THEORIES OF AMERICAN POLITICS  
POLITICAL SCIENCE 310  
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY  
FALL 2010

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 3-4pm or by appointment

Course Meeting Times and Location  
TTh 9:30-10:45  
346 MARB

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Welcome to Political Science 310—Theories of American Politics. This course is designed to teach you about the nature of political science theory and the major approaches to American politics. It is also intended to give you an overview of how those theories and approaches have been applied to important topics in the study of American politics. We will ask about the purposes and goals of political science, and we will explore how political scientists go about creating and answering key research questions. In some respects, the course will be similar to courses that students of American politics often take their first year in graduate school. (One important difference is that the reading load is somewhat lighter than what you might find in graduate school – where students in graduate seminars read entire books, we will read chapters, summary overviews, and articles.) Still, you will read some of the literature studied by graduate students and familiarize yourself with the content of the field of American politics.

Because this is a relatively small (by BYU standards), upper-division course, I will conduct the class as a seminar. I will begin each session with an overview of the important elements that I see in the reading, adding some background and context to allow you to gain a broader perspective on the scholarly landscape. We will then discuss the issues together, working to delve more deeply into the implications of particular lines of thought and to more fully understand the subject matter. You are expected to arrive at class having read the material carefully and ready to participate actively in the discussion. Adequately preparing for our discussions will mean considerable time spent before class working through the texts, making notes, and critically assessing the ideas contained in them. Failure to adequately prepare will significantly harm your ability to understand the material and your ability to do well in the course.

Beyond the specific themes in American political thought we will investigate, this course will be a success if it develops in you the habits of work and mind that are central to college-level thought and argument and that will serve you well long after the final exam. We will emphasize the importance of attentive reading, thoughtful questioning, and compelling writing. By the end of the term, you should be practiced in the scholarly skills of critical reflection and persuasive reason-giving, and you should be able to craft an effective, insightful, and perhaps even eloquent college-level argument.

In the language of our department learning outcomes, this course should contribute to your intellectual enlargement in the following ways: it will help you demonstrate a familiarity with the subfield of American politics; increase your factual and theoretical knowledge of American
politics; help you think critically, analytically, and synthetically; strengthen your ability to write professional grade research papers (with properly cited sources and other such details); and encourage you to communicate effectively by presenting ideas in a high quality oral presentation. I hope, too, that our discussions will include moments in which you will be able to articulate principles of faith in political analysis.

More generally, I hope the course will promote your desire for learning and that you will begin to become a producer of ideas, not just a consumer of them. By adding something new – your unique ideas and perspectives – to the intellectual life of the university, you will become an integral part of the BYU community. The course will be valuable not simply because of what has been taught, but because of what you have learned.

While this process of learning can be demanding, it can also be exhilarating and extremely rewarding. Remember, too, that we are in this together. I expect our class to be an intellectual community in which we support and respect one another, giving each other constructive feedback and encouragement along the way.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

The requirements for this course are rigorous but fair. I expect you to come to every class prepared. That means you should complete all reading assignments before class, and you should arrive at class having already made some notes and begun to think critically about what you have read. The reading assignments usually consist of about 125-175 pages per week (sometimes a little more, sometimes a little less). This is not a great deal of reading in terms of the number of pages (especially for an upper-division course), but often, we will cover several writers or thinkers per class period. More importantly, because this material can be difficult at times, you will need to read more carefully (and probably more slowly) than you might with other kinds of reading assignments.

Assignments for this class include a group presentation and paper, an essay, a midterm, and a final. The remainder of your grade comes from active participation in class discussions. In computing the final grades, assignments will be weighted as follows:

- 15% Group Presentation and Paper
- 15% Class Participation (including email assignments)
- 20% Midterm Exam
- 25% Essay
- 25% Final Exam

**Group Presentation**

After the midterm, the class sessions will include group presentations from the students. You will be assigned to groups of 4-5 students (you may choose to form a group of your own or Dr. Karpowitz can assign you to a group. These groups will also function as your writing groups for the essay assignment.

