Course Description

This course is designed to serve as an introduction to the study of political behavior in political science. The field of political behavior is one of the largest fields of study in political science with a particularly heavy focus on the behavior of mass publics in the United States. As a result, this course will principally focus on the American context. However, we will inevitably discuss why the study of political behavior has taken this route, the limits of such an approach, and encourage thinking of ways to expand our focus to other contexts.

Because the study of political behavior has grown exponentially, the reading requirements for this course will be heavy. Because of the small size of our class, every student should be well prepared to participate and contribute to our discussions of the readings each week. Doing so is not only essential to earning a satisfactory grade in the course, but it is also essential to one of the primary goals of the course - for students to learn the basic concepts, theories, and findings of research on political behavior. This will lead to what I view as the most important goal of this course - for students to be able to critically reflect on the field, identify areas in need of further research, and make a substantive contribution to the field through a seminar research paper.

Course Requirements

Your grade in the course will be based on my evaluation of your performance in the following areas conditional upon the grading option you choose, which will be described in detail below. Each evaluative component is listed with its respective weight to your final grade:

Option A

- Weekly responses to readings (40%)
- Class participation (15%)
- Lead class discussion (45%)

Option B

- Weekly responses to readings (15%)
- Class participation (15%)
- Lead class discussion (30%)
- Research paper (40%)

Option A explained
Weekly Responses. It is naturally expected that you will read the entire readings assigned for each week. In addition, you will be required to summarize your reactions to the week’s readings in a response paper that should be approximately 2-3 pages in length. If you choose Option A, you will provide 12 such reaction papers. The weeks in which you lead the discussion of a book (see below), you will not be required to submit a reaction paper. These papers should NOT be summaries of the readings. Rather, you should critically reflect on the readings in ways that might contrast various pieces, raise questions about the authors’ methodologies, reflect on the authors’ theoretical foundations, or suggest alternative ways in which the research questions can be analyzed. Because we will be helping each other digest, comprehend, and analyze the course material, I will ask that you email copies of your weekly responses to me and fellow classmates by 12pm on each Thursday before our evening seminar. I will grade these responses on a three point scale ranging from incomplete, completed, satisfactory, to excellent.

Class Participation. It is expected that every student play an active role in class discussions. It is not merely sufficient to reflect on the readings in your weekly responses but also by engaging with other students in class about the week’s readings.

Lead class discussion. You will be required to lead a class discussion by presenting your analysis of two of the books assigned for this course. The presentation will involve two components. You will present a critical analysis of the book similar to your weekly responses but in much greater depth. The length of this response should be approximately 3-4 pages. You will email this written response to the book to me and your classmates by 12pm on each Thursday before we meet. The second component will involve leading a discussion on that book in class. The presentation should by about 10 minutes in length and should not merely be a re-reading of your written response. Rather you should also incorporate the other supplementary readings for that week into your presentation. On week’s you lead such a presentation you will not be required to also present the weekly response papers noted above. As with the weekly responses, your written and oral responses will be graded on a four point scale ranging from incomplete, completed, satisfactory, to excellent.

Option B explained

The above requirements generally hold for Option B. The exception is that you will only write 6 reaction papers and you will lead a presentation on only one of the course books. The significant additional requirement to Option B, however, is that you will be required to write a substantive research paper.

Research paper. Inform me by September 22 that this is the option you will choose to pursue. I would then ask that you submit to me a 3 page research proposal detailing the questions you are addressing, the data and methods you plan to use, and the theoretical contribution of your paper to the study of political behavior. The final research paper will be due on December 8, 5PM. Seminar research papers are, on average, 20-25 pages in length.

Course Policies

Absences

Due to the importance of our in-class discussions, absence from class whether in body or in mind will not be tolerated. If you miss one class session, I will deduct 10% from your final grade. If you miss two class sessions, I will deduct 20% from your final grade. If you must miss three or more class sessions, you will be asked to drop the class and take it at a later date.
Late Assignments

Assignments must be turned in by the scheduled deadline. I will accept late assignments up to 24 hours past the due date, but these assignments can only earn half credit of the assigned grade. Assignments received more than 24 hours past the due date will not be accepted.

Incompletes

It is my policy not to grant incompletes other than for extreme circumstances approved by me. In other words, just because you feel you have an extreme circumstance it does not necessarily mean I will view it as a valid excuse.

Academic Misconduct

I take plagiarism very seriously. Any student caught plagiarizing will earn an automatic F in this class and will be referred to the appropriate authorities.

Texts and Readings

I have made the following books available for purchase from the university book store. As these are all books of recent vintage, I hear that you can also find them for reasonable prices on line through a web search site such as addall.com. Prices shown next to each book are those listed by the university book store for new and used, respectively, and then followed by the price I found via addall (including shipping).


Erikson, Robert S., Michael Mackuen, and James A. Stimson. *The Macro Polity*. $32.00, $24.00, $22.99


Green, Donald, Bradley Palmquist and Eric Schickler. 2004. *Partisan Hearts and Minds*. Yale University Press. $18.00 $13.50 $17.49

Huckfeldt, Robert, Paul E. Johnson, and John Sprague. 2004. *Political Disagreement*. Cambridge University Press. $27.00, $20.25, $18.45

Course Schedule

**Week 1 - Aug 25: Introduction**


**Week 2 - Sep 1: No Class (APSA)**

**Week 3 - Sep 8: Beliefs, Preferences, Opinions, Systems†**


**Week 4 - Sep 15: More on Beliefs, Preferences, Opinions, Systems†**


**Week 5 - Sep 22: Humans and Our Brains: biology or psychology?**


**Week 6 - Sep 29: Like It or Not, You Will Become Your Parents (?)**


**Week 7 - Oct 6: Moving Beyond the Family†**


**Week 8 - Oct 13: The Ever Expanding Circles of Influence**


**Week 9 - Oct 20: Partisanship†**


**Week 10 - Oct 27: Substantive Outcomes of Political Behavior**

Rosenston and Hansen. 1993. Chapters 1-3, 6-8


**Week 11 - Nov 3: Substantive Outcomes of Public Opinion†**


**Week 12 - Nov 10: Substantive Considerations about Democratic Legitimacy**


**Week 13 - Nov 17: The Continuing Intersection with Race†**

Leighley, Jan. 2001. *Strength in Numbers?*. 


**Week 14 - Dec 1: New Challenge, Old Challenge, or No Challenge to Foundations?†**

Erikson, R.S., M. Mackuen, and J.A. Stimson. *The Macro Polity.*