POLS 5311: Graduate Seminar in American Politics

SPRING 2017, 3 CREDIT HOURS

Mark Owens
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Course Time: 6:00 p.m. – 8:45 p.m.
Wednesdays
Classroom: BUS 208

Office Hours: 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. Mondays
3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. Wednesdays
Office: BUS 231

Course Description

This course is designed to provide a survey of the institutions within the American government and the behavioral trends in American Politics. Each week examines, in detail, the scholarly arguments over the complexities of each topic and how to use the literature to identify details necessary when analyzing a question. Upon completion of this class, students should be prepared to take an advanced seminar on a subfield of American Politics and evaluate arguments in American politics that are worth of appearing on a comprehensive exam.

Learning Objectives

- Identify the components used to develop a political science theory.
- Translate the applied implications of an empirical or theoretical study (recognize, interpret, interact).
- Evaluate if theories in political science are valid.
- Justify how individuals in government achieve powers beyond the direct authority of an office.
- Synthesize the needs of individuals to participate in politics.
- Raise, and recognize, questions that political science has still not answered.
- Produce works that systematically analyze political phenomenon.

Communication Policy

E-mails will be answered within 24 hours during the school week and occur between 9am and 5pm. Feedback on assessments will be less than 2 weeks upon submission.

Required Readings

All articles and books are available online and FREE by accessing e-books through UT-Tyler Library.

Student Evaluation

Class Assignments & Participation, 300 points

As a graduate seminar active participation in the class discussion is essential to your learning, as is the ability to apply knowledge gained from your study. For this reason the 300 points associated with assignments and participation are broken into multiple weekly assignments and the weekly evaluation of the proportion of the high quality contributions made in each class meeting. Note: Incorrect answers during class discussion will not count against you, but you should not expect points in those cases. Distracting others or engaging in tasks that are off topic detract points from from the weekly participation score.
Class Assignments
Note: Items are also listed in the course schedule in the week they are assigned.

In-Class: Informal Writing: Identify if the aggregate concerns of the electorate are being met – (January 18).

Online-Week: A reflection essay: Why is a scientific approach to political science valuable, particularly for understanding American Politics? Are the findings from such studies valid? – (January 25).

Online-Week: Prepare an Experiment to Study Behavior – (February 8).

In-Class: Implement Experiment in Class – (February 15).

Online-Week: Election Rules Reform Brief – (March 1).

In-Class: Role Play, what will you let pass? – (March 22).

Online-Week: Institutional Rules Reform Brief – (March 29).

In-Class: Peer Review: Provide thoughtful comments and questions on the work of your peers. The quality of the comments and question will make up 50 points – (April 26).

Assessments of Academic Works

The seminar’s course readings touch on subfields within the discipline to understand the aspects of American politics that are studied most and the theories used to explain. Moreover, the topics in the course provide an initial foundation in preparation for the comprehensive exams. With that motivation, select four weeks in the semester in which you are to critically assess each reading based on the value of its academic contribution (teaching something new, providing a different perspective...).

Each submission is worth 40 points each, for a total of 200 points. See the related rubric for more information on what questions to think about and how to structure your submission.

Study of Close Elections, 100 points

We often hear that elections have consequences, however political scientists have asked do campaigns actually matter? For these reasons researchers argue whether each election is unique or whether the stability in observations of turnout and election outcomes within certain contexts allows us to make meaningful predictions.

In this first research paper, select three elections for either a similar office (House, Senate, President, etc.) or in the same location (Tyler, Texas, etc, or United States). The selection of these three cases should fit the research question of the paper (be it the effects of advertising/recognition, candidate experience, or national conditions). Then in a six to eight page, double-spaced Times New Roman font size 12, recognize the politics at play, and interpret the effect of these conditions (especially if one issue compounds another). Finally, present clear conclusions to whether we can recognize direct or indirect connections between what you observed and understanding the outcome of an election. Late submissions will lose 10 points for each day after the due date.

The Study of Close Elections is due on Wednesday February 15.

Legislative History: Applied Writing Exercise, 100 points

The outcome of this assignment should be an in-depth description of the legislative processes by which a bill was considered and how they relating the content and success of the legislation. There is no page requirement, but most papers are somewhere between 7 and 10 pages in length to explain what you found through all of your research. Format for the paper should be typed, and double-spaced with one-inch margins. Reading your own work is helpful, as your grade will be penalized for grammatical and spelling errors, as well as omissions of important topics from the paper. Late submissions will lose 10 points for each day after the due date.
The process of creating the final draft is an involved research process that requires the researcher to collect all of the relevant information, synthesize the concepts, and determine what the consequences of each course of action was. As you present this information, justify observations by finding the original source documents. Identify each source with either a footnote or by embedding a hyperlink to the actual government document if it is available online.

*Suggested steps to begin this process*

1) Choose a law.

