GOVT 510: American Government and Politics

Fall 2015 - Robinson Hall B 442; T 4:30-7:20 PM

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Course Description:
This course provides a broad introduction and overview of the academic study of American government and politics. The course is designed for both PhD- and Masters-level students, with varying requirements for each degree. This is a survey course, but we can not cover all seminal and contemporary approaches to studying American politics. Yet, by the end of this course, students will have a basic familiarity with the debates, controversies, methodologies, and approaches to studying American politics by political scientists. Political science is a diverse discipline and, despite the instructor’s intellectual biases, this course will expose students to myriad epistemologies and different analytical points of view. In particular, we will cover both institutions and behavior — the two major subfields in American politics — as well as issues in public policymaking; and we will examine research that is theoretical and empirical, quantitative and qualitative.

This is a core course for political science MA and PhD students and it should be the foundation for successful completion of the PhD qualifying exam in American Government and Politics. In addition, for those wishing to specialize in this field, this course should assist you in identifying your own research topic and specialty. For such majors, this course should be supplemented by field seminars, including: GOVT 603: Seminar in the Courts and Constitutional Law; GOVT 604: Seminar on Congress and Legislative Behavior; GOVT 605: Seminar on the Presidency; GOVT 706: Federalism and Intergovernmental Relations; and field electives in more specialized topics.

Note: There are different requirements for MA and PhD students. Please read these requirements carefully.
Course Goals:
By the end of this course, each student should be able to:

- Understand and evaluate classic and theoretical works on American politics
- Understand and evaluate empirical political science research

PhD students should be additionally prepared to:

- Study for the PhD qualifying exam in American Government and Politics
- Develop and design original empirical research on a topic in American politics

Course Requirements:
This course is a seminar and individual class sessions will be discussion-based. Although the instructor will spend some time during each meeting introducing the material and perhaps clarifying technical aspects of the readings, the primary purpose of our meetings is for student-led critique and discussion of the required readings. Given the nature of the course, the readings are at times numerous and detailed.\footnote{You’ll notice that there are many “required” books. These are all essential bookshelf material for PhD students, but I understand that it might be financially burdensome to purchase all of these books, especially all at once. I have thus placed all books on 4-hour reserve at the Fairfax library. You may also coordinate to share copies of books amongst yourselves. But, please plan ahead. All required readings must be completed by the day of assignment. “I didn’t have the book” is never a valid excuse for not reading required material.} If you find that you are having trouble keeping up with the readings, feel free to contact the instructor for advice. In addition, you may wish to coordinate with other students for help with collective notes, which are encouraged especially for students planning to take the PhD qualifying examination in American Government and Politics.

A necessary requirement for this type of course is that students attend every class. Absence from more than one class – unless a student has a documented emergency – is considered unacceptable. With each absence past the first, a student may be penalized a letter grade, and will be encouraged to drop the class. Work commitments, vacation, and travel are not documented emergencies, and if these conflict with class, you should strongly consider dropping and taking the course when it better fits your schedule. In addition, any absence must be reported to the instructor prior to the beginning of class.

The following are components of the requirements for ALL students in this course:

- Class Participation is required to make the seminar run smoothly. Students should read all of the required readings and think about them before arriving to a class meeting. Please see the companion notes on successful participation posted in the Dropbox folder containing the course readings. Participation includes both raising and responding to questions regarding the readings and being attentive to the thoughts and criticisms of fellow participants. Advanced graduate students need not be coerced into engaging the literature and fellow seminar participants. Discussions, while focused on criticism, will remain constructive and productive throughout. 15% 

- To facilitate the desired levels of participation, each student is responsible for individual or cooperative Seminar Leadership. Twice during the semester (once in the first half, and once in the second half), a student will be required to type up a 4-5 page synthesis of the
week’s readings and at least 10 key questions for discussion and submit these materials to the class by 5 PM the Monday before class. These materials are to be emailed to the instructor, who will then post them for the rest of the class to see. This student (or students – some weeks will have more than one seminar leader) will also prepare a 10-15 minute introduction to the topic’s readings at the beginning of class, which the instructor will augment as needed. Your synthesis and the discussion questions you develop should explore the themes and controversies in the literature about the topic, and raise questions for discussion about how that week’s theoretical approaches fit the broader scope of the course. Please see the “Participation Guidelines” handout.

