POS 6045

Seminar in American Politics

Spring 2018

Instructor: Jonathan Knuckey

Course Overview

Welcome to the Seminar in American Politics!

This course is designed to meet the needs of graduate students who wish to acquire greater knowledge about American politics, teach American politics or who want in the near future to do original research, such as an MA thesis. Additionally, this course will provide a solid foundation for more specialized graduate seminars in political science that you might take in the future, as well as serving as an introduction and overview of the American politics literature for those who intend to go on at some point to enter a doctoral program.

An introductory course such as this generally aims to acquaint students with the breadth of work in the field and does so at the expense of depth. In many ways this course will be no different. But the breadth of work in American Politics is huge, and we will not be able to cover it all. However, I hope the selected topics and readings, will provide you with an introduction to a wide array of concerns, intellectual problems, controversies, theoretical approaches, research design, and methods of inquiry that relate to contemporary American politics

I look forward to the seminar and hope you find it enjoyable and informative. I look forward to learning a lot from you!

Contact Information

Office: Political Science department, Phillips Hall 302L

Office hours: Tuesday, 10.00am-2.00pm; Thursday, 10.00am-2.00pm.

Email: Use email in Webcourses.

Skype: I am happy to talk via Skype. My Skype name is jonathan.knuckey70

Course Requirements & Expectations

Requirements for this course can be organized into the four primary areas:

(1) Weekly Reaction Papers:

Each week, students are expected to prepare a short (4-5 pages, double-spaced, or around 1,200-1,500 words) critical assessment of the readings for the week. These papers will provide evidence that you have read and critically evaluated the readings.

For these type of papers what I **do not** want you to do is to simply summarize the readings in your papers. My goal in having you write these papers is to provide you with the opportunity to reflect on the readings and develop the critical thinking and writing skills that are essential to succeed in graduate school. Your papers might do one or more of the following:

- Raise questions provoked by the readings;
- Compare the arguments of different authors;
- Critique the authors' methodology;
- Discuss common themes across articles;

- Discuss areas of disagreement across articles and what might account for them;
- Propose alternative explanations for the authors' findings;
- Substantive implications of findings about understanding contemporary American politics;
- Directions for future research on the topic

The papers should be uploaded in Webcourses by Tuesday of each week at 5pm.

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(2) Weekly Questions:

Asking good questions is an integral part of doing graduate-level political science. Therefore you will p**ost at least two discussion questions** prior to the seminar. The questions are designed to generate discussion pertaining to the assigned topic. They should be analytical (theoretical) or methodological in nature and can focus directly on the reading or attempt to develop a tangential line of inquiry. You may also develop questions that "speak" to multiple readings.

The easiest way to accomplish your task of generating questions is to take note some particular conundrum/problem/question puzzle that comes to mind as you read the assigned reading and prepare for the seminar each week. In general, think of your questions more as "conversation starters" than questions that require definitive answers. Question such as "who thinks this article is rubbish?" "who thinks the author was on drugs when writing the article" or "who thinks this article is biased" etc., etc. do little to generation conversation. Keep this in mind when formulating your questions.

In weeks we read multiple article (rather than a single book), instead of a question you may want to give a **"Gold Star" of the week award** to one article, or a **"Raspberry" of the week** award to one article read during the week. Some brief notes if you decide on awarding one these prestigious/dreaded awards:

- **"Gold Star of the Week!"** Did one article just stand out above the others in terms of the substantive topic is addressed, the execution of its research design and it general contribution to the research topic and the sub-field of political behavior in particular? You will briefly need to say why -- and justify -- why this accolade should be placed on the article.
- **"Raspberry of the Week!"** Awarded when there major deficiencies in any article. This would cover any aspect of the article, data, variables, methods and substantive conclusions drawn. You will briefly need to say why -- and defend -- why an article falls into the dreaded Raspberry of the week.
- In any single week you can only award a Gold Star of a Raspberry. That means if you award the Gold Star you cannot award a Raspberry (and vice versa). So if giving one of these awards, choose wisely as to whether you wish to praise or butcher a particular article.

Questions/Gold Stars/Raspberries should be posted to the Discussions board in Webcourses by Wednesday of each week at 5pm.

Please review, and print out all of the questions, so you can reflect upon them ahead of the seminar and so we can refer to them during the seminar.

(3) Seminar Participation

Active participation is key to the success of a graduate seminar. So come to our seminar thoroughly prepared to discuss the readings—to evaluate each reading's contribution to the literature, to identify themes across readings, to analyze how the readings differ from each other (and how this poses a challenge for building knowledge in the field), and to propose areas of future research.

Remember, this is not a lecture class. If you fail to read and reflect upon the assigned material we will likely spend nearly three hours each week staring at each other with very little to say. My role in the seminar is to facilitate your input into the seminar, which includes testing your ideas, providing critiques of the material, asking questions that might help us gain a better understanding of the material and thinking about how future research on a topic might be crafted.

A quick word on what it means to "do the readings" in this seminar. It doesn't just mean passively reading, but rather it means you will annotate in the articles and books as well as making your own notes to refer to.

