PSC 710R: Proseminar in American Politics

Prof.
Email: Last updated September 1, 2016
Office: Office Hours

Course Overview

This course is an introduction to the American politics subfield, covering a wide range of topics. Each week, we will cover a specific research area, such as public opinion, voting behavior, or Congress. Beyond learning what the main research questions are in each area of study within American politics, the course will stress broader and overarching themes.

Our readings consist mostly of classics (pre-1980s) and more recent “classics” (since 1990s) and are highly cited books and articles. I made this choice to focus on these, rather than the most recent work, since the purpose of this course is to introduce you to the main themes and questions Americanists have grappled with. I will try to note recent advances on each topic as we progress through the semester.

The “additional readings” on the syllabus are there to give you some direction if you want to go more in-depth on the topic, but those readings are NOT required.

Within American politics are various methodological and theoretical approaches. For instance, some might distinguish between those that study political behavior and political institutions. We will see how differences in substantive focus and methodological approaches like this play out in the study of American politics.

Since this is a graduate course, there will be a somewhat heavy focus on research methods. That is, this course will provide more than just a literature review. We will spend a significant amount of time critiquing the literature, and critiquing on methodological grounds is a large component of that. There is no methodology prerequisite, but I do assume you have at least a rudimentary understanding of correlations and simple regressions. A lot of our methodological discussions will be broadly conceptual and will not necessitate specific training or math background.

To summarize, there are four main goals of the course. (1) Conduct a literature review of previous research on American politics, (2) Critique existing research and propose new approaches to existing research questions or propose new questions altogether (conduct research), (3) Demonstrate methodological approaches and techniques (methods), (4) Be able to use the information gained in class to teach an undergraduate course in American politics (teaching).

Books

Gelman, Andrew. 2009. Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State
Course Requirements and Grading

Class participation 10%: You are expected to come to class on-time and prepared, and actively participate in class discussion. Come prepared with at least one discussion question for each reading for that week. The questions can be either substantive or methodological.

Read two “additional readings” 10% total: Choose two readings from the additional readings list for a week of your choice. Just make sure no other student chose the same reading. Prepare a short summary (1 to 2 pages) of the main points of the article. Distribute that summary to your classmates and give a brief discussion in class on the article. This will give a little help to those who will be taking the comprehensive exam in American politics.

3 response papers (10% each = 30%): Choosing three weeks during the semester, write a brief paper (2 to 4 pages, double-spaced, 11-pt font) that discusses the readings for that week. The first part of the paper should state the common research question(s), theme(s), or puzzle(s) of the readings. What is the overall impression the readings give on the topic (is there a consensus among scholars or what issues are at debate)? For the remainder of the paper, provide a critical assessment of a subset of the readings (focusing on one paper is fine). What are the strengths or weaknesses of the paper. Is the puzzle important and tied to an important literature? Critiques of the methodological approach?

Two research design papers, 15% each = 30%: Due dates are Friday, Oct 21, 5pm and Friday, Dec 9, 5pm. These papers should be in the range of 4 to 6 pages (double-spaced, 11-pt font) and on a topic related to the topics that have been covered up to that point. The paper should focus on its theoretical and empirical contribution, as well as spell out exactly what data would be used (has to be realistic to gather within a semester or so with limited financial resources) and the basic empirical approach to be used. This paper should look something like the first half of a research article: What is the research question? What is the relevant literature? How does your work extend the literature? What are your theory and hypotheses? How will you test your hypotheses?

Final exam, 20%: Two-question, take-home final exam during finals week. Exact time and due date TBD. The questions will look something like what you might find on an American comprehensive exam.

Late work: Assignments must be uploaded to WebCampus on time. Late work will not be accepted and will be given a grade of zero.

Grading Scale:
Other University Policies and Resources

**Academic Misconduct** — Academic integrity is a legitimate concern for every member of the campus community; all share in upholding the fundamental values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility and professionalism. By choosing to join the UNLV community, students accept the expectations of the Student Academic Misconduct Policy and are encouraged when faced with choices to always take the ethical path. Students enrolling in UNLV assume the obligation to conduct themselves in a manner compatible with UNLV’s function as an educational institution.

An example of academic misconduct is plagiarism. Plagiarism is using the words or ideas of another, from the Internet or any source, without proper citation of the sources. See the *Student Academic Misconduct Policy* (approved December 9, 2005) located at: [https://www.unlv.edu/studentconduct/student-conduct](https://www.unlv.edu/studentconduct/student-conduct).

**Copyright** — The University requires all members of the University Community to familiarize themselves with and to follow copyright and fair use requirements. You are individually and solely responsible for violations of copyright and fair use laws. The university will neither protect nor defend you nor assume any responsibility for employee or student violations of fair use laws. Violations of copyright laws could subject you to federal and state civil penalties and criminal liability, as well as disciplinary action under University policies. Additional information can be found at: [http://www.unlv.edu/provost/copyright](http://www.unlv.edu/provost/copyright).

**Disability Resource Center (DRC)** — Disability Resource Center (DRC) — The UNLV Disability Resource Center (SSC-A 143, [http://drc.unlv.edu/](http://drc.unlv.edu/), 702-895-0866) provides resources for students with disabilities. If you feel that you have a disability, please make an appointment with a Disabilities Specialist at the DRC to discuss what options may be available to you. If you are registered with the UNLV Disability Resource Center, bring your Academic Accommodation Plan from the DRC to the instructor during office hours so that you may work together to develop strategies for implementing the accommodations to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. Any information you provide is private and will be treated as such. To maintain the confidentiality of your request, please do not approach the instructor in front of others to discuss your accommodation needs.

