American Political Institutions and Processes  
GOV 381J; Unique #: 38885  
Professor Eric L. McDaniel  
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Fall 2012  
Wednesday 12:30-3:30  
Classroom BAT 1.104

Office: 4.122 Batts Hall  
Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday and Friday 11-12  
Phone: 232-7268

Course Description
This seminar introduces graduate students to the study of American political institutions. The course reviews both classic and recent scholarship on issues related to political institutions. The readings address a range of topics regarding the definition and study of institutions along with an in-depth analysis of specific institutions in American politics.

Classes will be devoted to intensive reading and critical discussion of the literature (and related scholarship) of that week’s topic. Discussion will be of the works read for that day as well as other approaches and scholarship on related issues.

Course Expectations and Requirements
As with every graduate seminar, this course should help you to prepare for your preliminary exams, to consider research and dissertation topics, and to teach in the sub-field of American politics. More specifically, this seminar will be somewhat of a “mini-laboratory” in which we will not only discuss and debate old and new ideas/paradigms, but the course assignments will correspond to the types of activities in which you will be engaged as a practicing political/social scientist. I will determine the course grade based upon: short papers, class participation and a take-home final.

Short Papers (30% of grade): Each student will write two short papers (5 pages, typed and double-spaced with citations) each dedicated to a week’s readings. The papers are to summarize the central debate of the readings, their arguments, and their strengths and weaknesses. The short papers are to be posted in the designated section of blackboard by 5 PM the Tuesday before class meets. Each paper will be worth 15 percent of your grade.

Participation (35% of grade): In conjunction with the short papers, students will lead class discussion. Students discussing readings should be in contact with one another to coordinate their presentations. An example of what the presentations should look like is posted on blackboard. The class participation grade will be further determined by how students contribute to the overall discussions in class. I of course expect you to attend class, to have read and thought about all of the week’s assigned readings, and not to be bashful or overzealous in sharing your thoughts. A 35 percent participation grade will be based on the quality of these presentations and overall participation.

In order to facilitate better discussion in class you should attempt to answer the following questions as you prepare your short papers, presentations and comments for class.
1. What is the author’s central question?
2. What are the core concepts under investigation?
   a. How does the author define these concepts?
   b. How does this definition of the concepts differ from others?
3. What is the author’s argument?
   a. Are there any specific hypotheses?
   b. Is the author refuting someone else’s findings?
   c. Are their alternative hypotheses that are being ignored?
   d. Is this a valid argument?
4. What evidence does the author use to support her argument?
   a. Is the author’s evidence valid?
   b. How does the author operationalize the core concepts?
   c. Is the author’s argument and data similar or different from other readings?
5. Is the author able to support her argument?
   a. Does the author confirm her hypotheses?
   b. How convincing are the results?
6. What questions are left unanswered?

**Take-Home Final (40% of grade):** The Take-home final will be a mock comprehensive exam, with only one exam question. Students will have a choice of essay questions to answer (one of two) and the paper will be due in 48 hours. The take-home final is worth 35% of your grade.

**Required Texts**


Required readings that are not listed among the above texts are the responsibility of the student (available through UT Library databases). I will post book chapters and unpublished manuscripts on the Blackboard site for this class.

**Preparation**
Doing well in this class necessitates that students are informed and prepared. Therefore, you will be expected to complete the readings prior to when class meets. This course covers a large amount of material in a short amount of time. If you do not keep up with the readings, your grade will reflect your preparation.

**Professionalism**
Remember that this is an academic environment. Therefore, I ask that you minimize unnecessary disruptions. This includes (but it is not limited to) side conversations, cell phone calls and pagers. I also ask that you be proactive if any conflict occurs. This means notifying me ahead of time if you are unable to meet the requirements of the course.

**Academic Dishonesty**
The University defines scholastic dishonesty in the following way:

“According to the *Institutional Rules*, scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, and falsifying academic records.” For a detailed explanation of the University’s honor code and definition of plagiarism please refer to the following website [http://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/gi09-10/ch01/index.html](http://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/gi09-10/ch01/index.html).

In the event that a student violates the University policy on scholastic dishonesty, he or she will be subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced.

**Students with Disabilities**
Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259, [http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/](http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/)

**Religious Holy Day Observance**
By UT Austin policy, you must notify your instructor of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

**Emergency Evacuation Policy**
In the event of a fire or other emergency, it may be necessary to evacuate a building rapidly. Upon the activation of a fire alarm or the announcement of an emergency in a university building, all occupants of
the building are required to evacuate and assemble outside. Once evacuated, no one may re-enter the building without instruction to do so from the Austin Fire Department, University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.

Students should familiarize themselves with all the exit doors of each room and building they occupy at the university, and should remember that the nearest exit routes may not be the same as the way they typically enter buildings.

Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructors in writing during the first week of class. Faculty members must then provide this information to the Fire Prevention Services office by fax (512-232-2759), with "Attn. Mr. Roosevelt Easley" written in the subject line.

Information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at http://www.utexas.edu/emergency

Cancelled Classes
Periodically class may be canceled. The class will be informed of these dates and will be held accountable for the readings of that day.

Changes to the Course
The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus in order to better facilitate the needs of the course.

Course Schedule

29-Aug Defining Institutions

5-Sep How to Study Institutions
12-Sep Constitutions

19-Sep Federalism

26-Sep Congress
3-Oct Congress

10-Oct Presidency

17-Oct Presidency

24-Oct Bureaucracy
31-Oct Courts

7-Nov Parties

14-Nov Parties
21-Nov Interest Groups

28-Nov Social Movements

5-Dec Media