On presentation days, one group will be assigned to present an article from the course syllabus. The presentations should review the main points of the article, should focus on the theory being used, and should offer an overview of the article’s theoretical approach, methods, and findings.
This should take approximately 15 minutes. On the same day, a second group will be asked to critique the article, including offering an alternative approach or competing evidence, perhaps from an article that criticizes the first. The second presentation should also take about 15 minutes. At the conclusion of the second presentation, the first group will have 5 minutes for rebuttal, followed by a final 5 minutes from the second group. The remainder of the class period will be devoted to discussion of the issues raised by the presentations. The purpose of the presentation is for you to help the members of the class think critically and to set the stage for an effective discussion of the material. Be creative and have fun with these presentations!

Each group member will also submit a 3-page essay no less than one week after the presentation. The purpose of this essay is to critically compare and contrast the reading your group presented with another article or chapter on the topic published since 1995. Each group member must submit an original essay – each individual should complete this element of the assignment on his or her own.

Part of the grade for this assignment will come from the students who watch the presentation, part will come from your fellow group members, part will be based on the essay, and part will be based on Dr. Karpowitz’s overall evaluation of the presentation. Additional details about the group presentations will be given to you after the midterm.

Class Participation

In order to succeed in this course, your consistent attendance and regular participation in class discussions is essential. Class participation involves regular, high-quality interventions in class discussion. Quality is more important than quantity, but you should try to participate actively in the discussion. High-quality comments are usually only possible when you have read carefully and prepared for the class session. For some, speaking up in class is an especially difficult challenge. If this is true for you, please come see me so we can talk about alternative ways to participate in the ongoing scholarly conversation.

You are responsible for all material presented and/or discussed in class (you are also responsible for all course readings, even if we do not spend significant time on them in class). Multiple unexcused absences will be noticed and are grounds for a significantly lower participation grade. I have one exception to this policy. If you experience flu-like symptoms, you are NOT to come to class. Instead, email me about your condition and contact your health care provider for further instructions. STAY HOME until your symptoms have passed.

In addition to what happens in class, participation grades will also be based on several short writing assignments you complete during the semester. For the period prior to the midterm, you will choose 3 topics and submit a brief email to me for each. The email should be no more than 2 paragraphs and no more than 300 words. It must be sent prior to the beginning of class. The first paragraph must give a brief overview of the main ideas or assumptions of one of the assigned readings. The second paragraph should include your critical questions and ideas about the reading. What makes it useful? What are its weaknesses? Is it falsifiable? Why or why not? This paragraph may also critically contrast the theory under discussion with other theories we have read and discussed. This second paragraph is your attempt to critically evaluate the reading prior to our classroom discussion.
Please send these emails to the following address: karp310@byu.edu. In the subject line of the email, type “PLSC 310:” then the name of the theory we are covering. Do not type your own name in the subject line. Since I sometimes receive many emails in a given day, sending these messages to the above address and including the requested subject line will help me sort the emails and make sure you get full credit for your work.

During the second half of the course, you will also send brief emails about the topics in American politics that we are discussing. For these emails, you are to choose one of the readings for the day. The first paragraph must review the main argument of the reading. As much as possible given the reading, this paragraph should explain the hypotheses, identify the independent and dependent variables, and summarize the author’s data. The second paragraph should analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the author’s argument and evidence. Be constructively critical, and you may compare and contrast with other readings from the course, if you prefer. You should choose 3 readings on which to write during the second half of the course.

You may choose any topic/reading, but you may only submit one email per class session. You may not write the day your group completes its presentation.

Over the course of the semester, then, you will send 6 emails about various course topics (3 about the readings or topics covered in the first half of the course and 3 about the issues or topics we cover in the second half of the course). You will receive credit for the assignments if you complete all aspects of the emails as discussed above. Emails of exceptionally high quality will receive additional credit.

Exams

We will have two exams over the course of the semester – a closed-book midterm that you will take home and complete on your own and a final exam given on Monday, December 14 from 7-10am. More detail about the exams will be distributed prior to the exam dates.

Final Essay

The final essay is meant to provide you an opportunity to begin finding your own voice as a political scientist. Think of the final essay as an introductory chapter to a dissertation or a research monograph, and you can look to the introductory chapters of existing books for a model.

For this essay, you will pose a general research question, and you will develop your own theoretical ideas in the context of a critique, synthesis, and reformulation of the existing literature on the subject, including some of the pivotal ideas we have discussed in the class. Your essay should include a well-designed research question, a review of existing literature, a discussion of your own theory and hypotheses, and a general discussion (this is not a full research design) of the data you will need to answer your question or test your hypotheses. Your final essay may emerge out of ideas you generated in the participation emails you sent.

