Course: PSC 72001 American Politics: Theories and Core Concepts
Time: Monday 4:15pm–6:15pm
Room: 6493
Instructor: Sanford Schram
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Hours: M 3-4 pm
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Course Description: This seminar surveys the major scholarly debates in the study of American politics today. It draws on prominent theoretical perspectives for understanding empirical issues regarding: (1) the history of American political development; (2) the constitutional and institutional structure of American government in its contemporary form; (3) the structure of power and the behavior of political elites; and (4) ordinary people’s political behavior as manifested in studies of public opinion and political participation broadly construed. As a seminar, the course emphasizes dialogue about assigned readings. Students are to be active participants in the conversation. Each student will lead one session. The course is designed to help students prepare for the doctoral exam in American politics and to acquire the background to teach American politics at the undergraduate level. The course will regularly address issues and problems in teaching an undergraduate American politics survey course.

Course Objectives: Besides introducing graduate students to significant scholarship and debates in American politics, this course seeks to encourage the development of several skills needed by scholar-teachers to:

(1) understand in any given reading the author’s goal, the outcome (dependent variable) to be explained, and the causal logic of the argument;

(2) identify alternative explanations for a given outcome, including possible alternatives an author may have overlooked; to compare and contrast scholarly explanations for the same outcomes;

(3) appreciate the strengths, weaknesses, and biases of the major approaches to the study of American politics;

(4) evaluate methods and evidence in scholarly research;

(5) present concise oral summaries of scholarly work in a way that makes the main points clear to non-specialists and lead a discussion that integrates works on a topic;

(6) begin to produce scholarship (rather than merely consume it) by building upon existing literature to make an original argument about some aspect of American national politics;
(7) use the course literature to write a focused and concise essay answer to a broad question of the type found on the program’s comprehensive graduate exams; and

(8) develop facility addressing issues regarding teaching an undergraduate American politics survey course.

Course Requirements:
1. Complete assigned readings before class meetings. There is a limited number of pages in assigned readings to keep the reading assignments manageable, though of course you may disagree with my notion of what that means. For each session, class discussion will be led by a student in the class, focusing on questions about the authors’ methods and use of evidence.

2. Over the course of the semester each student is required to submit eight, non-graded responses to assigned readings, with not more than one paper per class session. Each response paper should: (a) offer a concise summary of the main point in the article or chapter(s); (b) raise questions about problems with the author’s argument or evidence; and (c) draw comparisons and contrasts with other things you have read (ideally, but not necessarily, for this course) or instead applies the argument to other cases. Response papers must not exceed 1000 words, submitted via e-mail before the class. No late short papers will be accepted.

3. Lead one class session. We will choose the class session each participant will lead at the first meeting. Each student will be responsible for organizing the discussion for the session, choosing to discuss each reading successively or grouping them together in some way that makes sense. Leading a discussion means just that – offering opening remarks and being prepared with questions to encourage the critical analysis of the readings, not lecturing. Performance leading the discussion will figure in the participation component of the grade. The schedule for class sessions is as follows:

Max 9/11
Jamell 9/18
Jeffrey 9/25
Faraz 10/2
Peter 10/9
Tyson 10/16
Julie 10/23
Sarah 10/30
Sandra 11/6
Nestor 11/20
Rosa 12/11

4. Attend class regularly and participate. Contributions to the class discussion will be considered in the calculation of the final grade for the course.

5. Write one comparative review essay on any topic related to the course. Each student should analyze and contrast scholarly sources a single topic. Students should contrast two books, one book and two articles, or four articles. At least, one source must not be listed as required reading.
A recommended option is to choose an issue associated with the topic for which you led discussion. You should get approval in advance from the instructor as to your topic and sources. The purpose of the review essay is for you to build on recent scholarship to offer your own interpretation of a significant phenomenon in American politics. Although you will need to summarize the authors’ views, the key goal is for you to make an original contribution by building upon their work.

