This seminar introduces graduate students to the study of American politics and government. The course reviews both classic and more recent scholarship on issues in American political science. The readings address a range of topics, from questions of democracy, the political system, and political culture, to ones of particular aspects of American politics, such as public opinion, partisanship, Congress, the presidency, and the judiciary. Students read what political scientists have written (and argued) about the different topics related to political science on the United States. Of special concern are the controversies within the discipline: where do political scientists disagree, and why? What are the implications of how political scientists have worked as professionals?

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. Each week, a designated student leader will provide critical overviews of the topic and direct the seminar discussion. All other students will be responsible for a question for one or more of that week’s readings. Students’ written assignments will consist of book reviews and a capstone review essay as part of students’ professional training.

The last third of each class period will consist of exercises for devising appropriate research designs for the topic of that week. Students will work in small groups so as to devise ways of furthering quality scholarship in the subfield of American political science addressed in that week’s reading.

Assessment

Grades will be based on student presentations and seminar leadership, class participation and reading question, book reviews (2), and review essay.

Student presentation/class leadership (2 ea.): 20%
Class discussion and weekly questions: 20%
Book Reviews (3), 1000 words each: 20%
Review Essay: 20%
Take-home Final: 20%
Guidelines

• Final grades will be on an A-F scale, with pluses and minuses. Paper, presentation, and other grades will be on a 100-point scale. Grades in the 83-86 range equal a B, for instance, grades from 87 to 89 equal a B+, and grades in the 80-82 range equal a B-. And so on.
• Assignments are due before class starts on Tuesday afternoon. Late papers will be subject to penalties, and, if sufficiently late, may not be accepted. All work must be your own (of course!) though you are welcome—in fact, encouraged—to discuss the readings and have others review your writing.
• Regular class participation and attendance is expected. More than one unexcused absence may deduct from a student’s class-participation grade. A student who knows he or she has to leave class early or miss a class one needs to let the instructor know in advance or as soon as possible.
• You may list your two preferred dates for presenting on a sign-up sheet outside the instructor’s door.
• A question (at least one per week) is required for each set of readings and to be posted on Blackboard the evening before Tuesday’s class. This assignment does not apply to that week’s presenter.
• Book reviews (3). These are to be formal book reviews of publishable quality, 1000 words in length. To see examples, please consult Perspectives on Politics or other relevant political science journals. Each review counts for 7 percent of the course grade, so students get an additional point extra. Due dates will be arranged in the second week of classes.
• Review essay. This is to be a formal book review essay, of the kind written for scholarly journals and general interest intellectual publications. It should constitute a balanced, professional, polished appraisal of a body of subject-related scholarly books. For examples of review essays, see Perspectives on Politics, World Politics, the New York Review of Books, and other sources. The student will discuss with the instructor which topic and which three books to write about in the review essay.
• The take-home final will be constitute a mock-comprehensive exam, though 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.
• You are expected to demonstrate the following values in this course: respect for your fellow students and teacher; self-reflection and on-going assessment of your own learning; honesty, responsibility, and hard work; intellectual engagement in the subject of the course.
• I am available at times outside office hours, by appointment. I shall also arrange individual meetings to discuss your class performance in mid-semester. If you have any questions or have special concerns, please see me as your earliest convenient.
Texts


All texts are available at the UT Cooperative Bookstore.

Required readings that are not listed among the above texts are the responsibility of the student (available through UT Library databases). I shall posted chapters in edited volumes on the Blackboard site for this class.
Course Schedule

1. August 31  
   **American Political Science: What Are We Doing?**

2. September 7  
   **Democratic Theory and the United States: Do Elites Rule?**

3. September 14  
   **Understanding Power: What Role Does “Power” Have in Political Science?**
4. September 21  American Political Culture: What Do Americans Believe?


5. September 28  Interest Groups and Pluralism: What Influence Do Interest Groups Have on Democratic Government?

- Federalist Papers, 10, 47, 48, 51
- Mancur Olson, Ch. 2 “The Logic,” Ch. 3, “Implications,” in The Rise and Fall of Nations, Yale, 1982

6. October 5  Political Parties and Organized Politics: Why Parties?

- John Aldrich, Why Parties? Chicago, 1996, Ch. 1-3, 6-9

7. October 12  American Politics Through Time: Why Study the American Polity through History?

- Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones, Agenda and Instability in American Politics, 2nd Ed, Chicago, 2009
8. October 19  The American State: Why Bring in the State?

- Theda Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In," in Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, eds., Bringing the State Back In, Cambridge, 1985
- John Bendix; Bertell Ollman; Bartholomew H. Sparrow; Timothy Mitchell; “Going Beyond the State,” American Political Science Review 86 No. 4 (1992): 1007-21

9. October 26  Race & Gender: How Significant Are Ascriptive Qualities?


- Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, Politicians Don’t Pander. Chicago, 2000

- Richard G. Niemi and Herbert F. Weisberg, ed., *Controversies in Voting Behavior*, 4th Ed. CQ Press, 2001, Ch. 1, 2, 6, 10

12. November 16  Congress: In What Ways Are Members Representative?


13. November 23  The Presidency: How Can Presidents Govern Effectively?


- Robert G. McCloskey, The American Supreme Court, rev. ed. by Sanford Levinson, Chicago, 2010
- Jeffrey A. Sigal and Harold Spaeth, *The Supreme Court and the Attitudinal Model Revisited* New York: Cambridge, 2002 (selections tba)

**Take-Home Final Exam**