Course Description and Objectives

This course focuses on the major theoretical traditions and approaches in the study of American politics. We will also spend significant time applying these theories to central topics in the study of American politics. In some respects, the course will be similar to courses that students of American politics often take their first year in graduate school that survey classic and contemporary political science literature. (However, 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.

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.

This semester is the first time I have taught this course at BYU, which means that it is under development. I look forward to your ideas and reactions to the course. Feel free to communicate with me constructively about your reactions (both positive and negative) to the course.

In this course, I hope you will become a producer of ideas, not just a consumer of them. Students who complete this course successfully should be able to:

- Think more conceptually and theoretically about political science;
- Understand the most important theoretical traditions in American politics as presented by leading practitioners;
- Critique the ideas of the best American politics scholars;

---

1 This course and syllabus borrows from a materials prepared by Professors Chris Karpowitz and Dan Nielson.
• Synthesize ideas from a variety of sources and research traditions;
• Craft your own effective and insightful argument using clear and engaging prose that is analytically sound.

Course Requirements and Grading

Before each class you should complete all reading assignments having already made some notes and begun to think critically about what you have read. The reading assignments usually consist of about 100-150 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.

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 is reflected 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 will result in a lowered final grade.

Your final grade will be figured by computing a weighted average using the following components:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Presentation and Paper</td>
<td>15 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation (including email assignments)</td>
<td>15 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>25 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>20 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>25 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100 %</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group Presentation

Beginning in Week 9 of the course, 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 I can assign you to a group. These groups will also function as your writing groups for the essay assignment.) Each group will be assigned to a class session and will choose one of the articles from that day’s syllabus to present. The presentation should review the main points of the article, should focus on the theory
being used, and should offer some critical perspective on the article’s theoretical approach, methods, and findings. The purpose of the presentation is for you to help the members of the class better understand the article 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 on the day of 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 in the past ten years. 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 my 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 participation in class discussion. Quality is more important than quantity, but you should try to participate regularly 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 ways for you 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.

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 beginning with our discussion of behavioralism in Week 4 and extending through the discussion of culture, ideas, and American exceptionalism in Week 7, you will choose 4 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 the theory we are discussing. The second paragraph should include your critical questions and ideas about the theory. 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.

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, the subject line will help me sort the emails and make sure
you get full credit for your work. Putting the right information in the subject line makes a difference.

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 4 topics 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 8 emails about various course topics (4 about the theories covered in the first half of the course and four 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.

Because the material covered in the assignment will be discussed in class, email participation assignments will not be accepted late for any reason.

Exams

We will have two exams over the course of the semester – a midterm and a final exam given in class on Friday April 16th from 7-10am. The university sets the date and time of the final exam. Do not ask for extensions or changes; I am not allowed to give them. 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 producing your own political science. 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-formulated 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 your participation emails.

The essay should be 15-20 pages in length. You will submit a brief (1-2 page) proposal on February 22nd. You will complete a full draft no later than March 24th, and the final revision is due on April 13th. Between the full draft and the final paper, 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 February 8\textsuperscript{th}. 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 March, I am also
happy to schedule formal writing conferences one on one or in small groups that you may
attend if you prefer.

Other Course Policies

\textit{It is your responsibility to read and follow these policies. Their presence in writing here
constitutes fair notice to you.}

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.

Often the best way for us to communicate with each other outside of class is via email.
Thus all class members are \textit{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. I will relay important or
time-sensitive class announcements via email. I \textbf{strongly} encourage you to check your
email daily throughout the semester. You are responsible for any information that I pass
along via this medium.

Late Work

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

Academic Honesty All of the work you do in this course is expected to be your own.
Academic misconduct will not be tolerated and will be handled according to university
policy. A review of the Honor Code can be found here: \url{http://saas.byu.edu/catalog/2009-
2010ucat/GeneralInfo/HonorCode.php}. This site includes some examples of various
forms of academic misconduct including cheating, plagiarism (both intentional and
inadvertant), and other misconduct. For example, violating BYU’s academic honesty
policy includes “submitting the same work for more than one class without disclosure
and approval.” You may not write a paper for another course that uses the same topic or
material as a paper for this course without discussing it with me \textit{first}.

A note on plagiarism and citations: 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.
You must fully cite every source you utilize. Quotation marks should be used for *directly quoted strings of three or more words*. Cite sources that you paraphrase, even if not the exact words.

If you have any questions about academic conduct, I encourage you to consult the web page and/or come speak with me.

