**AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS**

PL SC 540 Michael Nelson

M 9:05 AM – 12:05 PM mjn15@psu.edu

373 Willard Bldg. Office: Pond Lab 232

Office Hours: MW 4:00-5:00 PM

**Course Description**

The University Bulletin says this class is a “[s]urvey of basic literature in major fields of U.S. government: public opinion, parties, voting, interest groups, presidency, congress, [and the] judiciary.” More broadly, this course introduces graduate students to the core concepts and controversies in the study of American politics. We will discuss the evolution of research on American political institutions and behavior through discussions of both current and classic readings. We will consider both how these readings contribute to our knowledge of politics in the United States and how researchers designed and executed their studies.

Students in this course are expected to complete the assigned readings, to contribute meaningfully to class discussions, and to complete a variety of formal and informal writing assignments.

**Objectives**

This course has three central aims: (1) to help students find feasible research questions that they can investigate throughout their graduate careers, (2) to begin to prepare students for the field examination in American politics, and (3) to ready students for more advanced seminars in American political institutions and behavior.

**Course Materials**

I have asked the bookstore to stock all of the books from which we will read multiple chapters. I encourage you to buy these books, as all of them are seminal works. All should also be available in the library.

**Course Requirements**

The requirements for this course involve both (1) the completion of reading assignments and written work on your own outside of our class meetings and (2) your active and informed contributions to our course discussions when we meet. This course is a seminar. It is also three hours long. You are expected to come prepared to talk.

Weekly Responses and Discussion Questions (20%). For most weeks, each student will write a short (1-2 page) answer to a question that I pose. Students should also prepare two discussion questions (we’ll divide up the readings to limit duplication). These must be submitted to me and circulated to the class by noon on Sunday.

Final Exam (25%). Students will take a final exam that mirrors in its design a portion of the comprehensive exam in American Politics. We will discuss the format of this exam in class as the date approaches.

Grant Proposal (35% Total). This course culminates with the production of an original research design, mirroring part of the requirements for a Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant. You may choose any topic in political science that interests you, though my hope is that this project will help you start to think about the sorts of research projects that will interest you as you progress through graduate school. A research design is a well thought-out plan that “sells” your research question as an essential one, explains why that original question is motivated by the extant research, clearly explains the testable, falsifiable hypotheses you hope to examine, and explains the data with which you plan to test those hypotheses, including both the data collection and analysis stages of the process. Basically, you should think about this as a highly detailed overview of a research project that likely lacks the empirical analysis that would enable one to actually test the proposed theory (though some preliminary data analysis, if available, may be useful as proof of concept). The maximum length of the grant proposal is 10 single-spaced pages (not counting references).

I will grade the preliminary checkpoints (#1 and #2) on completion. *You should also plan to meet with me sometime during the month of September to discuss your proposed topic.*

Checkpoint #1: Annotated Bibliography. The bibliography should cover 5 individual works that are not part of the assigned reading list for the course. You will provide an introduction (approximately 1000 words) defining the topic, why it is important, summarizing the general state of the literature, and briefly proposing a theory/hypothesis suggested by the literature around which you intend to focus your grant proposal. Then, summarize each of the individual works in paragraphs of about 250 words each. Your summaries should identify the research question, the author’s theoretical argument, the evidence that supports (or rebuts) the argument, and the conclusion drawn by the author.

Checkpoint #2: Data Report. Each student will write a report on data that they would use to test their theory. The report should be 3-5 pages long and discuss the availability of data, how key concepts in the theory would be measured, and the reliability and validity of those measurements (or how reliability and validity would be assessed).

Final Submission. Using the annotated bibliography and data report, prepare a completed grant proposal (again, no more than 10 single-spaced pages in length, not counting references). On the last two course meetings each of you will present your research design for your colleagues. You will distribute a draft of your grant proposal before your presentation, and you are expected to provide feedback to your peers on their projects during a question-and-answer period after their presentation.

Participation (20%). This is a graduate seminar. It is your collective job to carry the majority of our class discussion. The final portion of your grade is based on your ability and willingness to contribute to our class. Everyone’s experience in this course is enhanced by regular attendance and active participation; conversely, everyone’s experience suffers if individuals do not participate. Remember that a sincere question often adds as much (if not more) to our understanding of the course material as an explanation of the week’s readings. So, don’t be afraid to speak up!