2) Identify all of the stages that legislative action and debate occurred.

3) Describe connections between different decisions to see if such decisions were independent or influenced by a past agreement. For example, did the bill receive a lot of amendments in committee - if so, did this preempt opposition or create more debate?

4) Examine whether the later implementation of the law matched the intent of the initial lawmakers.

A legislative history is a research tool used by lawyers and legislative staffs to understand the context that helped galvanize support for a policy in order to explain how a decision was made through the political process.

**The Legislative History is due on Wednesday March 15.**

*Presentation of Extended Research, 100 points*

Choose to extend your research on elections or the legislative process by finding collecting original data to help further answer your research question and test the theory you are presenting. In this reflective assignment, prepare a 10 minute presentation to educate the class about your research and how it can help evaluate if theories in political science are valid.

Presentations should include a synthesis of the literature, a behavioral or institutional theory that helps explain the phenomenon, a hypothesis, a research design to test the hypothesis, findings, and a conclusion. As a student it is your choice to determine how to present your research by selection to present before the class, produce an original video, create an academic poster. Late submissions, will lose 10 points each day.

*Two Exams, 100 points each*

The course includes two written exams, one at the midterm on (February 22nd) and the final exam. The exams will be structured the same in that you will be asked to answer a few short answer questions, as well as a longer essay. More questions will be presented than need to be answered, therefore it is important to read the instructions and parameters for selecting your questions. *Missing an exam without the confirmation of an alternative test date, before the exam date, will result in a zero.*

**Grading**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Assignments &amp; Discussion</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Assessments of Academic Works</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study of Close Elections</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legislative History</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation of Extended Research</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam (Feb 22)</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Written Exam</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>1000</strong></td>
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Student Conduct

I have high expectations for each student in this class, which are based on your academic performance to get to this point and my belief that you will treat each of your fellow classmates with respect. My goal is to facilitate a supportive and engaging classroom for everyone and one part of that is eliminating disruptive behavior. I will allow computers in-class for note taking. However, it is unacceptable to use your cell phone or computer during class to chat, surf the web, talk, or text. Using technology in this way during class is distracting to others and demonstrates a lack of respect for the instructor.

Netiquette

Since a large portion of the class will occur online and students have the opportunity to collaborate outside of class, it is necessary to establish a formal etiquette policy. 1) All communications should be professional. 2) Disagreements should be targeted at the subject and topic – not individuals participating in the discussion. 3) Be sure that secondary sources shared online have the appropriate copyright and fair use allowances for educational use. 4) Obnoxious or inflammatory online activity will be treated the same way as behavior that distracts from learning in the classroom. Offenses will be documented and reported to the University Conduct Committee.

Academic Honesty

It is your responsibility to avoid plagiarism, cheating, and dishonesty. The University of Texas at Tyler Policies and Procedures for Student Affairs will be strictly followed and can be found here at: http://www.uttyler.edu/mopp/documents/8Student%20Conduct%20and%20Discipline.pdf. Tests and assignments are designed to assess your understanding of the material–do not reference another student’s answers. Violations of academic integrity are serious and will have a negative consequence on your classroom performance. In each instance a violation occurs, a failing grade will be assigned for the assignment or the course, require work to be redone, and have you identify what the cause of the violation was. The matter will be referred to the Dean of Students if institutional action is necessary. Reference the rights and responsibilities of students: http://www.uttyler.edu/wellness/rightsresponsibilities.php.

Examples of plagiarism, cheating, and related descriptions are provided by the university at http://www.uttyler.edu/academicaffairs/files/syllabuspolicy.pdf.

Grade Replacement/Forgiveness and Census Date Policies:

Students repeating a course for grade forgiveness (grade replacement) must file a Grade Replacement Contract with the Enrollment Services Center (ADM 230) on or before the Census Date of the semester in which the course will be repeated. Grade Replacement Contracts are available in the Enrollment Services Center or at http://www.uttyler.edu/registrar. Each semesters Census Date can be found on the Contract itself, on the Academic Calendar, or in the information pamphlets published each semester by the Office of the Registrar.

Failure to file a Grade Replacement Contract will result in both the original and repeated grade being used to calculate your overall grade point average. Undergraduates are eligible to exercise grade replacement for only three course repeats during their career at UT Tyler; graduates are eligible for two grade replacements. Full policy details are printed on each Grade Replacement Contract.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>900-1000 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>800-899 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>700-799 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>600-699 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>599 or fewer points</td>
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</table>
The Census Date is the deadline for many forms and enrollment actions that students need to be aware of. These include:

- Submitting Grade Replacement Contracts, Transient Forms, requests to withhold directory information, approvals for taking courses as Audit, Pass/Fail or Credit/No Credit.
- Receiving 100% refunds for partial withdrawals. (There is no refund for these after the Census Date)
- Schedule adjustments (section changes, adding a new class, dropping without a “W” grade)
- Being reinstated or re-enrolled in classes after being dropped for non-payment
- Completing the process for tuition exemptions or waivers through Financial Aid

**State-Mandated Course Drop Policy:**

Texas law prohibits a student who began college for the first time in Fall 2007 or thereafter from dropping more than six courses during their entire undergraduate career. This includes courses dropped at another 2-year or 4-year Texas public college or university. For purposes of this rule, a dropped course is any course that is dropped after the census date (See Academic Calendar for the specific date).