**Disability**  I am committed to providing a learning atmosphere that reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any disability that may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, you are responsible for making your needs known to me and seeking available assistance from the university in a timely manner. In addition to notifying me, you must contact the University Accessibility Center (UAC) at 801-422-7065, 1520 WSC. The UAC reviews requests for reasonable academic accommodations for all students who have qualified documented disabilities, and any accommodations for this class must be coordinated with the UAC office. See [http://uac.byu.edu/](http://uac.byu.edu/) for more information.

**Discrimination/Harassment**  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 discrimination and sexual harassment extends not only to employees of the university but to students as well (see: [http://www.byu.edu/hr/human-resource-services/equal-employment-opportunity](http://www.byu.edu/hr/human-resource-services/equal-employment-opportunity)) If you encounter sexual harassment or discrimination, please talk to me; contact the Equal Employment Office in D-282 ASB or by telephone at 422-3863 or 367-5689 (24-hours); or contact the Honor Code Office at 422-2847.

**Learning Outcomes**  The BYU Political Science Department has developed a set of expected student learning outcomes. These will help you understand the objectives of the political science curriculum, including this class. See: [https://learningoutcomes.byu.edu/wiki/index.php/Political_Science](https://learningoutcomes.byu.edu/wiki/index.php/Political_Science). Feedback on the expected student learning outcomes can be given to me or sent to FHSS@byu.edu
Course Readings and Schedule

All course readings will be made available to you via Blackboard. Reading assignments are to be completed before class on the day indicated. Topics to be covered in the second half of the course will be announced after consultation with students.

Week 1
January 4: Introduction and Course Overview

January 6: Philosophy of Science

Week 2
January 11: Philosophy of Science (cont’d)

January 13: Can Political Science Be a Science? Should We Care?

Week 3
***No class on Monday, January 18th for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day***
January 20: Tensions between Political Science and Democracy?

Week 4
January 25: Behavioralism


January 27: Rational Choice


• John Aldrich. 1994. “Rational Choice Theory and the Study of American Politics.” In *The Dynamics of American Politics: Approaches & Interpretations*, eds. Lawrence C. Dodd and Calvin Jillson. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. (This chapter is relevant for this class session and the next. You should start reading it now and be sure to finish it by the next session.)

Week 5

February 1: New Institutionalism I


February 3: New Institutionalism II: History and Theory


Week 6

February 8: Political Psychology


• Margaret G. Hermann. 2002. “Political Psychology as a Perspective in the Study of Politics.” In *Political Psychology*.

***Final Essay Assignment Distributed***
February 10: 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*. (This is a helpful overview that can be skimmed quickly.)

Week 7

***No class on Monday February 15th for Presidents’ Day, but Tuesday the 16th is a Monday instruction day at BYU***

February 16: Culture, Ideas, and American Exceptionalism


February 17: Power and Pluralism


Week 8

February 22: Review and Catch Up

***Paper proposal Due Today***

February 24: Midterm Exam

***Group presentation assignment distributed with the 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.***
Political Science 310, Winter 2010
Course Schedule, 2nd Half of Semester

Week 9
March 1: Power and Pluralism

March 3: Interest Groups
• James Madison, Federalist #10

**Group 7: Danielle Dinius, Taylor Frame, Sean Kelly, Danny Leavitt, Robert Ranc

Week 10
March 8: Participation in Groups

March 10: Why Do We Participate?

**Group 3: Joelle Graham, Kelly Larsen, Rachel Hardt, Greg Kelsch
Week 11
March 15: Why Do We Vote the Way We Do?

**Group 5: Melissa Cluff, Asher Cox, Noelle Temple, Troy Wilson

March 17: Public Opinion

**Group 8: Trent Davis, Skylar deJong, Kyle Larson, Brandon Owens, Patrick Spencer

Week 12
March 22: Religion and Political Behavior

**Group 2: Brianna Barrett, Caleb Griffin, Jonathan Malan, Nathan Robinson

March 24: Representation

**Group 6: John Hadlock, Rachel Moon, Jeffrey Murphy, Erin Wells

March 26: DRAFT OF FINAL ESSAY DUE BY MIDNIGHT
Week 13
March 29: Congress

March 31: Congress

**Group 1: Brandon Berg, David Lake, McKay Lasko, Eric Thorpe**

Week 14
April 5: Judicial Decisionmaking
• Thomas G. Hansford and James F. Spriggs II, The Politics of Precedent on the U.S. Supreme Court (2006), Chapters 1-2

**Group 4: Gerald Anderson, Rachel Scroggins, Ryan James, Jordan Stauss**

April 7: The Presidency

Week 15
April 12: More Presidency and Catch Up

April 13: **Final Revision of Final Essay Due by Midnight**

Friday April 16: **Final Exam, 7AM-10AM**