

POL 498-01 Seminar in Political Science

American Political Behavior

Spring 2018

SSB 241 Thursdays 3:30p - 6:20p

Instructor: Dr. Daniel Bowen
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Office: Tues 1:00p-4:00p
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1 Course Description and Purpose

American political behavior is concerned broadly with how Americans think about, participate in, and influence U.S. politics. In this senior seminar course, we will study public opinion and its measurement, who participates in American politics and why, the causes and consequences of U.S. elections, and citizen assessments of U.S. government at various levels. The course material is designed to give students a taste of the rich research in political behavior. While we will read some classic works, the readings are skewed toward recent research. As a capstone seminar, students will conduct a major research project using empirical data on a topic related to political behavior. The project will illustrate an appropriate use of research methods. Students should have senior status and have successfully completed POL 200 and POL 390 (Tutorial). By the end of the course, students will be familiar with the major themes and work in the field of American political behavior. More importantly, students will have added to this work through their senior thesis.

2 Course Goals / Learning Outcomes

The course meets the following learning goals set out by the Political Science Department:

- (1) Breadth of Knowledge: Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the general boundaries of the discipline, key substantive knowledge in and the linkages between the four major subfields of political science, and the connections between political science and related fields, especially economics, history, international studies, law, and public policy.
- (2) Depth of Knowledge: Students will be able to demonstrate a deep understanding of a) central concepts, distinctions, questions, and theories related to the discipline, b) the in-depth workings of fundamental political processes and institutions at the national and international level, and 3) selected topics important to a particular subfield.
- (3) Core Values: Students will be able to integrate into their work the meaning and historical evolution of the core, if contested, values in Western political thought (such as justice, equality, freedom, human rights, and due process); competing theoretical perspectives; and their own belief systems.
- (4) Critical Thinking: Students will be able to read analytically, understand complex relationships and concepts, identify underlying assumptions, “dissect” scholarly texts, and synthesize their own politically-related interpretations, arguments, or positions.

- (5) Original Research: Students will be able to conduct original research using appropriate primary and secondary sources and the empirical research tools characteristic of the discipline.
- (6) Communication Skills: Students will be able to communicate effectively in a variety of formats and settings, presenting oral and written arguments that are cogent, compelling, and well-substantiated.
- (7) Historical, Social and Cultural Sense of Place: Students will be able to recognize and understand the impact of diverse settings on political phenomenon to locate themselves within an historical, social, and cultural setting; to grasp politics in a conceptual manner; and to transfer that conceptual understanding to other situations.

The course is also designed to meet the following Middle States/HSS learning outcomes:

- (1) Written communication: writing is a focus of instruction.
- (2) Oral communication: public speaking is a focus of instruction.
- (3) Scientific and quantitative reasoning: learning how to use scientific method and performing appropriate analyses is a focus of instruction.
- (5) Critical analysis and reasoning: ability to critique the arguments of others in the discipline, the construction of one's own arguments, and using evidence are key areas of instruction.
- (6) Information literacy: evaluating the validity and reliability of a source is a focus of instruction.
- (11) Preparation to participate in civic life: the development of understanding of political processes in US democracy and/or the development of respect for civil discourse are an important area of instruction.

Fourth Hour: The class meets The College's fourth hour requirements by being more academically rigorous and containing additional learning tasks that will engage you in the study of political behavior. The course is quite difficult; the reading load in the first month and a half of the semester is substantial. Further, conducting your analyses and drafting the thesis will require your full attention and sustained effort.

3 Course Required Materials

Political behavior research is (in my opinion) the most sophisticated and richest work in political science. We have learned a great deal about how Americans think and act politically since the first academic survey work began in the 1940s. In order to provide an opportunity to study many different issues in the field, as well as to expose students to real and current political behavior research, journal articles will be the primary required readings. Occasionally supplemental book chapters will also be assigned. Journal articles will be available for FREE pdf download at the library's website (use Google Scholar): <http://www.tcnj.edu/~library/research/index.html>. Other readings will be posted on the course's Canvas site.

4 Research Project in American Political Behavior

The central component of the class is the successful completion of a senior thesis. Students will design and implement their research project, and write their results in format standard in political science scholarship. The basic details of the research project are as follows:

Data and methodology: Students will public opinion or election data and analyze them using appropriate methods. Projects can be large-N comparative studies (using statistical methods) or in-depth comparative studies of a few well-chosen cases. In both cases, projects are expected to be methodologically rigorous and incorporate evidence to test hypotheses, with attention given to evaluating empirical claims and the generalizability of the findings.

Major components: The project should include (but is not limited to) a well-defined research question, developed theory, at least one testable hypothesis drawn from the theory, descriptions of the data and methods used, and a discussion of the results of the study.

Paper length: The paper should be approximately 7500 words long, which is about 25 pages of double-spaced, 12pt font text. Students doing statistical analyses will likely be a little shorter than that, while those doing small-N studies should be longer. In addition, the paper should include tables, graphs, and/or figures when appropriate.

