PS 72000: American Politics
Professor Keena Lipsitz
Fall 2014
Wednesdays 2:00-4:00pm
Room 4433

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This seminar provides an introduction to classic and contemporary studies in American politics. It is designed for graduate students, especially those who plan to take the American politics field exam. The semester will be organized into three parts: institutions (e.g. Congress and the Presidency), mediating institutions (e.g. political parties and the media), and behavior (e.g. political participation and public opinion). By the end of the course, students will have a basic familiarity with many of the fundamental works in the subfield, understand the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to studying the American political system, and be familiar with many of debates that have animated and continue to animate research in the discipline.

SEMINAR ORGANIZATION AND REQUIREMENTS

If this is your first year of graduate school, welcome! As you will quickly learn, there is no place to hide in a graduate seminar. You are expected to contribute in each class. This means you need to do all of the required readings for the week and come prepared to discuss them. This will be much easier if you take good notes while you are doing your reading. If you do not prepare well, we will spend the two hours we have to together each week staring at each other with little to say.

On the first day of class, students will sign up to be discussion leaders for 3 classes during the semester. On most days, I hope there will be two discussion leaders. When it is your turn to be discussion leader, you should be especially well-prepared and come with a list of questions that will further discussion by asking thought-provoking questions or by providing an insightful analysis of the readings. Your job is to encourage thoughtful discussion, NOT to provide a summary of the readings.

In addition, each week students will be required to write a 2-3 page response to the readings. These essays should NOT summarize the readings; instead, they should synthesize and critically respond to them. They can do this in a number of ways, including comparing and contrasting the arguments/findings of two or more readings from the week, critiquing a study’s methodology or measurements, suggesting alternative explanations for its findings, or elaborating on the implications of its findings, among others. At a minimum, you should discuss at least two of the assigned readings for the week, but good response papers will try to address all of the readings.
These essays are due at 5 p.m. the night BEFORE the seminar (i.e. on Tuesday). Students can skip two of the responses during the semester, which means they will need to turn in 10 responses total. I will grade the responses as “A,” “A-,” or “B+”. Because these responses are supposed to help you prepare for class, they will not be accepted late.

All students will take a final exam that will help them prepare for the comprehensive exam in American politics. Like the field exam, it will be closed-book.

Your final grade will be determined in the following manner:

- Participation: 20%
- Responses: 40%
- Final exam: 40%

READINGS

All of the articles are available through online databases such as JSTOR and EBSCO. Book chapters will be available on the course’s Blackboard website in PDF format (indicated by [BB]). You are required to buy the following books for the course:


In addition, I strongly suggest that you take a look at the syllabus at the beginning of the semester and order any books from which we are reading that look interesting to you. It is better to take notes in a book that will sit on your bookshelf than to take notes on a print-out that you will very likely misplace.

Please note that the topics/readings for any given week might change, especially if the students express an interest in exploring a particular topic further or adding a topic that does not currently appear on the syllabus.
COURSE SCHEDULE

September 3: Introduction

September 10: Approaches to Studying American Politics


Further Reading


PART I: GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS

September 17: Presidency

- Hamilton, Federalist #70. [BB]
Further Reading


September 24: NO CLASS

October 1: Bureaucracy

Further Reading


October 8: Congress


Further Reading

- Schickler, Eric. Disjointed pluralism: Institutional innovation and the development of the
October 15: Judicial Decision-Making

- Hamilton, *Federalist #78*. [BB]

Further Reading


PART II: MEDIATING INSTITUTIONS

October 22: Political Parties


Further Reading


October 29: Interest Groups


Further Reading


November 5: NO CLASS (canceled by instructor)

November 12: Media


Further Reading


**PART III: PUBLIC OPINION AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR**

**November 19: Public Opinion**


*Further Reading*


**November 26: Vote Choice**


*Further Reading*

December 3: Turnout and Political Participation


Further Reading

December 10: Democratic Responsiveness


Further Reading