Political Science 501: PROSEMINAR IN AMERICAN POLITICS  
Rutgers University (Spring 2015), Hickman Hall 313  
*** PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS ***

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Class Meeting: Wednesday 3:00pm-5:40pm, Hickman 313  
Office Hours: Wednesday 12:00pm-1:30pm, Hickman 603 or By appointment

Course Overview  
This course is a broad overview of the field of American Politics across a range of topics and methodological approaches. A considerable amount of time in the course will be spent engaging and discussing the scholarly work on American political institutions and political behavior. Themes throughout the course include representation, power, influence, and identities. The goals of the course are to familiarize students with both canonical works and newer approaches to the field, as well as augment students’ ability to assess methodologies and evidence presented and utilized by the authors we read.

A guest speaker, specializing in the topic from our department, will attend a portion of many of our scheduled class meetings. This allows students to gain perspective from a scholar within the field and how this field relates to other components of the broader American politics subfield.

Course Requirements:
1. Students are required to write two memos on the readings  
2. Regular participation in seminar discussions  
3. Attend class every week  
4. Author Presenter Role twice in the semester  
5. Assume Authors’ Defendant Role  
6. Research Paper or Take Home Exam

Weekly Memos  
Each memo should be 4-5 double spaced pages and should focus on 2-3 readings from the week. **Memos are due by 6 pm on Tuesday night on the class website.** All students in the class and the professor will be able to view the response papers. Memos should be analytical in nature rather than summarize the readings. Your goal is to develop an original argument (theoretical, empirical or methodological), which improves our understanding of the underlying issues of the week’s topic. Late memos will not be accepted for credit. Memos cannot overlap with the weeks you are author presenter or assume the role of author’s defendant. A sign-up will be circulated at the first class meeting.

Participation  
This is a graduate seminar and your avid participation is vital to its success. Attendance and participation in the weekly seminar meeting is required. Students are expected to complete all assigned readings before class and come prepared to discuss the material. All students will be
expected to contribute to the discussion at every class meeting. Quality of comments is valued over quantity. If students come to seminar unprepared the quality of discussion will be radically diminished. Students will be required to facilitate discussion and be the authors’ defendant at least once in the semester. There will be a sign-up at the start of the semester.

**Author Presenter**
Students will be asked to lead discussion by presenting core aspects of one assigned reading in a 10-15 minute presentation using power point. Over the duration of the semester students will be required to present twice. It will simulate a conference style presentation and the presenter will present as if he/she is one of the authors of the work. Students in the class will then be able to ask questions about the work in a 10 minute discussion following the presentation. The presentation should include the following:

a. What is the research question?
b. What literature/work is this work contributing to?
c. What is the theory and hypotheses?
d. What is the methodological approach and research design?
e. What are the findings?
f. What is the central contribution of the work and implications?

**Authors’ Defendant**
As the authors’ defendant you must seek to defend the theory, method, and value of the readings for a given week. This role does not require any written work but rather is a type of participation. As is the case in many graduate seminars, critiques of work are plentiful, however there is little praise or defense of work. Your job is to defend the value and merit of the readings from unjust attacks in order to keep the discussion balanced.

**Research Paper/Take Home Exam**
The final assessment can be an original research paper on a topic of your choosing in American Politics, or a take-home exam that is a simulation of comp exams. If you select the paper option, a 2-page research proposal is due by **Wednesday March 4th in class.** Your paper topic and research design will need my approval before you are allowed to proceed with this option. I strongly encourage first year graduate students to utilize the exam option. The exam is a great opportunity to solidify your knowledge of a body of literature and good preparation for comps. Final papers or take home exams will be due on **May 6th at 9am**. Students will be required to submit it on the course website as well as directly emailed to the professor. Additional details regarding the paper or exam, including directions of where to turn it in on the Sakai site, will be provided on the specific assignment sheet.

**Grade Breakdown:**

- Memos: 20%
- Author Presentations: 20%
- Authors’ defendant: 5%
- Participation: 25%
- Final Exam/Paper: 30%

**Please note that in order to receive a passing grade in this course, all assignments must be completed**
Grading Scale:
90-100% A
87-89.9  B+
80-86.9% B
77-79.9% C+
70-76.9% C
60-69.9% D
59.9 and below  F

**Plagiarism and Cheating**
In an effort to deter plagiarism and cheating, all students will be required to submit all written work to TurnItIn. This software program is designed to detect plagiarism, similarities in work submitted by students, and other forms of academic dishonesty.

Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and are treated as such by both the university and the professor. Be aware that the professor is apt to impose the most severe penalty allowed by university rules, which includes but is not limited to issuing an automatic grade of 0.0 for the course. If students have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, or other matters of academic integrity, the following link may be helpful http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/files/documents/AI_Policy_9_01_2011.pdf.

Section II specifically discusses the definitions of cheating and plagiarism. If you are having trouble assimilating outside information into your own ideas or have any other questions concerning academic writing, see the Rutgers Learning Center (http://lrc.rutgers.edu/), or come to my office hours.

**Collaborative work:**
Please note that unless specifically granted by the professor or directly indicated on the assignment sheet otherwise, students should only complete assignments individually. Memos, papers and take home-exams are NOT to be completed in a collaborative effort with other students. Students are allowed to discuss readings together and share notes from the class over the duration of the semester. Notes, memos, and summaries written by another student are intellectual property that cannot be simply used in your own work without appropriate citations. Once the take home exam has been distributed, students are NOT allowed to discuss the exam questions or any other course material with one another via any medium, electronic or in-person. Please note that in completion of written assignments, you should take great care to ensure that you are not putting yourself in a position of having very similarly or identically worded prose compared to another student – my expectations is that your work will be distinct from that of others. Additional warnings and directions concerning these points will be further elaborated on specific course assignment handouts.

**Course Materials:**
I strongly recommend that you purchase all of the required books in this course to build your American Politics library. Books can be purchased online from sites such Amazon where used options are available. The books will NOT be available for purchase at a campus bookstore. Books with large selections on the syllabus are listed as required for purchase. Assigned shorter book
selections and articles will be posted on the class website. All required books will be on reserve at Douglass Campus Library for the duration of the semester. Please note the reading schedule and reading selections are subject to change if the professor deems it necessary.

Books Required for Purchase


Readings and Seminar Schedule

Week 1 (January 21st ) Big Picture


Week 2 (January 28th ) Representation


**Week 3 (February 4th) Race & Ethnicity**


**Week 4 (February 11th) Gender**


**Week 5 (February 18th) Presidency**


**Week 6 (February 25th) Congress**


**Week 7 (October 21st ) The Judiciary**


**Week 8 (March 4th) Bureaucracy**


James Q. Wilson, Bureaucracy (2000 ed.), 3-30


**Week 9 (March 11th ) Public Opinion & Political Psychology**


***SPRING BREAK No class March 18th ****
**Week 10 (March 25th) Campaigns & Elections**


David Redlawsk, Caroline J. Tolbert, and Todd Donovan, “Iowa and the 2012 Presidential Nomination Campaign: Revisiting the Effects of Iowa and New Hampshire on Subsequent Nomination Contests” APSA 2012 Paper. (this is an updated version of Ch. 7 from *Why Iowa*)


* No Class April 1st WPSA Conference**

**Week 11 (April 8th) Political Parties**


**Week 12 (April 15th) Interest Groups**


**Week 13 (April 22nd) Social Movements**


**Week 14 (April 29th) Civic Engagement & Political Culture**


**FINAL PAPER OR TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE May 6th. Time TBD.**