(Important details: Review essays should be approximately 12-14 pages doubled-spaced (and not more than 16 pages). The review essay will be due at the Monday after Thanksgiving, and should be submitted to the instructor via e-mail as an attachment in Word format. If you submit the paper on time, you will have the opportunity to revise and resubmit it to improve the grade (the better of the two grades will count). As this course is designed to be finished on time, late papers will be penalized one-third of a letter grade per day when there is not a valid, documented reason for lateness and the opportunity to rewrite the paper will be forfeited.)

6. Complete a final exam. The exam will be sent to students via email on December 19, 2017 and it will be due December 29, 2017. It will be an essay exam with choice. Students will be asked to choose from multiple question twice to write two 1000-word essays for submission in one document.

**Grading:**
Grading for the course will be based on class participation and preparation, the review essay, and a final exam. Each component will be given equal weight (one-third of the total course grade). The class participation grade will be based upon the response papers, leading class discussion and overall participation in class throughout the semester. Timely completion of the eight short papers establishes a base participation grade of A-. If you submit fewer than eight, the base participation grade drops to B; if you submit fewer than five, to C+. The participation grade will also reflect your effective direction of the class discussion you lead and your active, thoughtful contribution to the other class sessions.

Incompletes are granted only in cases where the student has a legitimate, documented excuse. No incomplete will extend past February 1, 2018.

**Readings:**
We will be reading a significant portion of each of the following titles, so I recommend you purchase them online.


All other required readings will be available by clicking on the links.

**Schedule of Topics and Reading Assignments:**
Required reading have an asterisk. You should read them in the order in which they are listed. Additional readings for each topic (listed alphabetically) are intended as a guide to further research and planning for undergraduate instruction, and so include a mix of classic works, new scholarship, and a few popularized treatments.

The syllabus includes a number of supplemental topics that may be covered in an introductory undergraduate American politics course. These topics are listed below at the approximate point at which they would be covered in such a course. I encourage you to explore the supplemental topics as time permits. You may select books for review drawn from these headings.

**8/28: Course Overview**

**9/11: Conceptual Models for the Study of American Politics**

Supplemental Reading:
Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).


Sanford F. Schram, “Political Science Research Beyond Political Science,” *Perspectives on Politics* 14 (3) (September 2016): 784-87.


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**9/18: The Foundations of American Politics: American Political Culture**


Supplemental Reading:


George Shulman, American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

9/25 The Constitutional Framework I
*Federalist Papers, nos. 1, 9-10, 51, 56-57, 68-70, 78, 84.

Supplemental Reading:

10/2 The Constitutional Framework II

Supplemental Reading:


### 10/9 Federalism


*Gary Gerstle, “Federalism in America: Beyond the Tea Partiers,”* *Dissent* (Fall 2010):

**Supplemental Reading:**


### 10/16 The Structure of Power and Elite Politics Today

*“Corruption is Legal in America: A Graphic Presentation.”*
Supplemental Reading:
The Young Turks, “Proof The US Is An Oligarchy, Not A Democracy.”

10/23 Interest Group Politics: Past and Present, Causes and Consequences

Supplemental Reading:
Anne Costain, Inviting Women's Rebellion: A Political Process Interpretation of the Women's Movement (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1992).


McGee Young, *Developing Interests: Organizational Change and the Politics of Advocacy* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2010).

### 10/30 Public Political Participation


### Supplemental Reading:


11/6 Public Opinion in an Age of Partisan Polarization


Supplemental Reading:


11/13 Political Parties, Elections, and Partisan Regimes


Supplemental Reading:


11/20 Congress: History, Structures, and Politics


Supplemental Reading:


11/27 Presidential Power Across Time


Supplemental Reading:


Charles M. Cameron, *Veto Bargaining: Presidents and the Politics of Negative Power* (New

12/4 *The Judiciary in the American Politics*

Supplementary Reading:


### 12/11 The Bureaucracy and Democratic Accountability


Supplemental Reading:


12/18 American Politics at the Crossroads

Supplemental Reading:

12/19 Final Exam Distributed
12/29 Final Exam Due