To help you organize your thoughts and analysis you might find it beneficial to create and use an **"Analytical Brief"** which is one way of keeping track of what you read in an article. This will also help when writing the paper.

In evaluating participation, here are some things you might ask yourself each week concerning the quality of your seminar participation:

- Have I arrived on time for the seminar, with the assigned materials and my own notes accessible?
- Do I direct my comments to all member of the seminar, rather than just to the professor?
- Have my seminar comments demonstrated comprehension and analytical insights of the material?
- Were my comments constructive, i.e., have my comments identified problems and made suggestions for how to address the weakness or problem?
- Have I reflected on how new research on the topic might be crafted?
- Have I avoided simply repeating the assigned material rather than making analytical insights, connections or extensions?

- Have I avoided the tendency to be express anecdotal or uninformed opinions rather than engaging the actual readings for the week?

Grades for participation will be posted during the semester after **weeks 3, 7, 10 and 15** (the final participation grade) These grades will provide a cumulative assessment of your seminar participation. However, I certainly encourage you to ask for feedback on your seminar performance at any time. Generally, seminar participation will be evaluated as follows:

(4) <u>Data Analysis Paper</u>

As one of the goals of this seminar is facilitate your becoming a producer - not just a consumer - of knowledge about American politics, your semester project is to undertake a data analysis paper. The paper should result in a product which, when further developed through additional research and analysis, could be presented at a professional conference or submitted to a journal.

Given the other requirements of this seminar - and likely those of other graduate seminars you are taking this semester - I am limiting this paper to something like a research update, a replication, a research note, or a pilot study. As such the paper will been around **7-8 pages.** In lieu of a literature review section in the paper, you will instead compile an annotated bibliography on your paper at the midpoint of the semester. You will find guidelines her on **How to Compile an Annotated Bibliography.**

The paper you will submit at the end of the semester will therefore focus on your ability to identify a research question, formulate hypotheses, test hypotheses, draw conclusions and provide directions for future research. Most of all I want this paper to provide you with the opportunity to analyze and interpret secondary data using SPSS (or Stata or R depending on your training). To that end the paper will use the **2016 American National Election Study** as a data source. This is among the best and most well-established sources of studying voting behavior, public opinion and political attitudes.

The only limitation on the paper topic is that it broadly be related to one of the substantive topics week cover during the semester. You will find further guidelines about the paper format and how to brainstorm a research question under **"Research Paper Guidelines"**

<u>Important Dates for the Paper:</u>

- **February 9th:** The paper topic must be approved by me. You schedule a time to meet with me prior to then so we can talk about your paper topic. The earlier you come and talk to me the better.
- **February 15th:** During the seminar meeting you will bring a one-page handout describing your data analysis paper topic. This will allow you to receive feedback. I will provide specific details on the format of this summary and what it should contain.

- **March 1st:** Annotated bibliography should be submitted in Webcourses**.**
- **April 23rd:** The final version of the research paper should be submitted in Webcourses.
- **April 26th:** Poster session of research paper findings. Refer to **How to Put Together a Poster** in creating your poster presentation. Note that this will take place during our allotted the final exam day/time

You should begin thinking about potential topics right away. Progress of your research papers will be monitored throughout the semester, and you are expected to consult and with me about the paper as much as you need to. I will also ask for periodic updates on your paper progress throughout the semester. Don't be afraid to ask me for help on the paper, whether it be the topic, undertaking your data analysis, or interpretation of your findings.

Grades

Your overall grade will be weighted as follows:

Seminar participation**:** 25%

Weekly papers: 25%

Weekly discussion topic posts**:** 15%

Annotated bibliography for paper: 10%

Data analysis paper: 20%

Poster session presentation of research paper findings: 5%

Note: To receive a passing grade in the course students must complete ALL of the above course requirements, i.e., the end of semester poster session is mandatory.

Overall course grade boundaries are as follows:

A: 93%+

A-: 90-92.9%

B+: 88-89.9%

B: 83-87.9%

B-: 80-82.9%

C+: 78-79.9%

C: 73-77.9%

C-: 70-72.9%

D: 60-69.9%

F: Below 60%

Consider the substantive interpretation of grades as follows: A/A- is excellent work, B+/B/B- is good, C+/C/C- is average and D is a marginal pass.

Note: No graduate-level course with a grade of "D+" or lower can be used to complete a course requirement, but the grade is calculated into the overall GPA. Only a maximum total of six semester credit hours of “C” grades (including C+ and C-), or the “C” grade credits associated with at most two classes (whichever is greater) may counted toward a graduate program of study.

Other Course Policies

Attendance

Attendance in a graduate seminar is assumed. I also expect that everyone arrives for the seminar on time and stays for the duration. We will have a 10 minute break each work after about 1 hour. Repeated tardiness and/or constantly coming and going during the seminar - without explanation - will potentially result in a reduction in the participation grade.

If you do need to miss a seminar meeting because of **genuinely exceptional circumstances** please contact me ahead of time to let me know that you will not be able to attend and to make arrangements to complete an alternate assignment in lieu of attendance and class participation, usually this will entail a more extensive paper based on the readings for the seminar you miss.

