American Politics Graduate Seminar  
Political Science 7900

Instructor: Laura Moyer / Kate Bratton  
Office Hours: Tuesday, Thursday & Friday 11-12, and by appointment  
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Goals of Course

This course will survey the political science literature on American politics. We will review the history of the study of American politics, and the important questions and controversies among scholars of American politics. The readings cover the variety of theoretical approaches and empirical methods used to study American politics. At the end of the course, students should understand how their own research interests fit into the broader literature in American politics.

Requirements

(A) 1/3 Participation. Come to class thoroughly prepared to discuss the readings—to evaluate each reading’s contribution to the literature, to identify themes across readings, to analyze how the readings differ from each other (and how this poses a challenge for building knowledge in the field), and to propose areas of future research.

(B) 1/3 Reaction papers. Each week, students are expected to prepare a short (one to two single-spaced pages) critical assessment of the readings for the week. Students should provide evidence that they have read and critically evaluated the readings—and each student should focus on a particular question, as assigned on the attached sheet.

The papers are due by Tuesday at noon.

(C) 1/3 Research design paper. Details to follow.
Tentative Schedule

Introduction (January 14th)

**Week One (January 21st) : The Mass Public: Information, Preferences, and Consciousness**

*Required Readings*


*Recommended Readings*


**Week Two (January 28th) : Attitudes & Opinion**

Graduate American Core


**Recommended Readings**


**Week Three (February 4th): Civic Engagement**


Questions

1. What is the theoretical **importance** of the question (can bring in outside readings, readings from other classes)?

2. What are the theoretical **perspectives** that are evident in the readings—and are there alternative theoretical perspectives that could be brought to bear?

3. What **specific questions** are raised in the readings?

4. What are the **testable hypotheses** that are presented—and how are they rooted in the theoretical perspectives that the authors use?

5. What are the **concepts** used? How are they measured? How effectively are they measured—how valid and reliable are the measures?

6. How are the **results** presented? What are the results?—and do the results support the conclusions that the authors draw?

7. Do the questions and conclusions across the readings represent a **unified body** of knowledge?

8. What **methods** are used—and are the methods appropriate for the question?

9. How might these readings relate to **other areas of research** (within American politics or in other fields or disciplines)? What are some avenues of future research?
## Graduate American Core

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