- **Reading Summaries** — Each student is required to write 6 short reading summary papers throughout the semester. These will be due at the beginning of class and pertain to that day’s required readings. Reading summaries should be 1 page long and should succinctly summarize 2 of the week’s required readings. Each summary must include the following sections:
  
  - **Research Question**: state the main question the research seeks to answer
  - **Theory**: state the author’s causal explanation for their empirical findings, or what they think might appropriately answer the research question
  - **Hypotheses**: restate the author’s primary expectations, if applicable.
  - **Method**: describe the means by which the author assesses the main hypothesis. What method is used?
  - **Results**: describe the main finding of the test and the concluding inference the author draws to answer the research question.

There are 12 weeks beyond our first meeting, so you will be writing these summaries for half of the class periods. You may **not** submit a reading summary on a class period where you are seminar leader, so this limits your flexibility somewhat. You may, however, write a summary of our Capitol Hill Day experience (see below, this will take place on 10/23, as a special class in Washington, DC). The Capitol Hill Day summary will be due on 11/3, along with any summaries on the “Lobbying and Interest Groups” readings. These are due at the beginning of class and late reading summaries will not be accepted.

- Each student is required to complete an **Assessment of Course Readings** (due 12/11). This informal assessment should specify a) those readings that have been especially useful and reasons why, b) those readings that should be dropped from future versions of the course and why, and c) what you have read outside of this course that should be added to this syllabus. Completion of this assessment will earn you 5% of the final course grade.

In addition to those components mandatory for all students, students must choose (by Friday, September 25) whether they wish to write a **research design** OR take **midterm and final examinations**. Political Science PhD students **are required** to take the “research track,” but MA and MPA students can choose between that option and an “exam track.” Once an MA or MPA student chooses either to take exams or write a research paper, they cannot, under any circumstances, change to the other track. The following are components of the two separate “tracks”:
• Research Track (required for PhD students)

Choose a research question in American politics, broadly speaking, and complete an original research design meant to address your chosen question. The final product should take the form of a conference paper/journal article, but without the actual empirical research. Your paper should be between 15 and 18 pages in length. For the design, you must pose a unique and appropriate political science research question that is properly motivated, use the literature of the field to develop theoretical expectations about a relationship, and pose a suggested course of collecting and analyzing data that would allow a researcher to evaluate the question. In your conclusion you can speculate about findings, but you do not need to perform the research. The paper will be due in several stages:

  – **Friday, September 25** (by 5:00 pm in my mailbox, or via email): Research Proposal. First, you will complete a 1-page introduction that states a thesis, or research question, and provides a basic outline of your paper.

  – **Friday, October 30** (by 5:00 pm in my mailbox, or via email): Literature Review and Bibliography. 4-7 pages for the literature review. As many bibliographic references as you’d like to add, but certainly enough to fill out the literature review.

  – **Friday, November 27** (by 5:00 pm in my mailbox, or via email): Hypotheses and Description of Data. 1-2 pages of hypotheses, derived from the existing literature. 3-5 pages describing which data/evidence you would use to test these hypotheses. These can be qualitative or quantitative in nature.

  – **Wednesday, December 8**: Final Research Design due.

The research design is due in multiple stages, but will be graded holistically, taking into consideration the quality of the intermediate submissions, at final submission. 40%

• Exam Track

For this option, you will be required to complete take-home midterm and final examinations. For each assessment, you will be required to answer two (out of a pool of more than that) questions in 5-7 pages per question. You will be expected to refer primarily to the literature covered in the course, but you can use outside sources if you wish. The exams are open books and open notes, so your answers should be well thought out and written intelligently. You will not be allowed to work collaboratively on these exams. The following are the dates for the exams:

  – **Midterm Exam** will be distributed in class on October 6 and will be due a week later, by 7:20 pm on October 13 (There is no class this day, but the exam will be due via electronic submission). 20%

  – **Final Exam** will be distributed in class on December 8 and will be due a week later, by 7:20 pm on December 15. 20%
Grade Distribution:

- Class Participation: 15%
- Seminar Leadership: 15%
- Reading Summaries: 25%
- Assessment of Course Readings: 5%
- Research Design/Exams: 40%