Laptop Computers, Tablets and Cell phones

I am perfectly happy with you using laptops and tablets to be able to refer to the journal articles you download, as well as for you to take notes. However, I will assume that these devices will only be used for seminar related purposes. Cell phones should be set on silent or vibrate mode. If you know you must take a call or text then it is courteous to inform me of that prior to the beginning of the seminar for that evening.

Student Conduct

Please familiarize yourself with the UCF Golden Rule handbook, which outlines expectation concerning both academic and non-academic student conduct.

I expect seminarians to assist in maintaining an environment which is both respectful and conducive to learning. This includes, but is not limited to, refraining from making offensive or disparaging remarks, reading newspapers, reading or doing work for other classes, sleeping or engaging in any other form of distraction.

Religious holidays

Any student missing a written assignment or class because of observance of religious holidays shall be given an opportunity during that semester to make up missed work, provided that this does not create an undue burden on the university of instructor. The make-up will apply to the religious holiday absence only. It shall be the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor no later than the end of the first week of class of his or her intention to participate in religious holidays which do not fall on state holidays or periods of class recess.

Submission of late papers

Submission of late papers really should not be an issue in graduate school. I do know, however, that life sometimes can throw the unexpected at us. So, if you think you might not be able to submit a paper by a deadline, please let me know ahead of time, and provide a convincing rationale for doing so. It usually will have to be some extenuating circumstance, other than failing to manage your time accordingly. If weekly papers are consistently submitted after the due date, then I reserve the right to reduce the grade on those papers.

This policy does not apply to the annotated bibliogrpahy nor the data analysis paper, which will be subject to a letter grade reduction for up to two days after the due date.

Incompletes

Incompletes are discouraged and are assigned only under extenuating circumstances. Since degrees will not be certified with an incomplete on the degree audit, "I" grades will be changed to "F" if not resolved by the stipulated deadlines. "I" grades are considered "unsatisfactory" grades until resolved for program of study purposes.

Note: Incomplete grades are not counted as completed courses or recognized as such by Financial Aid. Therefore, students on financial assistance must check with the Financial Aid office to see if the receipt of an incomplete grade will affect their financial award.

Special Accommodations

The University of Central Florida is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities.This syllabus is available in alternative formats upon request. Students with disabilities who need accommodations in this course must contact me at the beginning of the semester to discuss needed 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 me.

Disclaimer

I reserve the right to change, add or modify any part of the syllabus. Of course, advance notice will be given of any such changes.

Course Schedule, Topics and Readings

Books can be purchased from the UCF Bookstore. You might be able to find the books at a cheaper price than the UCF Bookstore.

Most, if not all, of the journal articles are available online through JSTOR, or the website of the respective journals, which the UCF library has electronic access to. If you are not on-campus you will need to log-in to the UCF library via a proxy server.

January 11th: Seminar Introduction

January 18th: The 2016 Election - An Anomaly or Preview of the Future of American Politics?

- James W. Ceaser, Andrew E. Busch, and John J. Pitney Jr. *Defying the Odds: The 2016 Elections and American Politics.*

February 1st: The Mass Media & American Politics

Readings TBD

February 8th: Polarization in American Politics - Is it Authoritarianism, Stupid?

- Marc J. Hetherington and Jonathan D. Weiler, *Authoritarianism and Polarization in American Politics*

****** Meeting to finalize research paper topic should be held no later than Friday, February 9th ******

****** One page handout of data analysis paper research question should be sent to me by Wednesday, February 14th ******

February 15th: Beyond Polarization? The Apartisan Voter & Dealignment in American Politics

- Russell J. Dalton, *The Apartisan American: Dealignment and Changing Electoral Politics.*

February 22nd Gender & Identity in American Politics

Readings TBD

March 1st: *No Seminar meeting - Citadel Symposium on Southern Politics*

******Annotated Bibliography for Paper due******

March 8th: The Presidency in American Politics - Does Character Matter?

- James David Barber, *Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House* (4th Edition)

Spring Break

March 22nd: Political Parties & the Presidential Nomination Process - Is the System "Rigged?"

- Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel and John Zaller . *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform*

March 29th: African Americans and American Politics

Readings TBD

April 5th: Latinos and American Politics

Readings TBD

April 12th: Racial Attitudes in American Politics

- Michael Tesler. *Post-Racial or Most-Racial?: Race and Politics in the Obama Era*

April 19th: Anti-Immigrant Backlash in American Politics

- Marisa Abrajano and Zoltan L. Hajnal. *White Backlash: Immigration, Race, and American Politics*

****** Upload final copy of Data Analysis Paper in Webcourses,***

Monday, April 23rd, 5.00pm***

April 26th: Data Analysis Paper Poster Session (7.00-9.50pm)

You will present your data analysis paper findings during a poster session. Specific details on the format of the poster session will be provided during the semester.

Note: Based on mutual agreement we may move what is technically our "final exam" starting time back an hour so presentations can begin at 6.00pm.