**Religious Holidays Policy** — Any student missing class quizzes, examinations, or any other class or lab work because of observance of religious holidays shall be given an opportunity during that semester to make up missed work. The make-up will apply to the religious holiday absence only. It
shall be the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor **within the first 14 calendar days of the course for fall and spring courses (excepting modular courses), or within the first 7 calendar days of the course for summer and modular courses**, of his or her intention to participate in religious holidays which do not fall on state holidays or periods of class recess. For additional information, please visit: [http://catalog.unlv.edu/content.php?catoid=6&navoid=531](http://catalog.unlv.edu/content.php?catoid=6&navoid=531).

**Transparency in Learning and Teaching**—The University encourages application of the transparency method of constructing assignments for student success. Please see these two links for further information:

[https://www.unlv.edu/provost/teachingandlearning](https://www.unlv.edu/provost/teachingandlearning)

[https://www.unlv.edu/provost/transparency](https://www.unlv.edu/provost/transparency)

**Incomplete Grades**—The grade of I—Incomplete—can be granted when a student has satisfactorily completed three-fourths of course work for that semester/session but for reason(s) beyond the student’s control, and acceptable to the instructor, cannot complete the last part of the course, and the instructor believes that the student can finish the course without repeating it. The incomplete work must be made up before the end of the following regular semester for undergraduate courses. Graduate students receiving “I” grades in 500-, 600-, or 700-level courses have up to one calendar year to complete the work, at the discretion of the instructor. If course requirements are not completed within the time indicated, a grade of F will be recorded and the GPA will be adjusted accordingly. Students who are fulfilling an Incomplete do not register for the course but make individual arrangements with the instructor who assigned the I grade.

**Tutoring and Coaching**—The **Academic Success Center (ASC)** provides tutoring, academic success coaching and other academic assistance for all UNLV undergraduate students. For information regarding tutoring subjects, tutoring times, and other ASC programs and services, visit [http://www.unlv.edu/asc](http://www.unlv.edu/asc) or call 702-895-3177. The ASC building is located across from the Student Services Complex (SSC). Academic success coaching is located on the second floor of the SSC (ASC Coaching Spot). Drop-in tutoring is located on the second floor of the Lied Library and College of Engineering TEB second floor.

**UNLV Writing Center**—One-on-one or small group assistance with writing is available free of charge to UNLV students at the Writing Center, located in CDC-3-301. Although walk-in consultations are sometimes available, students with appointments will receive priority assistance. Appointments may be made in person or by calling 702-895-3908. The student’s Rebel ID Card, a copy of the assignment (if possible), and two copies of any writing to be reviewed are requested for the consultation. More information can be found at: [http://writingcenter.unlv.edu/](http://writingcenter.unlv.edu/).

**Rebelmail**—By policy, faculty and staff should e-mail students’ Rebelmail accounts only. Rebelmail is UNLV’s official e-mail system for students. It is one of the primary ways students receive official university communication such as information about deadlines, major campus events, and announcements. All UNLV students receive a Rebelmail account after they have been admitted to the university. Students’ e-mail prefixes are listed on class rosters. The suffix is always @unlv.nevada.edu. **Emailing within WebCampus is acceptable.**
**Final Examinations**—The University requires that final exams given at the end of a course occur at the time and on the day specified in the final exam schedule. See the schedule at: [http://www.unlv.edu/registrar/calendars](http://www.unlv.edu/registrar/calendars).

**Library statement:**
Students may consult with a librarian on research needs. For this class, the Subject Librarian is ([https://www.library.unlv.edu/contact/librarians_by_subject](https://www.library.unlv.edu/contact/librarians_by_subject)). UNLV Libraries provides resources to support students’ access to information. Discovery, access, and use of information are vital skills for academic work and for successful post-college life. Access library resources and ask questions at [https://www.library.unlv.edu/](https://www.library.unlv.edu/).

**Topics and readings (subject to changes)**

**Week 1: Introductions and Theoretical Primer**


**Week 2: Public opinion**


**Additional readings:**


Week 3: Political participation


America.” PS: Political Science and Politics


Additional readings:


Week 4: Voting behavior – Partisanship

Gelman, Andrew. 2009. Red State, Blue State, Rich State Poor State


Additional readings:


Week 5: Voting Behavior part 2


Additional Readings:

Popkin. 1991. The Reasoning Voter


Lupia, Arthur and Mathew McCubbins. 1998. The Democratic Dilemma: Can Citizens Learn What They Need to Know?


**Week 6: Interest Groups**

Olson, Mancur. 1965. The Logic of Collective Action


**Additional readings:**

Truman, David. 1951. The Governmental Process


**Week 7: Electoral Politics**


**Additional readings:**
Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*
Jacobson. *The Politics of Congressional Elections*

**Week 8: Congress: Electoral Connection**
Mayhew, David. 1974. *The Electoral Connection*

**Additional readings:**

**Week 9: Congress: Institutions and Organization**

**Additional readings:**
Cox and McCubbins. 1993. *Legislative Leviathan*
Smith, Steven. 2007. Party Influence in Congress
Gilligan and Krehbiel. 1989. “Asymmetric Information and Legislative Rules with a Heterogeneous Committee,” AJPS.

**Week 10: Partisan realignments, issue evolution, and polarization**


*Additional readings:*

**Week 11: Presidency**

Cameron, Charles. 2001. Veto Bargaining, excerpt

*Additional readings:*

**Week 12: Bureaucracy**


Week 13: Courts


Additional Readings:

Segal, J. A. and Spaeth, H. J. 2002. The Supreme Court and the Attitudinal Model Revisited