Please remember that attending class and sitting silently is not, by definition, “participation.” Also, please note that I do not penalize you directly for missing class (though multiple absences will adversely affect your grade through a lower participation score).

**Expectations/Procedures**

Respect. In this course, we are all engaged in the endeavor of building a stronger understanding of American politics. Everyone comes to this course with a different background in the subject (particularly with respect to the technical aspects of the readings). It is important that we all treat each other with the utmost respect.

Criticism. This is a seminar and, as such, it is our job to be criticics. As you read for class, you should examine the goals of an article, the persuasiveness of the evidence it presents in support of its theory, and the place it makes for itself in the literature. Remember that a harsh critique isn’t the same thing as an intellectually rigorous one, and focus less on what you perceive to be flaws and more on what you could learn from the article. Oftentimes, it is more difficult to point out what is “good” than what is “bad”. In other words, treat our authors the way you would like to be treated by students in your shoes in 20 years.

Office Hours. I have office hours, listed at the beginning of the syllabus. My door is usually open, and you shouldn’t hesitate to stop by outside of my scheduled office hour times.

Late assignments. Assignments not submitted by the assigned due date and time are late. This is a graduate class, so I expect you to communicate with me about things that affect your ability to get an assignment in on time. All assignments must be completed to complete this course.

Extensions. Extensions will be granted in only the most severe circumstances. If you foresee the need for an extension, one needs to be requested and granted at least 24 hours before the due date. No one is entitled to an extension; they will be offered only at our discretion.

Academic dishonesty. I take violations of the University’s academic dishonesty policy—reprinted below—very seriously. Please review the policy and let me know if you have any questions.

Grading scale. The course will follow a standard grading scale:

93-100 A 80-82 B-

90-92 A- 77-79 C+

87-89 B+ 70-76 C

83-86 B 60-69 D

A Note on Grades. I do not *give* grades. You *earn* grades. It is essential that you are proactive regarding your performance in this course; *do not wait* until grades are posted and then ask how your grade could be improved. At that point, barring a mathematical error on my part, it cannot be. If, at any point, you are unsure of your current standing in the course, please come to my office hours.

Academic Dishonesty. The Department of Political Science, along with the College of the Liberal Arts and the University, takes violations of academic dishonesty seriously. Observing basic honesty in one's work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all members of the community are required to subscribe.

All course work by students is to be done on an individual basis unless an instructor clearly states that an alternative is acceptable. Any reference materials used in the preparation of any assignment must be explicitly cited. Students uncertain about proper citation are responsible for checking with their instructor.

In an examination setting, unless the instructor gives explicit prior instructions to the contrary, whether the examination is in class or take home, violations of academic integrity shall consist but are not limited to any attempt to receive assistance from written or printed aids, or from any person or papers or electronic devices, or of any attempt to give assistance, whether the one so doing has completed his or her own work or not.

Lying to the instructor or purposely misleading any Penn State administrator shall also constitute a violation of academic integrity.

In cases of any violation of academic integrity it is the policy of the Department of Political Science to follow procedures established by the College of the Liberal Arts. More information on academic integrity and procedures followed for violation can be found at: http://laus.la.psu.edu/current-students/academics/academic-integrity/college-policies

Note to students with disabilities. Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) at 814-863-1807 (V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit the Office for Disability Services Web site at http://equity.psu.edu/ods/

Instructors should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable accommodations.

**Schedule**

Below, you’ll find a list of all class meetings, the topic we’ll discuss, and the reading assignment. You should complete the reading assignment before you come to class and bring any questions that you have with you to our class meetings. In the event that deviations from this schedule are necessary, they will be announced in class.

**Introduction (Aug. 25)**

No Readings: Overview and Discussion

**Sept 1: No Class, Labor Day**

**Public Opinion and Political Attitudes (Sept. 8)**

*Political Preference Formation*

Converse, Philip. 1964. “The Nature of Belief Systems in the Mass Public.” in *Ideology and Discontent* ed. David Apher 206-261.

Campbell et al. 1960. *The American Voter* [Ch. 1, 2, 6, 7, and 9-10]

Zaller. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Ch. 1-2

*The Media and Public Opinion*

Kinder and Iyengar. “Experimental Demonstrations of the "Not-So-Minimal" Consequences of Television News Programs.” *American Political Science Review* 76: 848-858.

Berinsky Adam and Donald Kinder. 2006. “Making Sense of Issues Through Media Frames.” *Journal of Politics* 68: 640-656.