Scholarly literature: An important component of any research paper is to examine what other scholars have published on the issue to situate the new work in the context of the field's knowledge and to provide support for claims not tested in the study. Each research paper should engage with the previous literature and cite appropriately. I expect a thorough literature review, with at least 20 scholarly works cited in the paper and referenced in a bibliography. Please follow the American Political Science Association's citation style (<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/DocAPSA.html>).

Schedule: The research project includes the following steps: three short paper ideas, a research proposal presentation and written summary, a polished draft of the paper, a formal presentation of the finished research, the final thesis, and disseminating the research at the Celebration of Student Achievement.

Paper ideas: three 1 page paper ideas are due during in the first six weeks of class (see schedule). Each paper idea should include the topic or research question driving the research, a specific, testable hypothesis, the proposed methodological approach, and a comment about potential sources.

Research proposal: Students will present their polished research proposal to the class and receive feedback on their proposal. A written, 4 page research proposal is due at 5:00pm on the Friday following the student's presentation (either March 2nd or March 9th). Research proposals should include the research question, outline of the theory, one or more testable hypotheses drawn from the theory, a brief comment on how the project would fill a gap or correct a problem with the existing scholarly literature on the topic, and a discussion of the methodology and data sources to be used. It is essential that students describe the research design and data source; too many good student projects have failed because design or data collection issues were not recognized early in the research process.

Meeting: on March 22nd and 29th, students will meet with me to discuss the progress made on their research projects. At this meeting, students must explain their research design and show me their current data collection effort. Datasets should be complete or very close to completion by this meeting.

Draft: A *polished* draft of the research paper is due by the end of the day on April 13th. The draft should be posted to Canvas.

Presentation: The final two weeks of class are devoted to presentations. Each student will have approximately 20 minutes to present their original research and answer questions from the class. *Plan on 12-15 minutes for the presentation* and the rest of the time for questions.

Final Paper: The final paper is due on Dec. 9th at noon (through Canvas and one hard copy) and should incorporate comments and suggestions received after the presentation as well as any needed additional research and editing.

Dissemination: Students should plan on presenting their research at the Celebration of Student Achievement on Wednesday, May 2nd and are responsible for registering for the event. Presenting at COSA is an honor; students whose projects are not of sufficient quality will not be allowed to present.

5 Participation

In addition to the research project described above, students are expected to be engaged participants throughout the course semester. Thirty percent of the course grade is based on performance in a range of class activities. Students

are expected to contribute to class discussions on course readings and to offer feedback during student presentations. Students will also complete weekly in-class writing assignments which will offer students an opportunity to reflect on the week’s reading assignment (based on a prompt from the instructor). Successful writing assignments will make connections across readings and refer to specific details in the readings.

6 Grading

The following tables denotes the weight of each course component toward the final grade and grade ranges used.

Assignment	% of Final Grade	Due
Participation	30	Variable
In-class discussion		
In-class writing		
Paper ideas		
Meeting		
COSA presentation		5/3
Research proposal	10	
Presentation		3/1 or 3/8
Proposal		3/2 or 3/9
Thesis - draft	25	4/13
Presentation	10	4/26 or 5/3
Thesis - final	25	5/9

Table 1: Grading Weights

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	F
100–93	92–90	89–87	86–83	82–80	79–77	76–73	72–70	69–67	66–60	59–0

Table 2: Grading Scale

7 Class Schedule

1. Jan. 25th: Introduction & Public Opinion
 - (a) Converse 1964 (pp. 1-57)
 - (b) Zaller 1992, Ch 2. pp. 2-39.
2. Feb. 1: Public opinion
 - (a) Butler and Powell 2014
 - (b) Pacheco 2012
 - (c) Gay 2014
 - (d) Stimson 2015, Ch 3. pp. 52-84.
 - (e) Lax and Phillips 2012
3. Feb. 8: Political participation; *Paper idea #1 due*
 - (a) Aldrich 1993
 - (b) Burden et al. 2014

- (c) Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2011
 - (d) Ryan and Milazzo 2015
 - (e) Achen and Bartels 2016, Ch. 11, pp. 297-328
4. Feb. 15: Elections; *Paper idea #2 due*
 - (a) Jacobson 2017
 - (b) Campbell 1991
 - (c) Acharya, Blackwell and Sen 2016
 - (d) Fowler and Hall, 2017
 - (e) Hicks et al. 2015
 5. Feb. 22: Trust, efficacy, and approval; *Paper idea #3 due*
 - (a) Hetherington 1998
 - (b) Chamberlain 2012
 - (c) Rocha, Knoll and Wrinkle 2015
 - (d) Bowen (draft)
 6. Mar. 1: Proposal presentations, Group 1
 7. Mar. 8: Proposal presentations, Group 2
 8. Mar. 15: *Spring break*
 9. Mar. 22: Meetings with instructor, Group 1
 10. Mar. 29: Meetings with instructor, Group 2
 11. Apr. 5: TBD
 12. Apr. 12: TBD; *Draft due Friday, Apr. 13*
 13. Apr. 19: Presentation workshop
 14. Apr. 26: Paper presentations, Group 1
 15. May 3: Paper presentations, Group 2
 16. May 9: Thesis due at noon

References

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