Political Science 509
Proseminar in American Government and Politics

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Office Hours: 8-9 a.m., Monday-Thursday
And by appointment
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Course Description
This class is an introduction to the field of American politics. As such it covers a wide expanse in terms of content and materials. The purpose is to introduce graduate students to the topics and methodology employed by political scientists in the study of American government and politics. Generally speaking, this class offers a survey of some of the research and exposition in the field that one finds in American politics. What this means is that each of the subject areas has a more complete and exhaustive literature which, due to the constraints of time and the purposes of the course itself, we will not cover in the context of this class.

Course Objectives
1. Students will be introduced to the literature and research in the field of American politics.
2. Students will develop critical thinking skills through engagement with the research and interaction with one another.
3. Students will gain an appreciation for the various methodological approaches to the student of politics in the context of the United States.

Required Reading


In addition to the above required books, you will be required to use the resources available through the library to access materials through the reserve desk at the library, the electronic collections, and JSTOR.

**Course Requirements**

Each week we will discuss the readings assigned for that particular week. To facilitate this discussion, students will be responsible for two things: First, beginning next week students in the class will formulate at least two discussion questions on the readings themselves. These questions are to be emailed to the class by noon on Monday each week prior to our Tuesday meeting.

Second, each week a number of you will be required to write and submit to the class a critical review of at least two of the readings assigned. These brief papers (3 to 5 pages) should address the following questions/issues:

1. What is the research question? What is the argument being advanced?
2. What are the substantive findings? What is the substantive argument?
3. What methodological approach did the author(s) use?
4. What core concepts are developed?
5. What questions do the author(s) not address? Why not?

The critical review papers should be emailed to the class by 6 p.m. on the Monday before we meet on Tuesday to allow members of the class time to read them and formulate questions/comments for the writer.

The purpose of both the discussion questions and the critical reviews is to facilitate discussion. This class is participatory in nature. You will learn more by taking part and help others in the process. In other words, another course requirement is class participation.

Finally, students are required to submit a final research paper and present it to the class. The research paper should be 15 to 20 pages long and cover a particular topic or issue in the field of American politics.

**Formatting Guidelines**

The formatting for the written work submitted in this class will be as follows:

1. All papers should have 1 inch margins.
2. All pages should be numbered.
3. Use Times New Roman font no larger than 12 point and no smaller than 10 point (punctuation included).
4. All written work should be double-spaced.
5. Title pages are not necessary, however, be sure your name, course number, and date appear at the left-hand margin of the first page. It is also important to have a title for the papers themselves.
6. APSA style
Grading
Final grades will be determined based on the following percentages for the course requirements:

- Discussion Questions 15%
- Participation in the Seminar 20%
- Critical Reviews 30%
- Final Paper 35%

The grading scale is as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>91-100</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>81-90</td>
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<td>D</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>0-59</td>
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Attendance Policy
You are required to be here.

Students with Disabilities
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact: Office of Student Disability Resources and Services, Texas A&M University-Commerce, Gee Library, Room 132; Phone (903) 886-5150

Course Calendar
[Your professor reserves the right to edit the readings as required by the exigencies of the course.]

August 28
Introduction to the Course

Constitutional Origins
September 4


September 11


Ideology, Ideas, and Social and Political Capital

September 18


September 25


Participatory Democracy and the Responsible (?) Voter

October 2


**Race and Gender in American Politics and Political Science**

October 9


October 11


Media
October 16


Political Parties, Partisanship and Electoral Outcomes
October 23


October 30


The Politics of Interest
November 6


November 13


**Congress—Electoral Politics and the Politics of Representation**

November 20


**The Presidency**  
November 27  
Readings to be announced

December 4  
Presentations

December 6  
Presentations