

Senior Seminar in American Politics, Political Science #415

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{sample syllabus only – this may not reflect the details of the current course}

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Course description and requirements:

This course is designed to be the culmination of your undergraduate work in political science. My presentations will emphasize the *process* of research, analysis and writing, not any particular substantive area in American politics. Through reading and practice we will examine the steps to good quality social science research: developing a literature review and a research design, hypothesis formulation, data collection, analysis, and writing a paper that reports your findings and their implications. The final product will be a paper you proudly will be able to show to a prospective employer or to a graduate or law school admissions committee. This project should display your very best work.

We will spend most of our weekly sessions discussing models of political research along with works in progress from each student in this seminar. Virtually everything we do together this semester will build toward the completion of your seminar papers. As your project develops, you will share your work with the class. You will need to be prepared to discuss and defend each step of your project, from your literature review through to a highly polished presentation of your final product.

There are no written exams in this course. Rather, you face the more challenging task of designing, executing and presenting your own original research. Many interim deadlines will prevent you from procrastinating along the way. These steps are discussed below.

Regarding the substance of your paper, you are free (indeed required) to develop a meaningful question on a topic of your choice and to present a cogent and reasonably complete analysis of empirical evidence on that question. A few parameters apply. The paper must be grounded theoretically. That a question and its answer help us think more systematically about politics, either behavior or institutions, is precisely and exclusively what makes that question worth asking for political scientists. Your paper must have theoretical bite. Second, your research design must have a substantial empirical component. Merely posing an interesting question is insufficient. While I prefer quantitative evidence, other types of evidence, such as high quality case studies, are certainly acceptable (and may, in fact, be quite excellent). Above all else, your research method must fit the particular question you ask. Third, you must develop the implications of your findings (or non-findings). Telling your reader why your findings matter is crucial. You must answer the “so what?” question in some detail. Last, you must take great care with the presentation of your work. Documenting sources, explaining your rationale, measurements and analysis, and writing the paper clearly are all vital to your success in this course. Your paper should be between 15 and 30 pages long, excluding bibliography and appendices. A style manual to be placed on library reserve will guide you as to citation and bibliographic form. Please take those matters seriously, as to not do so can lead to plagiarism.

Your final paper will be presented in class toward the end of the semester. You may use a PowerPoint display if you like. If you elect this option, be careful not to allow the style of your presentation to overshadow the substance of your presentation. Two copies of the final version of your paper are due to my office by 4pm on December 9th. Please include a title page and a firm staple in the upper left corner.

No other covers or bindings are encouraged. Late papers will suffer a 10 percentage point penalty for each day they are late, weekends included.

Throughout the semester I will assign homework. These assignments will be due at the beginning of the following class meeting. Late assignments will suffer a 10 percentage point reduction for each day they are late. All the written work you hand in should be typed. If you fall behind on your project and are unable satisfactorily to meet homework deadlines, your homework grades will suffer until you catch up to where you should be. Please do not ask for passes on homework assignments. Give me the best you can on time. Pay close attention to the mechanics of writing on all assignments. Get yourself a handbook of standard American English if necessary. Visit the IWU writing center if you need help. Both substantive and stylistic/mechanical aspects of your written work contribute to your grades.

Regular attendance is required. Each unexcused absence (i.e., not a verifiable illness or family emergency) will result in a 2 percentage point drop in your overall course grade. Regular and thoughtful participation in seminar discussions is expected. Every student will present material in class several times. During those evenings on which you are not scheduled to present material formally, you are expected to offer constructive criticism to those who are presenting work. You will likely learn as much from each other as you learn from me or the readings. You should view other students' experiences (both ups and downs) as learning opportunities. You should also see your peers as resources. Share with the rest of the class the lessons you learn and challenges you face.

Various journal articles are on library electronic reserve (password = research). Only one text is required for this course:

The Craft of Political Research, 5th edition, W. Phillips Shively, Prentice Hall Publishers (2002)

You need to have read each week's assigned materials before coming to class that week. Be prepared to discuss the readings in class. Read the entries below carefully. Ask if you're unsure of assignments.

Grades:

Final course grades will be assigned as follows: 90-100% = A/A-; 80-89% = B+/B/B-; 70-79% = C+/C/C-; 60-69% = D; below 60% = F. In order to graduate with a political science major you must earn at least a C- in this course. I very strongly discourage taking a grade of incomplete in this course. Under no circumstances will a student be granted a grade of incomplete without discussing the matter with me by the end of week 10 (see dates below). Overall course grades are based on four factors:

Participation in class discussions: 15%
Homework assignments: 20%
Oral presentation of research paper: 15%
Written version of research paper: 50%

Schedule of class meetings, readings:

Week 1 Overview, getting started on research
Class work: Review syllabus, discuss tentative research topics
Homework: Locate and read two articles on your topic in a scholarly journal (see partial list at end of syllabus). Read the most relevant articles you can find, not necessarily the easiest to locate. Based on what you learn from these authors, write down 2 or 3 well formulated questions that could form the basis of your own research. By next week's class meeting we will need to agree on a research topic. See me before then if we have not already agreed on a topic.

