POL 542
Field Seminar on American Political Institutions
Princeton University
Department of Politics
Spring 2015

Tuesday 1:30-4:20pm
Corwin Hall 127

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Office Hours: Wed 3:30-5, or by appointment

Introduction

This class is an entry-level graduate class into the study of U.S. political institutions. The class aims to provide an overview of the field and a foundation upon which students can begin to teach themselves additional works in this literature. In addition, the class hopes to build students’ ability to conduct scholarly research, evaluate others’ scholarship, and offer some professionalization in terms of learning the appropriate behavior of discussants and reviewers. There are no formal prerequisites, but we will not shy away from discussing models and statistical methods/results given that many of the major works use such techniques. Prior or concurrent exposure to these methods will be beneficial. All that is required, however, is a willingness to engage carefully and thoughtfully with the readings.

While the class is squarely on American politics, many of the concepts will apply to related questions in international relations and comparative politics, and class discussions will welcome those sorts of linkages. The class will be a lecture/seminar format. Some weeks are going to be heavy on the lecture component because it involves concepts that you have yet to cover in your coursework. Others will involve more discussion.

Course Requirements

Grades will be based on class participation, short papers and presentations, and a final exam. Each component will be equally weighted in determining your final grade.

Class participation

In each class we will aim to clarify and probe the puzzles, theories, methods, and evidence presented in the readings and to assess the contributions they make to an understanding of American politics. Preparation for and active participation in our weekly discussions is of the utmost importance. You should expect to be called on at any time, to discuss any reading in any session. Preparation involves more than just doing the readings, but coming to class having
thought about the material and having organized your thoughts. Each week, you should bring questions and points to discuss.

**Short papers and class presentations**

Each student will be randomly assigned two weeks over the course of the semester (spaced across roughly six-week intervals) to both write a short paper and conduct a presentation in class.

**Papers** The goal of the short papers, which should be in the range of 3-5 double-spaced pages, is to critically analyze that week’s readings from the perspective of theory, logic, design, method, or evidence, assessing conclusions, relationships to other works, or contribution to the development of political science. You may choose to focus on one or more of the readings. High quality papers will avoid summarization and instead present critical analysis of most or all of that week’s readings (you should not just pick at smaller points within one article).

Papers must be emailed to me by 11am the day of class (i.e. the day you are presenting).

**Presentation** For the same week, I will assign you one paper (or book chapter(s)) for which you will be responsible for presenting to the class. The point of this exercise is to give your experience in “discussing” the work of other scholars. I will give you discretion to present the reading in the manner you see most fit, but, in general, good presentations will:

- Summarize the main points of the reading
- Relate the reading to the larger literature
- Offer critiques of the reading.

Note that it is perfectly fine to incorporate points from your short paper into your presentation.

**Final exam**

The final will be a take-home exam given over the reading and exam period. The goal of the exam will be to simulate the conditions of the written component of the American Politics general exam.
Class Readings and Schedule

**Articles** Unless otherwise noted, you are responsible for finding all articles online. Articles marked with a [BB] are available on Blackboard, either in “Course Materials” or “E-Reserves.”

**Books** The following books have been both ordered at Labyrinth and placed on reserve. You may wish to purchase some or all of these; if you are planning on taking the general exam in American Politics, it is probably worth the investment. (It is also worth seeing if you can find cheap used copies online).

- Arnold, R. Douglas, *Congress and the Bureaucracy*
- Arnold, R. Douglas, *The Logic of Congressional Action*
- Berry, Christopher. *Imperfect Union: Representation and Taxation in Multilevel Governments*
- Cameron, Charles, *Veto Bargaining*
- Cox, Gary & Mathew McCubbins, *Setting the Agenda*
- Krehbiel, Keith, *Information and Legislative Organization.*
- Krehbiel, Keith, *Pivotal Politics*
- Mayhew, David R., *Congress: The Electoral Connection.*
- Skowronek, Stephen, *The Politics Presidents Make.*
- Wilson, James Q., *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*

**A Note on the Readings**

Choosing readings for a field survey is something of a subjective enterprise, as it is impossible to cover any (or most) of the important works on a given topic in a single week. For each week, the goal of the readings is to expose you to the most important books and articles that provide a contour of the relevant debate(s). Where possible, I have also added relatively recent papers in order to provide you with a sense of what the “cutting edge” looks like, for a given topic.

The upshot is that you should not treat the required readings as exhaustive, in any sense. For topics you are particularly interested in, I would strongly encourage you to take a look at the
recommended readings—either concurrently with the required readings, time permitting, or whenever you have time. These readings are largely drawn from the American Politics general exam reading list, which I encourage you to consult. I’ve made the list available at http://www.princeton.edu/~jkastell/American_Politics_field_list_2009.pdf. Note that the list was last updated in 2009, so it obviously does not include any research published since then.


SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Week 1. Why study institutions? And how?

Required


Recommended

- Charles Cameron, “What is Political Science?” and “The Politics of Supreme Court Nominations,” in *A Quantitative Tour of the Social Sciences,* ed. Andrew Gelman and Jeronimo Cortina, pp. 207-241(Blackboard) [Written for undergraduates, but provides a great overview of the research process.]
Week 2. Congress: The Electoral Connection

Required


Recommended

- Grimmer, Messing and Westwood. 2012. “How Words and Money Cultivate a Personal Vote: The Effect of Legislator Credit Claiming on Constituent Credit Allocation.” *APSR*
Week 3. Congress: Committees

Required


Recommended

- Shepsle and Weingast. “The Institutional Foundations of Committee Power” *APSR*
Week 4. Congress: Parties

**Required**
- Powell & Butler. 2014. “Understanding the Party Brand: Experimental Evidence on the Role of Valence.” *JOP.*

**Recommended**
Week 5. Lawmaking and the Separation of Powers

Required


Recommended

Week 6. Presidency: Presidential Power

- Cameron. 2000. *Veto Bargaining.* Chapters 3, 4 and 6

*Recommended*

Week 7. Presidency II: Presidents and the Public

Required

• Howell. *Power Without Persuasion*. Chapters 2 and 4

Recommended

• Baum, Matthew and Sam Kernell. 1999. “Has Cable Ended the Golden Age of Presidential Television?” *APSR*.
Week 8. Bureaucracy: Bureaucrats’ Incentives

Required

- James Q. Wilson. Chapters. Chapters 1, 2, 5 and 8
- Dan Carpenter. 2000. *Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy*. Chapters 1, 2 and 3
- Gailmard and Patty. 2007. “Slackers and Zealots: Civil Service, Policy Discretion, and Bureaucratic Expertise.” *AJPS*

Recommended

Week 9. Bureaucracy: Delegation

Required


Recommended

Week 10. Polarization

Required

• Hetherington, Marc. 2001. "Resurgent Mass Partisanship: The Role of Elite Polarization." APSR
• McCarty, Nolan, Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal. 2006. Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology Unequal Riches (2006), Chapters TBA

Recommended

Week 11. Courts and the Separation of Powers

**Required**


**Recommended**

- Frymer, Paul, *Black and Blue*.
- Whittington. 20007. *The Political Foundations of Judicial Supremacy*
- Shep Melnick, *Between the Lines*
Week 12. State and Local Political Institutions

Required

- Chris Berry. *Imperfect Union: Representation and Taxation in Multilevel Governments*, Chapters 1-4

Recommended

- Key, V. O. *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (1949).