Purpose and Requirements

This seminar is designed to acquaint students with current research approaches in the various subfields of American politics. The aim is to serve students with a variety of reads, including those who intend to specialize in American politics and those who want to acquire a basic understanding of American politics without further specialization. Particular attention will be given to debates over theory, methodology, and substance. This course is not designed to provide a complete survey of the field; no one-semester course could possibly include all approaches or all subfields in American politics.

Each seminar will center on a critical analysis of the assigned readings for the week. Although I hope that much of our class time will be spent in group discussion, I will typically open with a commentary on the week's readings. At the end of each seminar I will introduce the next week's readings – describing them briefly and suggesting issues for you to think about.

Each week, one-half of the class will be required to write a short essay responding to the week's readings, no longer than two single-spaced page. These essays should try to engage a number of the week’s readings, by, for example, doing one or more of the following: juxtaposing and commenting on alternative explanations or approaches to a substantive topic; criticizing the methodologies used and proposing other strategies of research; criticizing the conceptualization and/or measurement of a particular construct; analyzing the implications of a set of findings; suggesting new questions or hypotheses for research; developing similarities and contrasts with arguments or research found in the readings from previous weeks. More generally, these papers should contain an argument, not a summary or description of the readings. These papers should be distributed to instructors and class participants by 4:00 on the Monday before the scheduled Wednesday meeting. I will comment on them and turn them back at the end of Wednesday’s session. These essays will serve as the starting point for our discussion.

A longer paper is due on the last scheduled day of class, December 14, 2006. This paper should review and interpret relevant literature and propose a research project that could be undertaken with limited financial resources, such as are available to most graduate students. In addition to reviewing the relevant literature, the paper should develop a significant hypothesis related to some topic in American politics and/or government and propose a practicable research design for assessing it. If you are writing a research paper for another course, you are permitted to combine the assignment with this one if you first clear the plan with us and the professor in the other course. If you combine the assignment, you will ordinarily be expected to carry out a research project. You will be expected to submit a preliminary memo outlining your research project by November 26, 2006. Late submissions are not permitted.
Grading

Grades will be calculated as follows:
Class participation: 35%
Short papers: 40%
Final Paper: 25%

Required Reading

I will provide links to several recommended books on my homepage, but these are not required for purchase. Depending on your personal interests, you may wish to purchase of these books. Please note that course participation is a critical part of your grade for this course. I expect that you will come to class prepared to discuss the week’s readings.

Course Outline

1. Introduction and Course Overview (September 6)

Political Behavior

2. Public Opinion I: Micro Public Opinion (September 13)


3. Public Opinion II: The Macropolicy (September 20)


4. Voting Behavior (September 27)


5. Political Participation (October 4)


6. Interest Groups (October 12)


7. Political Parties I: Mass Behavior (October 19)


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Institutions

8. Political Parties II: Elite Behavior (October 26)


9. Congress I: Institutional Development (November 2)


10. Congress II: Congress as a Political Institution (November 9)


11. The Executive Branch: The Presidency, and Inter-Branch Bargaining (November 16)


12. Bureaucratic Politics (November 30)


13. The Judiciary and The Supreme Court (December 7)


Mass/Elite Linkages

14. American Democracy (December 14)


15. Wrap-Up (Makeup Class TBA)