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| Week 2 | Reviewing literature | <p>* Shively, chapters 1 & 2 * Bond & Fleisher, <i>The President in the Legislative Arena</i>, ch. 2</p> <p>Class work: Group review of research questions; discussion of literature Homework: Find at least 2 additional books or articles on your topic. Write a 2-3 page review of what the authors say (you should now have at least 4 of them). Compare and contrast them. Include full citations of works cited.</p> |
| Week 3 | Generating testable hypotheses | <p>* Shively, chapters 4-6</p> <p>Class work: Hypothesis building exercise, discussion of literature Homework: Within 2-3 pages, re-write your research question and hypotheses. Also respond to the following: describe the theoretical framework of your research. Are there other theoretical approaches that could be used to examine your topic? Why are you not going to use those alternative approaches? Explicitly relate your hypotheses to your approach.</p> |
| Week 4 | Research design | <p>* Page & Shapiro, "Effects of Public Opinion on Policy," <i>American Political Science Review</i> vol. 77: 175-190 (1983) * Schram, Nitz, and Krueger, "Without Cause or Effect: Reconsidering Welfare Migration as a Policy Problem," <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> vol. 42: 210-30 (1998)</p> <p>Class work: group discussion of sample research designs Homework: Write your response to the following questions: 1) What is your dependent variable? How do you operationalize it? 2) What are your independent variables? How do you operationalize them? 3) What is your unit of analysis? Justify your choice in terms of your readings.</p> |
| Week 5 | Qualitative analysis | <p>* Terry Moe, "The Presidency and the Bureaucracy: The Presidential Advantage," pp. 443-474 in Nelson (ed.) <i>The Presidency and the Political System</i>, 6th edition (2000) * [if your project involves case studies, read "What is a case study and what is it good for?" by John Gerring, in the <i>American Political Science Review</i>, vol. 98, #2, May 2004]</p> <p>Class work: critique article; practice locating documentation [legislative histories and policy development] Homework: Develop a preliminary works cited page. Follow the style guide on library reserve.</p> |
| Week 6 | Approaching quantitative data | <p>* Shively, chapters 7-9</p> |

Class work: practice locating numeric data in some common sources
Homework: Locate as many sources of data for your project as you can. Write up a 1-2 page description of what you found.

- Week 7 Working with machine-readable data bases
Class work: Walk through an ICPSR download. Create an SPSS system file. Discuss the data you have found for your own project. What are its limitations?
Homework: Re-write your literature review based on what you have read so far. This should summarize what others have written and also offer some of your own critique of that work.
- Week 8 Quantitative analysis * Shively, chapter 10
Class work: refresher on means, medians, x-tab tables, comparisons of means, bi-variate and multi-variate regression
Homework: None. Work on your project.
- Week 9 Writing research designs * Jonathan Bernstein, "The New New Presidential Elite," pp. 145-178 in Mayer (ed.) *In Pursuit of the White House, 2000,* (CQ Press, 2000)
* Alan Monroe, "Public Opinion and Public Policy, 1980-1993," *Public Opinion Quarterly* vol. 62: 6-28 (1998)

Class work: Exploring model research designs
Homework: Write the research design section of your paper.

- Week 10 Writing data analyses * Thomas Little, "On the Coattails of a Contract: RNC Activities and Republican Gains in the 1994 State Legislative Races," *Political Research Quarterly* vol. 51: 173-90 (1998)
* Lieberman & Shaw, "Looking Inward, Looking Outward: The Politics of State Welfare Innovation under Devolution," *Political Research Quarterly* vol. 53: 215-240 (2000)

Class work: Exploring models of data analysis
Homework: Write the data analysis section of your paper and a draft of your findings section.

- Week 11 no class meeting – work on your paper
Homework: Revise your entire paper. Write a 1-page summary of what you think is lacking from your paper. Turn in your 1-page summary to my office by 4pm on Wednesday the 10th

- Week 12 Research presentations

Week 13 Research presentations

Week 14 Research presentations

Final paper due to my CLA mailbox - see policy above on late papers

A PARTIAL LIST OF JOURNALS AND DATA SOURCES IN AMERICAN POLITICS

American Political Science Review: Published since 1906; the profession's oldest and most prestigious journal.

American Journal of Political Science: Previously published as the *Midwest Political Science Review*; also a very prestigious journal; favors quantitative work and formal modeling.

Journal of Politics: Good reputation; emphasizes American politics.

Political Research Quarterly: Previously published as *Western Political Quarterly*, publishes on a variety of areas in political science.

Political Science Quarterly: favors qualitative articles on American politics, especially urban politics.

American Politics Quarterly: Publishes articles on a variety of topics in American politics.

Public Opinion Quarterly: published since 1937; favors quantitative research on American public opinion; includes a brief article in each edition accompanied by longitudinal trend data in American public opinion on a particular topic.

Legislative Studies Quarterly: particularly useful for those interested in Congress or state legislatures.

Presidential Studies Quarterly: Just what it sounds like.

Publius: The Journal of Federalism: Filled with articles on federalism, both in the US and other countries. The first volume of each year has an overview article on the state of American federalism.

State and Local Government Review: often short articles on state and local government

Political Behavior: Favors articles on voting and other forms of political behavior.

Statistical Abstract of the United States (annual, US Census Bureau; on-line and hard copy)

City-County Data Book (US Census Bureau)

Vital Statistics on American Politics (bi-annual, CQ)

Vital Statistics on the Presidency (CQ)

Vital Statistics on Congress (bi-annual, CQ)

America Votes (bi-annual, CQ)

Almanac of American Politics

Politics in America

Municipal Yearbook (ICMA)

The Book of the States (biannual, Council of State Governments)

State Fact Finder (CQ)

Public Papers of the President (gov't docs section of library)

Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents (gov't docs section of library)

Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report

Congressional Quarterly Almanac

Roper Center POLL data base of public opinion data (via Lexis-Nexis on-line)

Lexis-Nexis on-line newspaper archive (full text, good coverage back to the early to mid-1980s)