Required Books:


Topics and Schedule of Readings

The following is a tentative schedule for the course. Updates to this schedule may be emailed and communicated in class, as appropriate. This schedule is meant to give you a sense of the topic(s) to be covered on a given day. It is also meant to guide you if you wish to complete readings ahead of time. You are required to have read the assigned reading by the week listed below.
Part I. Classics

Week 1 (9/1)

THE FOUNDERS AND FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

Required


Recommended

○ The Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union. 1781.
○ Anti-Federalist Papers.
Week 2 (9/8)

Who Governs? Power and Policy

Required


Recommended


Part II. Institutions

Week 3 (9/15)

Congress

Required


**Recommended**


Week 4 (9/22)

THE PRESIDENCY

Required


Recommended

Bureaucracy

Required


Recommended


Week 6 (10/6)

THE COURTS

Required


Recommended

- Cameron, Charles M., Albert D. Cover, and Jeffrey A. Segal. 1990. “Senate Voting on Supreme Court Nominees: A Neoinstitutional Model.” The American Political Science Review 84 (Jun.): 525-534.


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**Week 7 (10/13 )**

**COLUMBUS DAY BREAK – NO CLASS**

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**Week 8 (10/20)**

**INTERBRANCH RELATIONS AND SEPARATION OF POWERS**

**Required**


**Recommended**


Week 9

10/23 (Friday) — Capitol Hill Day. 9:00-1:00PM

Gold Room (2168), Rayburn House Office Building

No class on Tuesday, 10/27.

Part III. Back to Power and the Nature of Government

Week 10 (11/3)

Lobbying and Interest Groups

Required


Recommended


Week 11 (11/10)

Parties
Required


Recommended

Part IV. Behavior – How do Individuals Interact with Government?

Week 12 (11/17)

**Public Opinion & Ideology**

*Required*


*Recommended*


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**Week 13 (11/24)**

**Participation + Elections**

**Required**


**Recommended**

Part V. Representation and Policy

Week 14 (12/1)

Representation

Required


Recommended

Publications.

Week 15 (12/8)

Political Inequality and Social Policy

Required

Recommended
Additional Concerns

Syllabus
This syllabus is a tentative guide for the course. I reserve the right to make announced changes to this document and will distribute these changes in class and on the course website. Each student will be responsible for all announcements and materials covered in class.

Class Conduct
Class atmosphere will be quite relaxed. Just a few guidelines to make sure:

* Arriving a few minutes late is tolerated as long as you make an effort to minimize the disturbance for other students.
* Eating and drinking in class should be reduced to a minimum. It is not forbidden, but please make sure that you are not disturbing others.
* Turn off all cell phones (or don’t even bring them).
* No email, IMs, or web browsing on computers during class.
* If you have to leave a class early, please let me know in advance. It is very rude to simply walk out in the middle of a discussion.

Disabilities and Accommodations
Please let me know within the first week of class if you require assistance or special consideration. I can make accommodations for those who need them but must be informed of the need in advance. Any requests for accommodation based on a disability must be arranged through the Office of Disability Services (ODS). [http://ods.gmu.edu/](http://ods.gmu.edu/)

Academic Integrity
All work completed in your name must be yours and yours alone. Any work you borrow or ideas you gather from other sources must be cited properly. Please see me if you are concerned about proper citation style. Any attempt to present someone else’s work as your own will be met with the harshest consequences. You will receive an F for the assignment and an F for the course. Furthermore, notification of, and supporting documentation for, the violation will be forwarded to the appropriate university administrators.

Enrollment Statement
Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Scheduled adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes.

Last Day to Add: 9/8/15
Last Day to Drop: 10/02/15

Please note, after the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons. Undergraduate Students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.
Other Useful Campus Resources:

**Writing Center**
A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200; [http://writingcenter.gmu.edu](http://writingcenter.gmu.edu)

**University Libraries**
http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html

**Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)**
703.993.2380; [http://caps.gmu.edu](http://caps.gmu.edu)

**University Policies**
The University Catalog, [http://catalog.gmu.edu](http://catalog.gmu.edu), is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other policies are available at [http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu](http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu). All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.