Prior, Markus. 2013. “Media and Political Polarization.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 16: 101-127.

**Participation (Sept. 15)**

*Why do Voters Participate?*

Campbell et al, *The American Voter* [Ch. 5]

Downs 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. [Ch 1, 5 and 14]

Riker and Ordeshook. 1970. “A Theory of the Calculus of Voting.” *American Political Science Review* 62 (#1): 25-42.

Brady, Henry E., Sidney Verba, and Kay Lehman Schlozman. 1995. “Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation.” *American Political Science Review* 89(2):279-94.

Gerber, Alan S. and Donald P. Green. 2000. “The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment.” *American Political Science Review* 94(3): 653-663.

*The Effects of Negative Campaigning*

Ansolabehere, Steven et al. 1994. “Does Attack Advertising Demobilize the Electorate?” A*merican Political Science Review* 88 (4): 829-838.

Krupnikov, Yanna. 2012. “When does Negativity Demobilize? Tracing the Conditional Effect of Negative Campaigning on Voter Turnout.” *American Journal of Political Science* 55 (4): 797-813.

**Voting and Elections (Sept. 22)**

*How do Voters Decide?*

Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. [ch 3, 7, 8]

Campbell et al. 1960. *The American Voter*. [ch 3, 4, and 14]

Lupia, Arthur. 1994. “Shortcuts Versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections.” *American Political Science Review* 88 (1): 63-76.

Ansolabehere, Stephen, James M. Snyder, and Charles Stewart, III. 2001. “Candidate Positioning in U.S. House Elections” *American Journal of Political Science* 45 (1): 136-159.

Oliver, J. Eric and Shang E. Ha. 2007. “Vote Choice in Suburban Elections.” *American Political Science Review* 101 (3): 393-408.

**Interest Groups (Sept. 29)**

*The Formation of Organized Interests*

Truman. 1971. *The Governmental Process* [Excerpt]

Schattschneider *The Semisovereign People* [Excerpt]

Olson, Mancur. 1965. *The Logic of Collective Action*. [Ch 1-2]

David Lowery and Virginia Gray. 1995. “The Population Ecology of Gucci Gulch, or the Natural Regulation of Interest Group Numbers in the American States.” *American Journal of Political Science*. 39 (February): 1-29.

*The Effects of Organized Interests*

Hall, Richard L. and Alan V. Deardorff. 2006. “Lobbying as Legislative Subsidy.” *American Political Science Review* 100 (1): 69-84.

Schlozman, Kay Lehman et al. 2014. “Louder Chorus – Same Accent: The Representation of Interests in Pressure Politics, 1991-2011.” *Issues in Governance Studies*.

**Political Parties (Oct. 6)**

***Annotated Bibliography Due***

*The Formation of Political Parties*

Aldrich. 1995. *Why Parties?* [Ch 1-2]

Bawn, Kathleen et al. 2012. “A Theory of Political Parties.” *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (3): 571-597.

*Party Organizations*

Key, V.O. *Southern Politics in State and Nation*” [Ch. 1, 18-19]

Masket, Seth. 2007. “It Takes an Outsider: Extralegislative Organization and Partisanship in the California Assembly, 1849-2006.” *American Journal of Political Science* 51 (3): 482-497.

Desmaris, Bruce A., Raymond J. La Raja, and Michael S. Kowal. 2014. “The Fates of Challengers in U.S. House Elections: The Role of Extended Party Networks in Supporting Candidates and Shaping Electoral Outcomes.” *American Journal of Political Science*

**Congress I (Oct. 13)**

*The Classics*

Mayhew 1974. *The Electoral Connection*. [Excerpt]

Fiorina 1978. *Keystone*. [Excerpt]

Fenno, Jr., Richard F. 1977. “U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration.” *American Political Science Review* 71(3):883-917.

*Committees*

Krehbiel. 1991. *Information and Legislative Organization* [Skim Ch. 1-3, Read 4]

Cox and McCubbins. 2003. *Legislative Leviathan* [Ch. 5, 7, 8]

Maltzman, Forrest. 1995. “Meeting Competing Demands – Committee Performance in the Postreform House.” *American Journal of Political Science* 39 (3) 653-82.