The essay should be approximately 20 pages in length. You will complete a full draft no later than November 19, and the final revision is due on December 7. You will meet as a writing group to discuss the drafts of each member of the group, and you will also write a formal
response to each member of the writing group. More detailed information about the essay will be distributed on September 30. I am available to meet with you at any point in the writing process, and I encourage you to come visit me to talk. In November, I will also schedule formal writing conferences that you may attend if you prefer.

Grading

In this course, when computing your final course grade, I do not follow a curve or limit the number of students who can receive top marks in any way. If every student in the course produces A-level work, every student in the course can receive an A. (Conversely, if no student produces A-quality work, no student will receive an A.) My expectations for your work will be high.

When grading, I evaluate only the words on the page before me. The effort you put into an essay or exam will most certainly be evident in what you submit. Please note that I expect your work to be free of grammatical, spelling, and formatting errors. (I am happy to explain any technical issues that seem confusing or obscure.) Failure to meet these expectations may result in a lowered final grade.

Due dates for assignments are **firm and final**. Personal extensions are not fair to other members of the class, including me. For this reason, there will be **no personal extensions** under any circumstances except documented illness or family emergency.

Because personal extensions are not allowed, **failure to meet assigned due dates will bring serious consequences**. For essay assignments, including drafts and final revisions, your assignment grade will be docked one full letter grade per 24-hour period beginning one minute after the deadline. The date and time of the final exam are set by the university. Do not ask for extensions or changes; I am not allowed to give them. I will, however, consider making the final a take-home exam if the class members prefer that to a 7am final.

**COURSE TEXTS**

All course readings will be made available to you via Blackboard. If multiple members of the class prefer a printed packet, rather than online access to the readings, I will be happy to facilitate that preference.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Note: Reading assignments are to be completed before class on the day indicated. Detailed instructions for the writing assignments will be furnished during the semester. Specific topics to be covered in the second half of the course will be announced after consultation with students. Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are recommended, not required.

Week 1
August 31: Introduction and Course Overview

September 2: Philosophy of Science

Week 2
September 7: Philosophy of Science (cont’d)
  • Imre Lakatos. 1970. "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes." In Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge, eds. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [Sections 1, 2c, 3a, 3b, and 4].

September 9: Can Political Science Be a Science? Should We Care?

Week 3
September 14: Can Political Science Be a Science? (cont’d)
September 16: Tensions and Problems in Political Science


Week 4
September 21: Behavioralism


September 23: Rational Choice and New Institutionalism I


Week 5
September 28: Critics of Rational Choice

- Donald P. Green and Ian Shapiro. 1994. *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Chapters 2-4. (*Chapter 2 is another overview of rational choice theory. You should skim it and focus on Chapters 3 and 4.*)
September 30: New Institutionalism II: History and Theory


- **FINAL ESSAY ASSIGNMENT DISTRIBUTED**

Week 6
October 5: Political Psychology


October 7: Theories of Race and Gender

- Hanes Walton Jr., Cheryl Miller, and Joseph P. McCormick II. “Race and Political Science: The Dual Traditions of Race Relations Politics and African-American Politics.” In Political Science in History: Research Programs and Political Traditions. (*)

Week 7
October 12: Culture, Ideas, and American Exceptionalism


October 14: **MIDTERM EXAM**

**The course calendar for the second half of the course will be announced after consultation with students about the topics that interest you most.**
POLICIES

It is your responsibility to read and follow these policies. Their presence in writing here constitutes fair notice to you. Please pay careful attention and follow each one!

• Communication. My door is always open to you, and I hope you will feel free to contact me about issues that arise during the course of the semester. I’m happy to meet with you during office hours or by appointment to discuss any aspect of this course. Just ask or e-mail me, or drop by my office during my regularly scheduled office hours.

Because it is the best way for us to communicate with each other outside of class, all class members are required to maintain an active email account. It is your responsibility to ensure that the email address that is listed for you in the BYU directory is accurate. To update your email address, log in to Route Y and select “Update Personal Information.” There you can specify a current email address if you are not using the one assigned to you by BYU, or you can have your BYU email forwarded to the account you plan to use. I will relay important or time-sensitive class announcements via email. I strongly encourage you to check your email daily throughout the semester. You are responsible for any information that I pass along via this medium.

