Course Description

This course is designed to introduce graduate students to some of the major theoretical and methodological approaches in the study of American politics. Because our goal is to obtain a sense of varied perspectives within different sub-fields, the readings are highly selective and should not be viewed as a comprehensive list of the most important literature in each area. However, the material covered will provide a foundation of knowledge upon which students can build through other courses in the field.

To the extent that the course has an overarching theme, it is to assess the U.S. brand of representative democracy. Much is made of how our government is one “of the people, by the people, and for the people.” A key question is whether the institutions and processes of politics and government live up to this ideal. Do citizens actually have much power? What conditions facilitate or impede the exercise of this power? How open and accessible is the political system for average citizens relative to elite groups in society? Ultimately, do the policies of government reflect the interests of its citizens?

Course Requirements

Grades for the course are based on a student’s performance in four areas:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation / Weekly Assignments</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Article and Book Summaries (2 @ 5% each)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>Research Design</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Examination</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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Class Participation

A large portion of the final course grade is determined by seminar participation. It is therefore imperative that students complete the assigned readings and take time to reflect upon them in a critical manner prior to class. Participation grades are determined by the quality of informed commentary contributed during our discussions.

Weekly Assignments

Students will be expected to submit a one-page paper at 8 different times over the course of the semester. The paper should be divided into three sections that address the following questions: (1) What are the major theoretical questions posed in the week’s readings and why are these questions important? (2) What are some of the major theoretical findings from this week’s readings? (3) Given these findings, what important questions remain to be addressed and how might scholars go about answering them? This last section is very important and I am expecting to see specific suggestions for future research and how such research might enhance our theoretical understanding of the topic. Please note: This one page assignment should not be longer than one page (assuming single spacing, 10-point font, and 1-inch margins). These assignments are due to me via e-mail (or in my box in the department office) by 9:00 a.m. on class day. Note that students writing on an “Extra Reading Option” should not also write a weekly assignment for that week. These assignments will count toward your participation grade.

Article and Book Summaries

On the schedule there are several groups of readings with the label, “Extra Reading Option”. In consultation with the instructor, students may sign up in advance to complete summaries of these readings. Each student is expected to complete two sets of these over the course of the semester. These summaries should be no more than 1½ single-spaced pages per article and no more than 4 pages for each book (assuming single spacing, 10-point font, and 1-inch margins). Each summary should contain sections indicating the question, theoretical context, data and methods, findings, authors’ conclusions, and your own comments. The section for your own comments is a very important part because here I want...
you to indicate how the research relates to other findings/themes of the week’s readings that everyone completed. One copy of the completed summaries should be provided to me (via e-mail or in my box in the department office) by 9:00 a.m. on class day. In addition, copies should be distributed to fellow students at the beginning of class. At an appropriate point in the seminar discussion, the student responsible for the extra articles will be asked to provide a brief (6-8 minute) presentation of these readings and how they relate to the material completed by the rest of the class.

Research Design
A 20-25 page research design is required of all students. The paper should review and interpret relevant literature and propose a research project that could be undertaken with the limited financial resources that are typically available to most graduate students. The paper should contain the following elements: a literature review with an explanation of the contribution your project intends to make, a significant question or set of hypotheses related to a topic in American politics, and a practical research design that details the methods (data and analysis) to be used in assessing your research question. Students should begin work on this project soon after the semester is underway and consult frequently with the instructor about topics, relevant literature, and research methods. The final version of the paper (hard copy) is due on Friday May 7 by 4:00 p.m., however, other parts of the project are due at various points throughout the semester and count as 20% of the total research project grade. Further details concerning this project will be provided in a separate handout.

Final Examination
The final exam is a comprehensive exam that allows students to bring together the material covered in the course. It is a take-home, open-book exam and you may take as much time as you need to complete it. The only requirement is that you do not consult anyone once the exam has been distributed. The completed exam (hard copy) is due on Friday May 14th by 4:00 p.m.