**Oct. 20—No Class; meet with me on your final project sometime this week.**

**Congress II (Oct 27)**

*Parties*

Cox, Gary W., and Mathew D. McCubbins. 2005. *Setting the Agenda: Responsible Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Ch 2, 5, and 10]

Smith, Steven S. 2007. *Party Influence in Congress*. New York: Cambridge University Press. [Ch. 3, 5-7]

Krehbiel, Keith. 1993. Where's the Party? *British Journal of Political Science* 23:235-66.

Rohde, David W. 2013. Reflections on the Practice of Theorizing: Conditional Party Government in the Twenty-First Century, *Journal of Politics*, 75: 849-864.

**Presidency (Nov. 3)**

***Data Report Due***

*Presidential Power*

Neustadt, Richard. *Presidential Power*. [Ch 1-2]

Canes-Wrone, Brandice, William G. Howell, and David E. Lewis. 2008. “Toward a Broader Understanding of Presidential Power: A Re-Evaluation of the Two Presidencies Thesis.” *Journal of Politics* 70(1):1-16.

Cameron, Charles. 2000. *Veto Bargaining* [Ch 1-2]

*Unilateral Action*

Howell, *Power Without Persuasion* [Ch. 1-4]

**Bureaucracy (Nov. 10)**

*Bureaucratic Power*

Lindblom, Charles. 1959. “The Science of Muddling Through.” *Public Administration Review* 19:79-88.

Epstein, David, and Sharyn O'Halloran. 1996. "Divided Government and the Design of Administrative Procedures: A Formal Model and Empirical Test." *Journal of Politics* 58(May):373-397.

*Oversight*

McCubbins, Mathew, and Thomas Schwarz. 1984. “Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms.” *American Journal of Political Science* 28:165-79.

McCubbins, Mathew, Roger Noll, and Barry Weingast. 1987. “Administrative Procedures as Instruments of Political Control.” *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 3:243-77.

Wood, B. Dan, and Richard Waterman. 1991. “The Dynamics of Political Control of the Bureaucracy.” *American Political Science Review* 85:801-28.

**Judiciary (Nov. 17)**

*Judicial Decisionmaking*

Segal and Spaeth, *The Supreme Court and the Attitudinal Model Revisited* [Ch. 3 and 8]

Glynn, Adam and Maya Sen. 2014. “Identifying Judicial Empathy: Does Having Daughters Cause Judges to Rule for Women’s Issues?” *American Journal of Political Science* Forthcoming.

Richards, Mark J., and Herbert M. Kritzer. 2002. “Jurisprudential Regimes in Supreme Court Decision Making.” *American Political Science Review* 96 (June): 305- 20.

*Judicial Impact*

Rosenberg, *The Hollow Hope* [Ch. 1-5]

**Nov. 24: No Class, Thanksgiving**

**Separation of Powers (Dec. 1)**

*Lawmaking*

Krehbiel, Keith. 1998. *Pivotal Politics* [Ch 1-2]

Binder, Sarah A. 1999. The Dynamics of Legislative Gridlock, 1947-96. *American Political Science Review* 93 (3):519-534.

Howell, W., S. Adler, C. Cameron, and C. Riemann. 2000. “Divided Government and the Legislative Productivity of Congress, 1945-1994.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly.* 25(2): 285-312.

*Judicial Review*

Dahl, Robert. 1957. “Decision-Making in a Democracy: The Supreme Court as National Policy-Maker.” *Journal of Public Law* 6(2): 279–95

Clark, Tom S. 2009. “The Separation of Powers, Court-curbing and Judicial Legitimacy.” *American Journal of Political Science* 53 (4): 971-989.

*Grant Proposal Presentations*

**Representation (Dec. 8)**

*Defining Representation*

Miller, Warren E., and Donald E. Stokes. 1963. “Constituency Influence in Congress.” *American Political Science Review* 57(1):45-56.

Weissberg, Robert 1978. Collective vs. Dyadic Representation in Congress. *American Political Science Review* 72 (2): 535-47.

*Assessing Representativeness*

Stimson, James A., Michael B. MacKuen, and Robert S. Erikson. 1995. “Dynamic Representation.” *American Political Science Review* 89:543-565.

Grimmer, Justin. 2014. “Measuring Representational Style in the House: The Tea Party, Obama and Legislators’ Changing Expressed Priorities.” Working Paper.

Jeffrey R. Lax and Justin H. Phillips. 2012. “The Democratic Deficit in the States.” *American Journal of Political Science* 56 (1): 148-166.

*Grant Proposal Presentations*