

**Senior Seminar in American Politics**  
**Political Science #415**

Greg Shaw  
Department of Political Science – Illinois Wesleyan University  
Center for Liberal Arts, #253  
phone: 556-3658 – fax: 556-3719 – e-mail: gshaw@iwu.edu

---

*Course description and requirements:*

This course is designed to be the culmination of your undergraduate work in political science. Class meetings 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. 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 must 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 expected 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 and it must test one or more clear propositions or hypotheses. Interesting stories alone are insufficient. Second, your research design must have a substantial empirical component. Merely posing an interesting question is insufficient. Substantially answering your research question(s) is expected. Regarding evidence, whether you tend toward quantitative or qualitative work, your methods should be driven by the nature of your question. You must develop the implications of your findings (or non-findings). Telling your reader exactly 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 seminar. Your paper should be between 15 and 30 pages long, excluding bibliography and appendices. Refer to the University of Chicago style manual as needed regarding 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 near the end of the semester. You may use PowerPoint 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. One copy of the final version of your paper is due to my office by noon on

December \_\_\_\_\_. Please consider double-sided printing to conserve paper, and include a title page and a firm staple (no paper clips) in the upper left corner. No other covers or bindings are encouraged. Late papers will suffer a 5 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 must 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 (or very close to on time). Pay close attention to the mechanics of writing on all assignments. Get yourself a handbook of standard American English usage 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 expected, as is regular and thoughtful participation in seminar discussions. Unexcused absences beyond the first one carries a penalty of one percentage point off of your overall grade. Every student will present material in class several times. Missing your presentations will seriously impact your participation grade. During those evenings on which you are not scheduled to present material formally, you are expected to offer constructive criticism to those who do present. 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*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, W. Phillips Shively, Prentice Hall Publishers

You need to have read each week's assigned materials before coming to class that week. Be prepared to discuss the readings in class. The schedule of classes below lists the work we will do in class that evening as well as each week's homework assignment on the evening it's assigned (it's due the following week). 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	
	<b>Class work:</b> Review syllabus, discuss tentative research topics	
	<b>Homework assignment (due next week):</b> 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.	
Week 2	Literature reviews	* Shively, chapters 1, 2 & 3 *Bond & Fleisher, <i>The President in the Legislative Arena</i> , chapter 2
	<b>Class work:</b> 7:00-8:30 – Library session on bibliographic databases; 8:30 and forward – group review of research questions, discussion of literature reviews	
	<b>Homework assignment (due next week):</b> 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.	
Week 3	Generating testable hypotheses	* Shively, chapters 4-6
	<b>Class work:</b> Hypothesis building exercise, discussion of literature	
	<b>Homework assignment (due next week):</b> 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.	
Week 4	Research design	* Page & Shapiro, "Effects of Public Opinion on Policy," <i>American Political Science Review</i> vol. 77: 175-190 (1983)
	<b>Class work:</b> Group discussion of sample research designs; students will present their research questions (about 5 minutes each)	
	<b>Homework assignment (due next week):</b> Write your response to the following:	
	1) Restate your research question as cleanly as you can	
	2) What is your dependent variable? How do you operationalize it?	
	3) What are your independent variables? How do you operationalize them?	
	4) What is your unit of analysis? Justify your choice in terms of your readings.	
	Write a brief status report of the information or data that you'll need for your analysis.	

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>, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (2000)</p> <p>* [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><b>Class work:</b> Critique article; formal student presentations (5 minutes each) on research design and progress to date</p> <p><b>Homework assignment (due next week):</b> Develop a preliminary works cited page. Impress me with the breadth of relevant reading you have done on your topic (remember that quality matters as much or more than quantity).</p>
Week 6	Approaching quantitative data	<p>* Shively, chapters 7-9</p> <p><b>Class work:</b> Practice locating numeric data in some common sources – Data scavenger hunt, analysis, and presentations by small teams [CLA lab]</p> <p><b>Homework assignment (due next week):</b> Locate as many sources of data for your project as you can. Write up a 1-2 page description of what you found. Rewrite 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.</p>
Week 7	Working with machine-readable data bases	<p><b>Class work:</b> Working with quantitative data. Discuss the data you have found for your own project. What are its limitations? Tips on writing a good paper. You will receive a schedule of student paper presentations by this week. [CLA lab]</p> <p><b>Homework assignment:</b> None. Work on your project.</p>
Week 8	Quantitative analysis	<p>* Shively, chapter 10</p> <p><b>Class work:</b> Refresher on means, medians, x-tab tables, comparisons of means, bivariate and multivariate regression [CLA lab]</p> <p><b>Homework assignment:</b> None. Work on your project.</p>
Week 9	Writing up research designs and analyses	<p>* Fowler, "The Colbert Bump in Campaign Donations: More Truthful than Truthy," <i>PS: Political Science and Politics</i> 41 (#3) (2008)</p> <p>* Lieberman &amp; Shaw, "Looking Inward, Looking Outward: The Politics of State Welfare Innovation under Devolution," <i>Political Research Quarterly</i> vol. 53: 215-240 (2000)</p> <p><b>Class work:</b> Exploring model research designs and data analysis</p> <p><b>Homework assignment (due next week):</b> Write the research design and data analysis sections of your paper.</p>

Week 10                      Trouble-shooting – I'll be in my office during class meeting time. Please come see me if I can help with anything.

**Homework assignment (due next week):** Complete a draft of your entire paper. Hand in entire draft (double-sided printing if possible).

Week 11                      Example of paper presentation by Greg; student Q&A

**Homework assignment (due next week):** Revise your entire paper. Write a 1-page summary of what you think is lacking. Turn in only your 1-page summary to my office by 4pm on Monday the 8<sup>th</sup>

Week 12                      Student research presentations ☺

Week 13                      Student research presentations ☺

Thanksgiving break – no class meeting

Week 14                      Student research presentations ☺

☺ note: please dress like a serious person ... business casual should work nicely

Final paper due to my CLA mailbox by noon on December \_\_\_\_ (see policy above on late papers)

## A PARTIAL LIST OF JOURNALS AND DATA SOURCES IN AMERICAN POLITICS

*American Political Science Review*: One of the profession's oldest and most prestigious journals

*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 U.S. 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 contains 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 iPOLL Databank of public opinion data (under Roper Center in A-Z list of data bases at library)

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