Course Description: This course is the gateway proseminar in American politics. As such, it is designed to provide an overview of the research literature on a wide array of topics, each of which has an extensive literature of its own. The course focuses predominantly on the two major subfields of political behavior and political institutions. Since this is an introduction to the literature, in most weeks we will cover both contemporary and “classic” work.

Learning Outcomes: Students who successfully complete the course will demonstrate the ability to:

- describe the theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of American politics
- apply and evaluate theories, hypotheses, and supporting evidence
- actively and deeply participate in class discussion
- identify unresolved questions in the existing literature
- produce an original piece of scholarly research that contributes to the understanding of American politics.

Prerequisite(s): While there are no formal prerequisites for this course, it is tailored for Ph.D. students in political science. Students will benefit from having taken POLI 701, the introduction to research design, and POLI 502, the introduction to statistical methods, in a previous semester. If you do not fit this profile I generally would not recommend that you take this course, although I would be happy to discuss it as an option under certain circumstances.

Credit Hours: 3

Office Hours: Thursdays from 1:00–2:00pm and by appointment.

Course Materials: Required readings for the course will be drawn primarily from selected books and numerous journal articles. Books should be purchased in advance, and all of the articles/book excerpts are available either online via the USC Libraries’ electronic journal subscriptions (including JSTOR) or will be posted on Blackboard. Students should bring all required readings with them to class on the day they are assigned. Readings may be added or dropped and the syllabus and schedule may be altered at the discretion of the instructor.

Required Books:


Expectations and Evaluation

Because this is a Ph.D.-level research seminar and not a lecture-oriented course, the success of the class will depend heavily on the full participation of each student. Broadly speaking, students will be expected to do all the required reading prior to each scheduled meeting and to participate actively and thoughtfully in class discussion. Additionally, one or more students will be assigned the task of leading discussion for particular weeks or topics, and in that case are expected to read well beyond the requirements (the recommended readings in the course schedule are a good starting point). It would be useful to identify potential research topics early in the semester and perhaps choose the associated week in order to delve further into the literature on that topic.

You have now moved past the “consumer” stage of your academic career and into the phase in which your interaction with what you read takes on the form of a dialogue as you become a “producer” of knowledge. This requires reading and writing much more than you may be accustomed to doing. As such, I cannot stress enough how important it will be to keep on schedule, to constructively give and receive criticism, to take intellectual risks, and to persevere. What that means for this class is that you should not hesitate to engage deeply in discussion, start thinking right now about your research paper, and begin reading beyond the syllabus.

Grades for the course will be comprised of the following three components:

1. Class participation and discussion (30%)
   As described above, it is imperative that every student attend each class session prepared to be an active participant in discussion. Both the quantity and the quality of comments are important, including leading discussion on the days that correspond with submission of a critical review. Let me emphasize that you will not earn higher than a B+ in this course unless you are a frequent, well-prepared, and thoughtful participant in class discussion. This also means that you should be prepared to lead discussion on any article when called upon to do so, even if it is not your “assigned” week.

2. Critical Reviews (30%)
   Students will be required to complete at least two critical reviews of the literature assigned for specific weeks. These papers need not be excessively long (5-7 pages is often adequate), but they should **concisely** synthesize the theory, methods, and findings and—most importantly, and at **greater length**—**critique** the literature for that particular week. More effort and attention should be focused on analysis and criticism and comparatively less on summarization; the best reviews will go beyond the required readings for the week.

3. Reaction Papers (10%)
   Additionally, each week (except when leading discussion), students will write a 1-2 page single-spaced reaction/critique corresponding to the assigned readings. This paper is due in hard
copy at the start of class, and represents the one exception to the formatting requirements described below.

4. Research paper (30%)

The capstone of the course is an original research paper, which will be judged on the same criteria applied to a paper presented at a professional conference or submitted to a journal. Thus, it must address an interesting empirical question related to American politics, relate that question to the existing literature, develop a theoretical account, and provide evidence in support of the conclusion(s) drawn. Over the course of the semester, we will devote time inside and outside of class to discussing progress, challenges, etc., with respect to students’ projects. Toward that end, a brief research proposal (identifying the question, key literature, theoretical contribution, and method of analysis) is due Tuesday, February 23. An annotated bibliography covering the relevant literature is due Tuesday, March 22. The final paper is due in hard copy by 5pm on Monday, May 2. While these represent the formal deadlines relating to the research paper, students are strongly encouraged to consult informally with me throughout the semester regarding the development of their papers. Further details on the research paper (and related assignment deadlines) will be provided separately.

Formatting: All papers should be prepared professionally. This means using standard fonts and formatting (such as double spacing), as well as disciplinary standards for citations and references. It would be a good idea to begin familiarizing yourself now with the APSA’s Style Manual, which covers the format required for submissions to many (albeit not all) political science journals. You can access it here: http://www.apsanet.org/files/APSAStyleManual2006.pdf. While not required, I encourage production of papers in \LaTeX.

A Note on Grading: A minimum grade of a “C” in this course is required in order for it to count toward fulfilling the Ph.D. degree requirements. However, a grade less than a “B” is typically considered unsatisfactory, and in fact a student receiving three grades below a “B” is at risk of removal from the Ph.D. program. All work will be graded on a letter scale, with an “A” representing exceptional work, a “B+” good performance, and a “B” minimally satisfactory output.

Accessibility: Any student with a documented disability should contact the Office of Student Disability Services at 803-777-6142 and then follow up with me to make arrangements for appropriate accommodations.

Incompletes and Academic Integrity: All work must be turned in no later than the start of class on the day when it is due. I do not give incompletes save for truly exceptional circumstances of a serious and unforeseen nature. In accordance with the USC Honor Code and professional standards, I expect that all work will be your own and take very seriously any form of academic misrepresentation, including improper or omitted citation of sources and misappropriation of another’s work. Students are also expected to conduct themselves in a professional and civil manner.
Course Schedule
(‡ = course reserve; † = Blackboard)

Week 1 (Jan. 12): Introduction to Course

No required reading. Items below are recommended background material, particularly for those with less grounding in American politics.

Democratic Theory & Foundations of American Government:


Week 2 (Jan. 19): Theoretical Foundations and Analytical Primer


Recommended:


Week 3 (Jan. 26): Political Participation


Recommended:


**Week 4 (Feb. 2): Public Opinion – Foundations**


*Recommended:*


**Week 5 (Feb. 9): Public Opinion – Framing and Citizen Competence**


**Recommended:**


**Week 6 (Feb. 16): Voting Behavior**


Recommended:


**Week 7 (Feb. 23): Macro-Politics, the Media, and Policymaking**


* Research proposal due 2/23

*Recommended:*


**Week 8 (Mar. 1): Congress – Representation and the Electoral Connection**


**Recommended:**


Mar. 8: No Class (Spring Break)

Week 9 (Mar. 15): Congress – Institutional Organization


Recommended:


Week 10 (Mar. 22): Presidency and Bureaucratic Politics


* Annotated bibliography due 3/22

**Recommended:**


**Week 11 (Mar. 29): Courts**


*Recommended:*


**Week 12 (Apr. 5): Political Parties**


*Recommended:*


**Week 13 (Apr. 12): Interest Groups**


*Recommended:*


**Week 14 (Apr. 19): American Political Development**


Recommended:


*Final research paper due by 5pm on Monday, May 2*