POLS G6210: Theories & Debates in American Politics
Wednesdays, 1:30-3:20pm, Fall 2005
IAB 270b

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This graduate student field survey provides an overview of the scholarly study of American politics. The course has been designed for students who intend to specialize in American politics, as well as for those students whose primary interests are comparative politics, international relations, or political theory but who desire an intensive introduction to the “American” style of political science.

Course Requirements

Readings and discussion

The readings, though extensive and representative, are not comprehensive. Most sections in the syllabus balance classics with work representative of the best current research in the field. The class is conducted predominantly in a discussion format, although we will lecture on various topics. Students are expected to have completed the assigned weekly reading before each class and to arrive prepared to contribute actively to all discussions. You should expect to be called on at any time, to discuss any reading in any session. Sessions will aim to clarify and probe the character, puzzles, theories, methods, and evidence presented in the various texts and assess the contributions they make to an understanding of American politics and the broader development of social and political science.

Assignments

All students will write two short papers (typed, double-spaced, and no longer than six pages) during the course of the semester. The first paper will be written on readings from one class in the first part of the semester (weeks II-VII), and the second on readings from a class in the second part of the semester (weeks VIII-XIII). Students must submit by the second week of class the numbers of the weeks on which they wish to write. The papers are due at noon on Wednesday, treating material to be discussed later in the day (late papers and electronic versions will not be accepted). We will write comments on the papers and return them to you, and then you may revise the paper in light of the comments. Revised papers are due one week after the first draft is returned.

The purpose of these papers is not to determine whether you have completed and understood the readings. Rather, they are assigned to help you develop your skills in the
art of scholarly argumentation. It is thus vital you not waste your space or our time summarizing the works. What you should do is critically analyze one or more of the week's readings from the perspective of theory, logic, design, method, evidence, on conclusions, relationships to other works, and contribution to the development of political science. You should stake out a coherent position clearly and forcefully in the first paragraph, then press it relentlessly forward in every subsequent sentence. Papers that fail to develop a forceful, compelling argument will receive a poor mark. They should be carefully edited, tightened, and revised. They do not demand reading or research beyond the week's assignments. When in doubt, substitute more thinking for additional reading or writing.

Please staple an extra blank sheet to the back of your paper for our comments and provide each instructor with a copy of your paper. We will try to return the paper with comments approximately a week after they have been submitted, though we cannot guarantee a consistently speedy turnaround. You must save these papers along with our comments on them and return them to us at the end of the semester so that we can compute final grades for the course.

Grading

Course grades will reflect effort and performance in class discussions and the two papers.

Availability of Readings

The following books have been ordered at Labyrinth Books, located next to the post office on 112th Street, east of Broadway.


Required readings have been placed on reserve in Lehman Library. You may make “fair use” copies if you desire. Many of the articles can be found at www.jstor.org.

**Class Schedule**

Sept. 7. Introduction
Sept. 14. I. Political Science: History and “Ism’s”
Sept. 21. II. Public Opinion
Sept. 28. III. Political Participation
Oct. 5. IV. Interest Groups and Political Parties
Oct. 12. V. Voting and Elections
Oct. 19. VI. Congress
Oct. 26. VII. Presidency
Nov. 2. VIII. Bureaucracy
Nov. 9. IX. Courts
Nov. 16. X. State and Local Politics
Nov. 30. XI. American Political Development (APD) and Analytical Political History
Dec. 7. XII. System Performance

**I. Political Science: History and “Ism’s”**

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


II. Public Opinion

Required:


Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro, The Rational Public. Chapters 1,2, 10.


Recommended:


III. Political Participation

Required:


**Recommended:**


**IV. Interest Groups and Political Parties**

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


V. Voting and Elections

**Required:**


McCarty, Nolan, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. *Partisan Polarization*. Manuscript. Chapters 1, 3, 4, and 5.

**Recommended:**


VI. Congress

Required:


Recommended:


VII. Presidency


Recommended:

Shapiro, Kumar, and Jacobs (eds.), Presidential Power. Jacobs and Shapiro, “Conclusion” plus any of the essays in Part 4 and/or Chapter 5 as per your interest.


VIII. Bureaucracy

Required:

Dan Carpenter. 2001. The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy. Introduction, Chapter 1, and Conclusion.


**Recommended:**


**IX. Courts**

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


X. State and Local Politics

Required:


Recommended:


XI. American Political Development and Analytic Political History

Required:


Theda Skocpol, “Introduction: Understanding the Origins of Modern Social Provision in the United States,” in *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*


Recommended:

Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal, *Congress*, Chapter 5

Eric Foner. 1984. “Why is there No Socialism in the United States?” *History Workshop* 7 (Spring) 57-80

John Aldrich, *Why Parties?* Chapter 3


**XII. System Performance**

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


