Political Psychology

Department of Political Science
College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Central Florida

pos4206b - Political Psychology
David Houghton

Course Home

Instructor Contact

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Introduction

This is the companion website to POS4206 *Political Psychology*, Fall 2011. Included here are the course schedule and this course overview, which details the book to be purchased and a breakdown of the course requirements. You will also find a 'Course Mail' function (see menu on left) which I will use to send you announcements and/or other materials between classes. I will also use the 'My Grades' function to post your grades for the Midterms and Final Examination once these become available.

It is absolutely vital that you check this site regularly (especially the course mail and schedule). Without doing this, you will miss any changes, announcements, documents or general messages I post or send to the class as a whole. I recommend that you check your course mail box at least twice per week (more often is better).

Course Description

„Political psychology" can be defined most simply as the study of the interaction between politics and psychology, particularly the impact of psychology on politics. Beyond this simple definition, however, a glance at some past issues of the academic journal dedicated to this topic – entitled, appropriately enough, *Political Psychology* – reveals that there are many different sub-fields, specialisms and approaches within it. Consequently, there are many different ways of teaching a course in political psychology. One distinction is that one camp is interested in mass behavior (how people vote, the impact of public opinion on government policies, and so on), while the other focuses on elite behavior (how elite perceptions shape government policies, the impact of personality on leadership, foreign policy decision-making and so on). Another important division in the field is that between approaches (influenced by social psychology) which emphasize the impact of *situations* on behavior, and those (influenced by cognitive psychology and the older tradition of abnormal psychology) which stress the importance of *individual* characteristics in shaping the way we behave. This distinction will serve as the critical organizing device in the course.

Sometimes a course like this one is taught almost exclusively as a study of U.S. voting behavior. Here, however, we'll range far and wide over the application of psychological approaches to a variety of political issues (though there will be a particular emphasis on applications to international relations). Starting by elaborating on what the study of political psychology involves, we will begin by looking at some of the psychological theories which have influenced the way we study political science. Particular emphasis will be placed to begin with on the impact of situational theories, most notably the work of B.F. Skinner, Stanley Milgram, Philip Zimbardo and Irving Janis. We will also look at more individually-based theories which examine the impact of personality on decision-making, schema theory, the role of affect or emotion, the impact of what cognitive psychologists call analogical reasoning and recent advances in what might be termed 'political neuroscience'. Along the way we'll illustrate the political value of these theories by examining (among other things) the extraordinary obedience that individual citizens often accord even to genocidal governments, voting behavior, the 1986 Challenger shuttle disaster, the psychology of genocide, the 1965 decision to Americanize the war in Vietnam, the recent Abu Ghraib prison scandal, and many other political examples.

Required Text

The class text is my own book *Political Psychology: Situations, Individuals and Cases* (New York: Routledge, 2009), which was written specifically for this course. The bookstore on campus now has copies of this, and it is also available through online sellers like www.amazon.com. All instructor profits for the sale of this book to course members go to charity (it does not matter *where* you purchase it, since I estimate the profits based on student number enrollments after the class has ended). You can also rent the textbook at the UCF bookstore.

Rules of Assessment

The final grade will be composed of three elements:

- Midterm Examination I on Thursday 29 September, in multiple choice format, worth 25% (brown scantron required). This exam is noncumulative and will be composed of 50 questions.
- Midterm Examination II on Tuesday 8 November, in multiple choice format, worth 25% (brown scantron required). This exam is noncumulative and will be composed of 50 questions.
- A Final Examination on Tuesday 6 December (10am-12.50pm), in multiple choice format, worth 50% (brown scantron required). This exam is cumulative and will be composed of 100 questions.

This version of the class is taught face-to-face, so you are expected to be present to take notes and engage in class discussions. Makeup examinations will be offered only in the rarest of circumstances. In order to be eligible to take a makeup exam, you must give a *convincing written explanation*, backed up with proper documentation, as to why you were unable to meet the expectations required of other class members (note that emails from unverifiable sources are not considered valid documentation). Only where the instructor is fully satisfied that the student could not be expected to attend the original examination given his or her personal circumstances will any exceptions whatsoever be granted. Note also that any makeup examination *will not necessarily be of the same format as the original exam*.

Finally, please note that ***no extra credit*** will be offered in this course; by continuing with the course, you are agreeing to abide by its rules of assessment and agreeing to accept the marks/grades assigned to your work. The grading scheme will be as follows:

A 90 or above
A- 88-89
B+ 86-87
B 82-85
B- 80-81
C+ 78-79
C 73-77
C- 70-72
D+ 67-69
D 63-66
D- 60-62
F Below 60

Format of the Classes

It is absolutely essential that you keep up with the reading and come to class prepared to discuss the material assigned for that day. The class will run twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The format will be a mixture of lecture material, class discussion of the assigned readings and video presentations followed by class discussion (see course website for a detailed week-by-week schedule).

Academic Honesty

Cheating of any kind on any of the examinations will result at least in an "F" for that exam (and may, depending on the severity of the case, lead to an "F" for the entire course). It may also be subject to appropriate referral to the Office of Student Conduct for further action. See the UCF Golden Rule for further information. I will assume for this course that you will adhere to the academic creed of this University and will maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. In other words, don't cheat by giving answers to others or taking them from anyone else. I will also adhere to the highest standards of academic integrity, so please do not ask me to change (or expect me to change) your grade illegitimately or to bend/break rules for one person in a way that will not apply to everyone equally.

