn in the regular weekly discussion paper. (30% of course grade)

(2) Research Paper: The research paper should represent a more detailed consideration of one of the topics on the syllabus. The different options for this paper will be discussed in the first class meeting. Since you will probably need to read beyond the required set of articles for the paper, you should consult with me early in the semester so that I can direct you to any additional readings and so that we can agree
that the topic is a promising one. From experience I have learned that the analysis portion of a research project usually takes more time than anticipated. Therefore, by the seventh week of the course (October 7th) you should prepare a brief prospectus (2-3 pages) on your project. We will use part of the class period that week to present and discuss these proposals. This proposal should include:

1. The research question (briefly)
2. Identification of relevant literature.
3. Data sources and relevant variables in these data. How are the variables measured and how are they supposed to be related to each other?

The paper should be about 5000 words long and should follow the structure and format of a typical journal article. You will also be required to produce a poster of your paper for presentation on the last day of class. We will discuss these posters as we get closer to the end of the semester. (40% of course grade)

(3) Final Exam: A take-home final exam will be given out in class the week before the Thanksgiving week break. You will have one week to answer the questions; the exam is due at the beginning of Thanksgiving break (Wednesday November 25 at 12:30). The exam will consist of essay questions designed to determine how well you have understood the topics and readings covered in the course. You can, of course, turn in the exam early if you plan to leave town before Wednesday and want to get this requirement out of the way. (30% of course grade)

III. Readings

Readings that cannot be obtained through required texts or JSTOR will be made available through moodle or some other distribution system. I’ve ordered the following texts and put them on reserve at Middleton Library (except for Niemi and Weisberg, which is not in the library). I’ve also put Fiorina’s book on Retrospective Voting and the Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee book on reserve at Middleton Library. The first two books are listed as required and the latter two as recommended, but I realize your finances will probably dictate which books you actually purchase.


Downs, Anthony. 1954. An Economic Theory of Democracy
Course Outline

Week 1  August 26 – Introduction and overview of the course


Week 2  September 2 – Voting Behavior: The Classics


Recommended


Week 3  September 9 – Voter Turnout


Recommended


**Week 4 September 16 – Turnout II: Campaign Mobilization**


Recommended


**Week 5 September 23 – Partisan Polarization**


**Recommended**


American Journal of Political Science 52:619-635.

Ura, Joseph Daniel and Christopher R. Ellis. 2012. “Partisan Moods: Polarization and the Dynamics of

Perspective on Polarization,” Public Opinion Quarterly 76:405-431.

Week 6 September 30 – Voter Choice


Politics 74:751-764.

Peterson, David A. M. 2009. “Campaign Learning and Vote Determinants,” American Journal of Political

Behavior 35:331-355.

Ambiguity,” American Political Science Review 103:xxx-xxx.

Ditonto, Tessa M., Allison J. Hamilton, and David P. Redlawsk. 2014. “Gender Stereotypes, Information

Recommended

US Elections,” American Political Science Review 105:166-188.


Ryan, John Barry. 2011. “Social Networks as a Shortcut to Correct Voting,” American Journal of
Political Science 55:753-766.

Science 53:55-72.


Week 7 October 7– Political Information: Information Effects and Uncertainty

***Proposal Presentations***


Recommended


Week 8 October 14 – Social Influence and Social Capital


Recommended


Week 9 October 21 - Media Effects


Recommended


**Week 10 October 28 - Issues in the Vote Choice/Political Psychology**


Week 11 November 4 - Congressional Elections


Recommended


Week 12 November 11 – Economic Voting


Recommended


Week 13 November 18 – Genopolitics


Recommended


Week 15 December 2 – Presentation of Posters