Exceptions to the 6-drop rule may be found in the catalog. Petitions for exemptions must be submitted to the Enrollment Services Center and must be accompanied by documentation of the extenuating circumstance. Please contact the Enrollment Services Center if you have any questions.

**Disability Services:**

In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA) the University offers accommodations to students with learning, physical and/or psychiatric disabilities. If you have a disability, including non-visible disabilities such as chronic diseases, learning disabilities, head injury, PTSD or ADHD, or you have a history of modifications or accommodations in a previous educational environment you are encouraged to contact the Student Accessibility and Resources office and schedule an interview with the Accessibility Case Manager/ADA Coordinator, Cynthia Lowery Staples. If you are unsure if the above criteria applies to you, but have questions or concerns please contact the SAR office. For more information or to set up an appointment please visit the SAR office located in the University Center, Room 3150 or call 903.566.7079. You may also send an email to cstaples@uttyler.edu.

**Student Absence due to Religious Observance:**

Students who anticipate being absent from class due to a religious observance are requested to inform the instructor of such absences by the second class meeting of the semester.

**Student Absence for University-Sponsored Events and Activities**

If you intend to be absent for a university-sponsored event or activity, you (or the event sponsor) must notify the instructor at least two weeks prior to the date of the planned absence. At that time the instructor will set a date and time when make-up assignments will be completed.

**Social Security and FERPA Statement:**

It is the policy of The University of Texas at Tyler to protect the confidential nature of social security numbers. The University has changed its computer programming so that all students have an identification number. The electronic transmission of grades (e.g., via e-mail) risks violation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act: **grades will not be transmitted electronically.**
Resources for Academic Success:

UT Tyler Writing Center (903.565.5995)

UT Tyler Tutoring Center (903.565.5964)

The Mathematics Learning Center, RBN 4021, this is the open access computer lab for math students, with tutors on duty to assist students who are enrolled in early-career courses.

UT Tyler Counseling Center (903.566.7254)

Technical Requirement and Support Statement:
The course requires students to maintain certain technical expertise:

Use a word editor (ex. Word or submit other written work as a PDF). As a student you have a subscription to Office 365 http://www.uttyler.edu/it/office365/365-students.php.

Keep your internet browser to the correct settings to run Blackboard – this may require deleting cookies or updating software to watch lecture videos. Campus Computing Services is there to help: https://www.uttyler.edu/ccs/index.php.

Download ZOOM and have some way to speak into an internet powered device if virtual office hour meetings are necessary.

If problems using the UT Tyler Learning Management System continue, contact the campus support staff and then alert the professor. Phone (903) 565-5610.

Class Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jan 18</th>
<th>Course Introduction: American Politics and Democratic Theory</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Readings:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assign.: In-Class, Written Reflection: Identify if the aggregate concerns of the electorate are being met.</td>
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</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jan 25</th>
<th>Online: American Voters</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Readings:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assign.: Reflection Essay Why is a scientific approach to political science valuable for understanding American Politics? Are the findings from such studies valid?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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1Should the class schedule need to be amended, I will advise the class in advance by email and via the Blackboard page
Feb 1  Studying the American Electorate


Feb 8  Online: Understanding Candidate Behavior and Public Opinion


Assign.: Prepare an Experiment to Study Behavior

Feb 15  Short-term Influences on Voting Behavior


Due: Study of Close Elections

Feb 22

*Online: Institutional Organization*

*Readings:*


Due: Midterm Exam

Mar 1

*Representation in Congress*

*Readings:*


American Political Science Review 100(2): 195-208.


Assign.: Election Rules Reform Brief

Mar 8
Spring Break

Mar 15
Online: Presidency


Due: Legislative History

Mar 22
Political Parties and Critical Elections


Assign.: Role Play Activity: *What Would You Let Pass?*

Mar 29

Online: Bureaucracy


Assign.: Institutional Rules Reform Brief

Apr 5

Supreme Court


Apr 12  
**Online:** Mass Media

**Readings:**  

Shaw, Daron and James Gimpel. 2012. “What if We Randomize the Governor’s Schedule? Evidence on Campaign Appearance Effects from a Texas Field Experiment.” *Political Communication* 29: 137-159.


Apr 19  
**Electoral Connection to Lawmaking**

**Readings:**  


Apr 26  
**Group Presentations**

May 3  
**Written Final Exam**