PSC 313: Elections and Voting Behavior

Spring 2015

Instructor: Rebecca Bryan
Class Hours: Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, 10:00 a.m. - 10:50 a.m.
Classroom: Baldy 110
Office: 507 Park Hall
Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:30 – 4pm, or by appointment
Contact: rmbryan@buffalo.edu

Course Description and Objectives
This course will provide an introduction to the study of elections and voting behavior in the United States. Offering citizens choice in their government by hosting regular elections is an integral part of American democracy. This course will examine voter turnout and how individual choice, political institutions and society influence election outcomes. We will investigate important topics including party identification, political ideology, trends in voter turnout, public opinion, the effects of election reform, media influence and the relationship between citizens and political elites. This class will consider the different theoretical arguments and empirical analyses used to explain these issues. Students will develop analytical thinking skills, debate skills and gain experience in research and working with data.

Required Readings
The following book is required and is available at the University Bookstore:

ISBN: 9781452240442

Journal articles will also be assigned each week to familiarize students with scientific research occurring in the field. These articles are available through UB libraries. Additional readings will be posted on UBlearns. The readings listed for a given date in the course schedule will be discussed that day. They are to be read prior to class.

Course Requirements
The course grade is based on position papers, debate performance, discussion board participation, data analysis, exams, a research paper, class participation and professionalism.

This class will rely heavily on UBlearns; make sure that you are familiar with your account. More information can be found on the site help page. If you experience any problems with accessing the materials, inform me immediately. All class documents will be available on UBlearns. Further information on assignment and grading rubrics will be available here.
All assignments are required to be uploaded to UBlearns to the appropriate assignment folder or discussion board forum. UBlearns occasionally experiences glitches so do not wait until the last minute to submit your assignments. Make sure to check that your assignment has fully uploaded. In the case that you cannot submit to UBlearns, email your assignments to me at rmbryan@buffalo.edu by the deadline.

1. **Position Papers and Debate Performances 20% (10% each)**
   Seven debates will be held throughout the semester to reinforce the information learned and offer students an opportunity to discuss their own ideas. Students are required to choose TWO debate topics to serve as a debate leader. Submit your top four choices by February 4th. Topic assignments will be posted to UBlearns.

   During assigned debate weeks, each student is required to submit a 500-word position paper. Position papers should be uploaded to UBlearns via the discussion board tool. See the discussion board for the list of requirements for this submission. Position papers are due by 5:00 pm the evening before the debate. If you do not submit a position paper, you will not be able to participate as a debate leader.

2. **Online Discussion 4% (2% each)**
   Students are required to submit at least TWO replies to two different debate topic threads using the UBlearns discussion board (100 words). These debate topics are to be different than your two assigned debate topics. See the discussion board for the list of requirements. Replies are due by 9am the morning of a debate.

3. **Data Analysis 6%**
   We will be working with real survey data this semester! A workshop will be provided during lecture that will show students what this data looks like and how it is used in political science research. This assignment is due March 23rd.

4. **Exams 30% (15% each)**
   There will two non-cumulative in-class exams, both consisting of multiple choice style questions. The questions will be based on class material as well as the readings. Bring a pencil and eraser to exams.

4. **Research Paper 25 % Total**
   - **Topic/Theory 2% Due February 11th**
   - **Outline 3% Due March 27th**
   - **Draft 5% Due April 17th**
   - **Final Paper 15% Due May 12th**

   This research paper will be in the style of an academic literature review. A literature review is the first portion of a scholarly article; it provides support for the author’s theory and covers the range of views present in that area of research. This includes views that compete with the author’s theory. This paper is designed to improve your analytical writing skills and get you thinking like a political scientist.
Students will choose a basic theory that represents a side of an existing debate in the literature on elections and voting behavior. The research paper will be 4-5 pages: typed, 12 pt. font, double-spaced, 1”x 1” margins. A minimum of 15 sources is required; these sources must be peer-reviewed journal articles or books. This paper requires a significant amount of sources in a limited space; in order to accomplish this papers must be concise, well articulated and free of ‘fluff’.

If you should need additional help in organizing your paper, please visit UB’s Center for Excellence in Writing. UB Libraries offers excellent tips on paper writing and in finding research materials. Google Scholar is also a useful source for finding articles and books.

5. Participation and Professionalism 10%

Students are expected to attend all classes and arrive on time. Students should have read all assigned readings and be prepared to participate in any class activities. Laptops and IPads are permitted to take notes. Cell phones and all other electronics must be silenced and put away, not on your desk. Inappropriate use of devices will significantly reduce your grade.

Part of your college career is learning to act as a professional. All individuals are to treat others respectfully and should require this treatment in return. Debate is expected: make sure that any comments are intellectually based and conducted in a professional manner.

For more information, see UB’s classroom code of conduct and rules and regulations.

This course’s objectives include being able to effectively and coherently communicate your questions, ideas and understanding of the material. All submitted assignments and all forms of communication should be of professional quality. Any effort that does not meet these guidelines will need to be resubmitted. These resubmissions are not immune to point deductions for being late, starting the day following my request for resubmission.

Missed Exams and Late Assignments

Make-ups for documented emergencies will be scheduled for students who notify me before the exam or assignment is due. Students should inform me as early as possible regarding any significant issues so that alternative arrangements can be made.

No make-ups will be granted for missed exams. No extensions can be granted for position papers or discussion board comments as other students’ grades depend on these submissions. Other late assignments will be discounted at the rate of 5% per day.

Academic Integrity

Absolutely no academic dishonesty will be tolerated in this course. For more information on what constitutes as academic dishonesty, please familiarize yourself with UB’s policies.

Plagiarism is the copying of text or ideas from a source without citing that source. It is easily preventable through proper citing. Guidelines can be found here and here. All research paper submissions will be run through UBlearns’ plagiarism detection software, SafeAssign through UBlearns. Plagiarism or cheating on your assignments or research paper will result in a zero on that assignment.
Special Needs

Students with special needs should bring their needs to my attention within the first two weeks of class. Information on available services can be found on UB’s Accessibility Resources site.

The demands of college and other life events can be challenging and stressful. Students dealing with stress-related problems or other crisis should be aware of the services provided by UB’s Counseling Center. The Wellness Center also provides many useful services.

Assessment

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<tr>
<th>Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>Assessment Measure(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Understand and describe major theoretical and empirical contributions to elections and voting behavior research</td>
<td>Participation, Position Paper, Debate Performance, Exams, Research Paper, Data Analysis</td>
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<td>Define key concepts in the areas of elections and voting behavior.</td>
<td>Exams</td>
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<td>Recognize and evaluate contesting theories in the literature, including their strengths and weaknesses</td>
<td>Participation, Position Paper, Debate Performance, Exams, Research Paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrate the ability to analyze important questions in Political Science</td>
<td>Participation, Position Paper, Debate Performance, Research Paper</td>
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<td>Demonstrate the ability to communicate coherent, fact-based arguments.</td>
<td>Participation, Position Paper, Debate Performance</td>
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<td>Demonstrate social science research skills</td>
<td>Research Paper, Data Analysis</td>
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Grading

Grades will be posted to UBlearns throughout the semester, make sure that you monitor your progress. If you are not doing as well as expected, contact me as soon as possible. Any questions regarding a specific grade will need to be addressed within one week from the date the grade is posted.

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<th>Grade Range</th>
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<td>90-93</td>
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This syllabus is subject to change. Students will be informed of any updates, which will be posted on UBlearns.
Course Schedule

See UBlearns for posted readings and further instructions.

* Debate related assignments are only due for those who have chosen these weeks for their debate or are leaving a comment on the discussion board.