Disability Statement

The University of Central Florida is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. This syllabus is available in alternate formats upon request. Students with disabilities who need accommodations in this course must contact the professor *at the beginning* of the semester to discuss needed accommodations. No accommodations will be provided until the student has met with the professor to request accommodations. Students who need accommodations must be registered with Student Disability Services, Student Resource Center Room 132, phone (407) 823-2371, TTY/TDD only phone (407) 823-2116, before requesting accommodations from the professor.

Schedule of Readings
Fall 2011

This is an online version of the course schedule, which will tell you what to read - and in some cases what to watch or listen to - in preparation for each class. There is no printed version of this schedule, since it may well change as we go through the course. Additional (online) readings may also be added as we go. Web links to some of the videos used in the course are also included in this online schedule where available.

Date	Topic	Activity
Part I: Introduction		
Tuesday 23 August	Introduction to Class	Overview of objectives and methods of assessment, plus a bird‟s eye view of what we‟ll be covering during the semester. Ensure that you have now purchased the course text. I recommend skimming through it to familiarize yourself with its overall content and focus.
Thursday 25 August	Situationism	Read David Houghton, *Political Psychology: Situations, Individuals and Cases* (New York: Routledge, 2009), Chapter 1.
Tuesday 30 August	Dispositionism	Houghton, Chapter 1.
Thursday 1 September	Class Cancelled	No class held – instructor at conference.
Tuesday 6 September	The Early Tug of War Between Situationism and Dispositionism	Houghton, Chapter 3; there is a copy of *In Search of Ourselves* on reserve, 3rd floor of the main library. Its proper title is 'A Science Odyssey, Vol.3'. You can watch the segment of that video about John Watson we saw in class here, and the bit about B.F. Skinner here.
Thursday 8 September	A Brief History of the Discipline	Houghton, Chapter 2.
Part II: Situationism		
Tuesday 13 September	Behaviorism and Freedom I	Houghton, Chapter 3. There is a reappraisal of Skinner here.

Thursday 15 September	Behaviorism and Freedom II	Houghton, Chapter 3; selection from the movie *A Clockwork Orange*. There is a DVD copy on reserve on the 3rd floor of the Library; we will watch scenes 20-25 inclusive.
Tuesday 20 September	The Psychology of Obedience I	Houghton, Chapter 4; video and discussion of the documentary film *Obedience*.
Thursday 22 September	Obedience II	Video, *Basic Instincts 5: The Milgram Experiment Re-Visited*; Houghton, Chapter 4.
Tuesday 27 September	Revision Class	Review of everything covered in the course up to this point.
Thursday 29 September	Midterm Examination I	Examination on all topics covered so far, 50 multiple choice questions. Bring a brown scantron and pencil.
Tuesday 4 October	Creating a "Bad Barrel" I	Houghton, Chapter 5. You may find the website for Philip Zimbardo"s new book 'The Lucifer Effect' useful, which can be found here. You can also watch a Jon Stewart interview with Zimbardo by clicking here.
Thursday 6 October	"Bad Barrel" II	Houghton, Chapter 5; also listen to NPR interview with Zimbardo by following this link. Part I of a BBC special on Stanford can be viewed here, and Part II is here. You can also watch a useful video called 'The Human Behavior Experiments' here.
Tuesday 11 October	Group Decision-Making I	Houghton, Chapter 6; video, *Groupthink*. There are some segments of this video available online, and you can view the introduction to it by clicking here.
Thursday 13 October	Group Decision-Making II	Houghton, Chapter 6.
Part III: Dispositionism		
Tuesday 18 October	Psychobiography	Houghton, Chapter 7. Guest lecturer.
Thursday 20 October	Personality and Beliefs	Houghton, Chapter 8. Guest lecturer.

Tuesday 25 October	Cognition I	Houghton, Chapter 9.
Thursday 27 October	Cognition II	Houghton, Chapter 9.
Tuesday 1 November	Revision Session	We will cover everything done since Midterm I.
Thursday 3 November	No Class Held	UCF closes early for football game.
Tuesday 8 November	Midterm Examination II	Non-cumulative examination, 50 multiple choice questions. Bring a brown scantron and pencil.
Thursday 10 November	Affect and Emotion	Houghton, Chapter 10.
Tuesday 15 November	Neuroscience	Houghton, Chapter 11. You can watch the video interview with political neuroscientist Drew Westen which we saw in class here.
Part IV: Bringing The Two Together		
Thursday 17 November	Voting Behavior	Houghton, Chapter 12.
Tuesday 22 November	Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict and Genocide	Video presentation, selection from the documentary *Scream Bloody Murder*, which you can watch here. There is a companion website to the film here; Houghton, Chapter 13.
Thursday 24 November	No Class	UCF closed for Thanksgiving.
Tuesday 29 November	Conclusions/Revision Session	Houghton, Chapter 17.
Thursday 1 December	No Class	Use time to prepare for Tuesday‟s examination.
Tuesday 6 December	Final Examination, 10am-12.50pm	Cumulative examination, 100 multiple choice questions. Bring a pencil and a brown scantron.