• Extensions: All deadlines in this course are firm. Except in the case of medical or family emergency, I give no individual extensions. If, due to such an emergency, you cannot meet a deadline, please contact me as soon as possible. In the event of a medical emergency, you must produce a note from a doctor or from the Student Health Center (or bring me pictures of your newly born baby). Late written work will be marked down one full letter grade for each day late, beginning one minute after the assignment is due.

• Honor Code: I expect that you will live by the university’s academic honesty policy, which you have already signed: BYU students should seek to be totally honest in their dealings with others. They should complete their own work and be evaluated based upon that work. They should avoid academic dishonesty and misconduct in all its forms, including plagiarism, fabrication or falsification, cheating, and other academic misconduct. Students are responsible not only to adhere to the Honor Code requirement to be honest but also to assist other students in fulfilling their commitment to be honest.

• Plagiarism: While all students sign the honor code, there are still specific skills most students need to master over time in order to correctly cite sources, especially in this new age of the internet; as well as deal with the stress and strain of college life without resorting to cheating. Please know that as your professor I will notice instances of cheating on exams or plagiarizing on papers. See http://honorcode.byu.edu for specific examples of intentional, inadvertent plagiarism, and fabrication, falsification.

Writing submitted for credit at BYU must consist of the student's own ideas presented in sentences and paragraphs of his or her own construction. The work of other writers or speakers may be included when appropriate (as in a research paper or book review), but such material must support the student's own work (not substitute for it) and must be clearly identified by appropriate introduction and punctuation and by footnoting or other standard referencing. The substitution of another person's work for the student's own or the inclusion of another person's work without adequate acknowledgment (whether done intentionally or not) is known as
plagiarism. It is a violation of academic, ethical, and legal standards and can result in a failing
grade not only for the paper but also for the course in which the paper is written. In extreme
cases, it can justify expulsion from the University. Because of the seriousness of the possible
consequences, students who wonder if their papers are within these guidelines should visit the
Writing Lab or consult a faculty member who specializes in the teaching of writing or who
specializes in the subject discussed in the paper. Useful books to consult on the topic include the
current Harbrace College Handbook, the MLA Handbook, and James D. Lester's Writing
Research Papers.

You should be careful to avoid the following examples of plagiarism: (1) Turning in work or
portions of work that are identical to work submitted by another student. If two paragraphs of
different papers are identical, we will assume that plagiarism occurred and will treat the incident
as a serious violation of the Honor Code. (2) Using work from past semesters as anything other
than a guide or supplement. If work is submitted for this semester which follows the format or
instructions of a previous semester, we will assume that plagiarism occurred. We encourage you
to work with other students and even consult work done in previous semesters. However, the
work you turn in must be entirely your own work. Because of the simplicity of "cut and paste," it
is easy to pass off another person's work as your own. It is your responsibility to make sure that
your work is entirely your own.

• Honor Pledge: As a way of reinforcing the importance of academic honesty, I am adopting a
tradition from Princeton University for the essays you turn in this semester. You should write the
following pledge at the end of all drafts and revisions, and then sign it (or, if the paper is
submitted electronically, print your name, which will count as your signature): “This paper
represents my own work in accordance with University regulations.”

• Discrimination: Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination
against any participant in an educational program or activity that receives federal funds. The act
is intended to eliminate sex discrimination in education. Title IX covers discrimination in
programs, admissions, activities, and student-to-student sexual harassment. BYU's policy against
sexual harassment extends not only to employees of the university but to students as well. If you
encounter unlawful sexual harassment or gender based discrimination, please talk to your
professor; contact the Equal Employment Office at 378-5895 or 367-5689 (24-hours); or contact
the Honor Code Office at 378-2847.

• Access: Brigham Young University is committed to providing a working and learning
atmosphere which reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any
disability which may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the
University Accessibility Center (422-2767). Reasonable academic accommodations are reviewed
for all students who have qualified documented disabilities. Services are coordinated with the
student and instructor by the UAC office. If you need assistance or if you feel you have been
unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of disability, you may seek resolution through
established grievance policy and procedures. You should contact the Equal Employment Office
at 378-5895, D-282 ASB.
WHAT TO DO NOW

When you get to this point in the syllabus, please e-mail Dr. Karpowitz at ckarpowitz@byu.edu to say that you read it, and tell me something about yourself and about your goals for the semester. Feel free to ask any questions that you may have about the course.