**Week 1**

Jan 26
Syllabus Review

Jan 28
Democratic Beliefs
Readings:

Jan 30
Turnout
Readings:
- p. 69-73 [Flanigan, Zingale, Theiss-Morse and Wagner = FZTW] (UBL)

**Week 2**

Feb 2
Turnout
Readings:
- p. 73-77 [FZTW] on Turnout (UBL)

Feb 4
Election Rules
Debate Topics Due
Readings:
- p. 242-243 [FZTW] “Presidential Primary Campaigns”
Feb 6
Election Rules
Readings:
- p. 77-84 [FZTW] “Institutional Impediments to Turnout”
- p. 58-59 [FZTW] on Campaign Finance Rules

Week 3

Feb 9
Theoretical Perspectives & Party ID
Readings:
- p. 98-118 [FZTW] on Party ID

Feb 11
Retrospective Voting
Paper Topic Due
Debate 1 Position papers due by 5pm Thurs*
Readings:

Feb 13
Debate 1: Party ID & Attitudes
Debate 1 Discussion Board Comments due by 9am Fri*

Week 4

Feb 16
Issues
Readings:
- p. 143-168 [FZTW] on the Issues

Feb 18
Class Cancelled (ISA)
Feb 20
Ideology & Movement: Polarization
Readings:
- p. 169-176 [FZTW] on Ideology

Week 5

Feb 23
Ideology & Movement: Realignment
Debate 2 Position papers due by 5pm Tues*
Readings:

Feb 25
Debate 2: Ideology & Realignment
Debate 2 Discussion Board Comments due by 9am Wed*

Feb 27
Voter Knowledge
Debate 3 Position papers due by 5pm Sun *
Readings:

Week 6

Mar 2
Debate 3: Voter Sophistication
Debate 3 Discussion Board Comments due by 9am Mon*

Mar 4
Public Opinion
Readings:
- p. 139-143 [FZTW] on Public Opinion
Mar 6
Public Opinion
Readings:

Week 7
Mar 9
Public Opinion: Data

Mar 11
Wrap up/ Exam Review
Bring Questions

Mar 13
Exam 1
Bring pencils and an eraser

Week 8
Mar 16 – 20 Spring Recess: No Class

Week 9
Mar 23
Candidate Evaluation
Data Analysis Assignment Due
Readings:
- 259-278 [FZTW] on Candidate Image

Mar 25
Elite Responsiveness
Readings:
Mar 27
(Model EU)
**Paper Outlines Due**
Debate 4 Position papers due by 5pm Sun *

**Week 10**

Mar 30
Debate 4: Candidate Evaluation
Debate 4 Discussion Board Comments due by 9am Mon*

Apr 1
Rational Choice Theory:
The Model
Readings:
- Ch. 1 “Is it Rational To Vote?” in

Apr 3
Rational Choice Theory: Institutional Costs
Readings:

**Week 11**

Apr 6
Rational Choice Theory: Information Costs
Debate 5 Position papers due by 5pm Tues*
Readings:
- p. 212-217 [FZTW] on the Media

Apr 8
Debate 5: Institutional/ Informational Costs
Debate 5 Discussion Board Comments due by 9am Wed*
Apr 10
Elite Influence: Information and Mobilization
Readings:

Week 12

Apr 13
Elite Influence
Debate 6 Position papers due by 5pm Tues*
Readings:

Apr 15
Debate 6: Elite Behavior / Turnout
Debate 6 Discussion Board Comments due by 9am Wed*

Apr 17
(MPSA)
Paper Draft Due

Week 13

Apr 20
Rational Choice Model Revisited
Readings:

Apr 22
The Sociological Approach
Readings:
- p. 182-210 [FZTW] on Social Characteristics/ Networks
Apr 24
The Flow of Information
Readings:

Week 14

Apr 27
Social Pressure
Readings:

Apr 29
Changing Forms of Participation
Debate 7 Position papers due by 5pm Thurs*
Readings:

May 1
Debate 7: Social Pressure/ Engagement
Debate 7 Discussion Board Comments due by 9am Fri*

Week 15

May 4
Election Forecasting
Readings:
- Peruse Nate Silver’s forecasting model

May 6
Wrap up/ Exam Review
Bring Questions
May 8

**Exam 2**
Bring pencils and an eraser

**Finals Week**
May 11 - 15

**Final Paper Due Tuesday, May 12th**