Reading Materials
The books listed below are available for purchase from various bookstores on and around campus:


All of the articles that are required readings are available electronically though the LSU Libraries main page under the heading “ejournals”. There you type in the title of the journal (e.g., *Journal of Politics, Legislative Studies Quarterly*, etc.) and from that point options are provided for retrieving the electronic version of the article (e.g., JSTOR). I strongly encourage you to print the articles and bring them to class. Very often we will reference particular aspects of the articles (especially the tables) and it is important to have a copy of the article in front of you. Note that only the articles indicated with a solid bullet point (●) are required reading for each week. The hollow bullet points (○) denote additional reading in each topic area that are recommended.

Students in need of a brief re-introduction to statistical methods are encouraged to read relevant sections of *Political Science Research Methods* (4th edition by Johnson, Joslyn, and Reynolds, 2001, Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly). Chapters 11-13 of this book are particularly instructive and are available on Moodle. Finally, students who need a refresher course on the basics of American politics may want to consult an introductory American politics text as well as review fundamental documents such as *The Declaration of Independence*, the *Constitution* (with Amendments), and the *Federalist Papers*. 

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General Policies

Plagiarism is a serious offense. Use of another’s words, ideas, or data without giving proper credit will not be tolerated. Care should be made to properly cite sources where appropriate. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please consult me. I reserve the right to investigate when I suspect that you are not doing your own work. All violations of this policy are turned over to the Dean of Students for adjudication.

Due dates for assignments are indicated on the syllabus and research project handout. Penalties for handing in work late will be assessed based upon the circumstances, but will generally involve a loss of points. In others words, be certain that I receive your written work when it is due. If circumstances arise that prevent you from meeting a deadline, please let me know as soon as possible.

For students who have special needs or require accommodations through Disability Services, please advise me of your situation so arrangements can be made.

Course Schedule

January 19  Introduction to the Course

January 26  Political Attitudes and Opinions


Extra Reading Option 1.1


Extra Reading Option 1.2


Extra Reading Option 1.3

Extra Reading Option 1.4


Extra Reading Option 1.5


Extra Reading Option 1.6


Additional Reading


February 2 Turnout and Participation


**Extra Reading Option 2.1**

**Extra Reading Option 2.2**

**Extra Reading Option 2.3**

**Extra Reading Option 2.4**

**Additional Reading**


**February 9**  
**Campaigns and Elections: Candidate Decision Making**


**Extra Reading Option 3.1**

**Extra Reading Option 3.2**

**Extra Reading Option 3.3**

**Additional Readings**

**February 16**  
**Mardi Gras**

**February 23**  
**Campaigns and Elections: Voters and Outcomes**


**Extra Reading Option 4.1**


**Extra Reading Option 4.2**


**Extra Reading Option 4.3**


**Extra Reading Option 4.4**


**Extra Reading Option 4.5**

Additional Readings

March 2

Political Parties


Extra Reading Option 5.1


Extra Reading Option 5.2


Extra Reading Option 5.3


Extra Reading Option 5.4

**Additional Reading**


**March 9 Interest Groups**


**Extra Reading Option 6.1**


**Extra Reading Option 6.2**

Extra Reading Option 6.3

Extra Reading Option 6.4

Extra Reading Option 6.5

Additional Reading


**March 16: Mass Media**


**Extra Reading Option 7.1**


**Extra Reading Option 7.2**


**Extra Reading Option 7.3**


**Additional Reading**


**March 23**

**Legislatures**


**Extra Reading Option 8.1**

Extra Reading Option 8.2

Extra Reading Option 8.3

Extra Reading Option 8.4

Extra Reading Option 8.5

Extra Reading Option 8.6

Additional Reading


March 30  Representation


Extra Reading Option 9.1

Extra Reading Option 9.2

Extra Reading Option 9.3

Additional Reading

April 6       Spring Break

April 13      Executives


Extra Reading Option 10.1

Extra Reading Option 10.2

Extra Reading Option 10.3

Extra Reading Option 10.4

**Additional Readings**

**April 20**

**Judicial Branch**

Extra Reading Option 11.1

Extra Reading Option 11.2

Extra Reading Option 11.3

Additional Reading


April 27 Local Institutions and Politics


Extra Reading Option 12.1


Extra Reading Option 12.2


Extra Reading Option 12.3


Additional Reading


May 4  Research Design Presentations