This pro-seminar is a graduate-level introduction to academic research on American politics. As the core seminar in the field, this course is designed to expose students to the central theoretical and empirical debates in the American politics literature. Ideally, an introductory course such as this would first acquaint students with the classic works in the field and then study the evolution of the literature from these classics to the best current research. Additionally, the course should introduce students to the various theoretical and methodological approaches that have been used to study each topic. While this goal is ideal, the voluminous literature on American politics makes achieving it unrealistic for a single-semester course.

This course emphasizes breadth over depth in the coverage of the literature but must ‘cut corners’ in terms of the number of works covered. For each week, the readings listed first are required. Everyone is expected to complete these readings. Listed below the required readings are additional readings that include classic works and other research relevant to the week’s topic. For those students pursuing a doctoral degree and selecting American politics as a field, this course will serve as the foundation for preparing for your comprehensive exams.

Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the required readings. You should complete the assigned readings prior to each class session, taking notes on the central theoretical arguments and empirical findings in each piece, recording your critical comments, and reflecting on the scholarly connections among the readings. The class meetings will generally be run as seminars where the students are expected to actively participate in the discussion.

Attendance and participation in class discussions will count for 15% of the course grade. Writing assignments will constitute the remainder of the course grade. These assignments are designed to develop a critical understanding of the readings and an awareness of the leading debates in the literature. The class discussions will be built around “talking points” submitted by students on the day prior to each class meeting (35%). Students will also be required to prepare an annotated bibliography on a scholarly debate related to one of the course topics (25%). Finally, there will be a take-home final exam composed of two essay questions designed to test for a comprehensive understanding of the course readings (25%). This exam will be completed during finals week and will be open-note and open-book.

**Weekly talking points:** After the first week, each student will be required to submit three “talking points” on each week’s readings. These are due by email (send them to hpalmer@buffalo.edu) by Sunday at Noon prior to the class session in which the readings will be discussed. These talking points should be the three most interesting questions or arguments identified by the student in the week’s readings. Each should be written in the form of a short paragraph summarizing the question or argument. No more or less than three distinct talking points should be submitted each week. Each talking point should refer to one or more specific sections of the weekly readings (with appropriate page references). Each talking point should refer to a different chapter or article from the weekly readings. Talking points in excess of 160 words will not be accepted. Talking points that arrive late will also not be accepted.
Annotated bibliography: Each student will be required to prepare an annotated bibliography focusing on a scholarly debate related to one of the course topics. This is a research-oriented summary of 8-10 journal articles and book chapters addressing a specific topic or research question relating to the week’s readings. The articles and chapters selected should be connected theoretically and methodologically. Each annotation should be 4-6 sentences, summarizing as concisely as possible the main point(s) of the article or chapter. For books, the annotation should focus on the section that is most relevant to the research topic or question, and if the relevant section includes multiple chapters, a separate annotation should be written for each chapter. After the list of annotations, the student will explain (in no more than 2 pages) how the articles and chapters conflict or complement each other in building toward a conclusion about the research question of interest.

The debates for the annotated bibliographies are listed below. Each student must prepare a bibliography on a separate debate, which can be claimed on a “first-come, first-serve” basis. Students who have not chosen a debate by February 2nd will have one assigned to them. At the end of the syllabus, readings are listed for each debate that will serve as the starting point for constructing your bibliography. The due date of the annotated bibliography depends on the debate chosen and is noted in parentheses below. Students are required to submit their bibliography to me by 4:00 PM on the due date and to e-mail an electronic copy to the other members of the class.

Sophistication of economic voters (February 10th)
Importance of party in government (February 17th)
Decline of turnout (March 17th)
Nature of economic voting (March 24th)
Campaign and media effects (March 24th)
Lobbying strategy of interest groups (March 31st)
Incumbency advantage (April 7th)
Midterm congressional elections (April 7th)
Policy consequences of divided government (April 21st)
Electoral origins of divided government (April 28th)

Extra credit: In addition to the required coursework, students have the option of submitting research topic proposals for as many as four course topics. A research topic proposal identifies either an original hypothesis that could be investigated empirically or an original approach to testing an existing hypothesis. The research idea should stem from the assigned readings and be presented concisely (in 1-2 pages). Students submitting research topic proposals would earn extra credit toward their course grade.

Required Texts


These texts can be purchased from on-line retailers. Most of the other required readings can be downloaded using the UB library’s Electronic Journal archive. Copies of other readings will be distributed as necessary. If you cannot find an article, let me know ASAP.
Course Schedule and Readings

January 12: Introduction to Course (Syllabus Review)

January 19: No Class – Martin Luther King Day

January 26: Democratic Theory (from an American Perspective)

Additional readings:
The Federalist Papers. Nos. 10, 37, & 51 [skim 38-50, 52, 70 & 78].
http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fedpapers.html

February 2: Public Opinion – Belief Systems and Opinion Formation

Additional readings:
February 9: Public Opinion – Political Information and Sophistication

Additional readings:

February 16: Political Parties

Additional readings:

February 23: Partisanship


Additional readings:

**March 2: Theories of Party System Change**

Additional readings:

**March 9: No Class – Spring Break**
March 16: Participation and Civic Engagement


Additional readings:


Rosenstone, Steven J. and John Mark Hansen. 1993. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. [especially chapters 1, 2, & 8]


March 23: Voting


Additional readings:
Key, V.O., Jr. 1966. The Responsible Electorate. [chapters 1-2]

March 30: Interest Groups

Additional reading:
April 6: Congress—Electoral Perspective

*Additional readings:*

April 13: Congress—Institutional Perspective

*Additional readings:*
April 20: Representation

Additional readings:

April 27: The Presidency

Additional readings:


May 11: Final Exam Due (by 4:00 PM)
Readings for Annotated Bibliography Assignment

Economic voter sophistication:

Importance of party in government:

Decline of turnout:

Nature of economic voting:

Campaign and media effects:

Lobbying strategy of interest groups:
Incumbency advantage:

Midterm congressional elections:

Policy consequences of divided government:

Electoral origins of divided government: