Proseminar in American Political Institutions  
PSCI 5030-001  
Fall 2019

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**Office Hours:** M/R 1-2:30pm  
**Class:** W 2-4:50pm, Wooten 111

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**Course Overview**

This course focuses on American political institutions and their place in the American political system. First, we will underscore some of the important approaches scholars take to studying institutions and, ultimately, publishing their findings. Next, we will proceed through each of the major political institutions, both in and outside of government. In other words, we will examine prominent research on each of the following institutions: Congress, the presidency, bureaucracy, courts, and mass media. We will conclude with a discussion of representation, which constitutes the linkage between the people and institutions in a democratic government, and sets the stage for the next proseminar in American political behavior. Throughout the course, we will discuss and analyze findings of the scholarly community.

This seminar is designed to introduce you to a broad spectrum of research, classic and current, on American political institutions. As you will be reading much of the important and relevant literature, you will develop a broad grasp of American political institutions, be introduced to important questions asked by researchers and yet to be answered. As an introduction, this class is not sufficient for your full understanding and appreciation of any of the covered topics.

Because this seminar is structured to encourage you to speak often about the readings and write a unique, conference-style research paper on American political institutions, you should leave the seminar with improved critical thinking and writing skills, and a frame of thinking about American politics using rigorous logic, not analysis by anecdote.

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**Course Assignments**

1. **Class Participation** 25 %
2. **Discussion Leader & Papers** 20 %
3. **Annotated Bibliography** 10 %
4. **Paper Presentation** 10 %
5. **Research Paper** 35 %
**Research Paper:** The final paper is a research paper that addresses a major question in American political institutions. You should begin thinking about your paper early, and may wish to glance ahead at a topic that you find interesting. This paper should not be seen as an end in itself. I strongly urge you to use this paper as a way of thinking about your dissertation or thesis. At the very least, this paper should serve as a foundation for a conference paper. The paper should follow APSA formatting and style.

This paper may take of the form of a research design in which you identify a specific research idea and begin developing hypotheses using systematic reasoning and theoretical thinking. You are not required to actually gather data and test the hypotheses, although extra work of this sort is encouraged. Indeed, the most useful papers (to you and your career) will make a strong attempt to collect and analyze at least a sample of data.

As part of the research paper grade, I require you to write and submit a one page proposal that will do the following: ask a question you will attempt to answer; identify some literature that you will read; and express why this might be an important paper. You should think of this proposal as the beginning of your conversation with me about your research paper. Therefore, I expect to see you about your research paper, whether before, during, or after (or all three!) you write this proposal. Although the final due date for the proposal is **October 9, 2019** you are more than welcome to turn in a proposal or seek my guidance earlier than that.

**Class Presentation:** During the last weeks of the semester, each of you will present your research paper to the class. This will be a conference-style presentation, meaning that you should limit your presentation to 12 minutes.

**Discussion Leader:** Each student will be assigned responsibility to lead one or more weekly meetings. Although I will assist and add to the discussion, it is the responsibility of the discussion leader to identify the major themes, questions, and topics for the week, raise questions and criticisms, and engage other students in a lively and productive conversation about the topics. Each student may have their own style for leading the class discussion—one may prefer to move thematically through the material, while another may wish to treat each article as its own.

Each discussion leader is also expected to write a 5-page critical overview of that week’s readings. I do not expect an article-by-article summary but rather a well-argued and organized paper that threads each article through a dominant theme. The paper should be typed, double-spaced, and turned in at the beginning of class. Please provide copies to your classmates at the beginning of seminar, or ahead of time via e-mail.

**Annotated Bibliography:** You will compute an annotated bibliography of 12 sources related to American political institutions. You may not annotate articles from the required readings, but you may use annotate some of the books and articles listed among the additional readings. I will provide a rubric which will clarify my expectations. The bibliography is due on **October 30, 2019**.

**Class Participation:** I expect each of you to demonstrate a comprehensive grasp of the assigned readings on a weekly basis and to do so by speaking about the readings each week. Only if you think about and grapple with the implications and limitations of the readings will you be able to develop your own insights. Speaking effectively is also a skill necessary for your career.
Articles and Books: Most, if not all, articles are available through JSTOR or the library’s electronic journal databases. Selections from books are available on this course’s page in Canvas.

Required Texts

Other Resources
One purpose of this class is to introduce you to key literature in multiple areas. Even a seminar like this, nevertheless, only scratches the surface of what is available. Two additional resources can help you to supplement your knowledge. These are: (1) The *Annual Review of Political Science* and (2) *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Both are available through the UNT digital library. Literature is arranged topically, is generally up to date, and will provide you with a general overview of important research. These sources are summaries and may not be used in the annotated bibliography.

Policies of General Importance

Americans with Disabilities Act Statement: The University of North Texas is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal opportunity legislation; reference Public Law 92-112 – The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. With the passage of new federal legislation entitled Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation, you must contact the Office of Disability Access before accommodations can be given.

Students who wish to utilize the testing center must first complete an Alternative Test Request form from the Office of Disability Access that must be signed by the instructor for each course and exam that he or she wishing to take at ODA Testing Center. The form must then be turned in to ODA's main office at the University Union Suite 322A at least 72 hours prior to any regularly scheduled exam and 1 week before a final exam. Please visit [http://www.unt.edu/oda/index.html](http://www.unt.edu/oda/index.html)

Academic Misconduct: Academic Integrity is defined in the UNT Policy on Student Standards for Academic Integrity. Any suspected case of Academic Dishonesty will be handled in accordance with the University Policy and procedures. Possible academic penalties range from a verbal or written
admonition to a grade of “F” in the course. Further sanctions may apply to incidents involving major violations. For policy and procedures: http://facultysuccess.unt.edu/academic-integrity.

For more information on what constitutes plagiarism, please visit: http://abacus.bates.edu/cbb/

**Sexual Discrimination, Harassment, & Assault:** UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Federal laws (Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act) and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, and therefore prohibit sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking, and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. UNT’s Survivor Advocates can assist a student who has been impacted by violence by filing protective orders, completing crime victim’s compensation applications, contacting professors for absences related to an assault, working with housing to facilitate a room change where appropriate, and connecting students to other resources available both on and off campus. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-565-2648. Additionally, alleged sexual misconduct can be non-confidentially reported to the Title IX Coordinator at oeo@unt.edu or at (940) 565 2759.

**Acceptable Student Behavior:** Student behavior that interferes with an instructor’s ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at www.unt.edu/csrr.

**Course Materials and Copyright Statement:** The handouts used in this course are copyrighted. By “handouts,” I mean all materials generated for this class, which include but are not limited to syllabi, quizzes, exams, in-class materials review sheets, and additional problem sets. Because these are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy the handouts, unless I expressly grant permission.

**Course Schedule**

**Week One**  August 28  
**Course Introduction**
APSA Style Manual and JOP Style Guide

**Week Two**  September 4  
**Interest Groups**


**Additional Reading**


**Week Three  September 11  Congress I: Electoral Connection**


**Additional Reading**


**Week Four  September 18  Congress II: Parties and Decisions**


**Additional Reading**


Week Five  September 25       Presidency I: Power


Additional Reading

Week Six  October 2       Presidency II: Institutions and Decisions


Additional Reading
Week Seven    October 9    Congress and the Presidency

Bond, Jon and Richard Fleisher. 1990. *The President in the Legislative Arena.* University of Chicago Press. (Selected chapters)

Additional Reading

Week Eight    October 16    Courts

Segal, Jeffrey A. and Harold Spaeth. 2002. *Supreme Court and the Attitudinal Model Revisited.* New York: Cambridge University Press. (Chapters 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8)

Additional Reading
Lax, Jeffrey R., and Kelly T. Rader. 2010. “Legal Constraints on Supreme Court Decision Making:

**Week Nine October 23 Bureaucracy**


**Additional Reading**


**Week Ten October 30 Media**


**Additional Reading**

Baum, Matthew A. 2006. *Soft News Goes to War: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy in the New Media Age.*


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**Week Eleven November 6 Institutional Agenda-Setting**


Week Twelve November 13

**Representation**


**Additional Reading**


*The Federalist, #10*

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Week Thirteen November 20

**Paper Workday**

**Weeks Fourteen (11/27) and Fifteen (12/4) Paper presentations & Papers due**

**Assignment: Research Paper**

The research paper should address a question related to American political institutions. You may research any topic that relates, but I suggest that you focus on one of the daily or weekly topics to narrow your choices. You could write, for instance, on the relationship between the presidency and
Congress in light of recent evidence suggesting that Congress is becoming more partisan; how Congress responds to Supreme Court decisions; or what role the news media play in curbing the expansion of government power.

Even though the semester artificially constrains the time it takes to complete a research paper, your goal should be to submit a complete, quantitative or qualitative paper with data and analysis. The data and analysis may be brief and preliminary, but you must make an effort to collect and analyze data. Overall, the paper will focus on a particular area of American political institutions, research a question in that area, assess the weight of the evidence, and make an argument: what is the relationship, for example, between speeches and presidential success in Congress? Is the evidence convincing? Where is the argument not convincing? Are there any questions remaining in this area of the literature that you think political scientists should explore? You should cover most of the important literature on your topic. I do encourage you to begin some preliminary data collection as soon as possible. The point is that if you can begin working now on what will be your dissertation, you are more likely to finish within five years. If you are an MA student, then your paper in this class may provide the foundation of your thesis.

The first step to writing a good paper is organization. Use an outline. If you know how information fits into your paper before you write, you will find writing to be much easier. Use headings. Headings will allow you to break up a lengthy paper into several smaller papers. This will also make writing easier, especially if you have not yet written an 18-20 page paper in your graduate career.

Most importantly, this paper will follow a standard, conference paper format for political science. Your paper will have a title page, with all of the appropriate information, including the title of the paper, your name, and your contact information. You will write an abstract that will be placed on page two, alone. Next, you begin writing your paper with a standard introduction of about 1-2 pages. The introduction will do just that: introduce your research topic by placing your research question briefly in the context of appropriate literature. The introduction will also serve to organize the rest of your paper and tell the reader why your topic is important. The literature review section of the paper follows the introduction. Here, you will review the literature that pertains specifically to your research question. The following section will be your theory section, where you apply previous research to your own argument. Here, you will also suggest some hypotheses that are clearly argued and supported by previous research. Although I do not expect you to collect all data, you will at least need to develop a research design and demonstrate that you know how to operationalize your theoretical concepts and analyze those variables. You should include a data and methods section in your paper to this end. Your findings follow, with a conclusion or discussion section wrapping up your paper. See the APSA style manual assigned during the first week of the semester for more information.

You should include a reference list and cite all references in the text, consistent with the style of the *American Journal of Political Science*. Each table should be numbered consecutively and on a separate page after the references. Please see the APSA style manual for additional information and advice.

This research paper should be about 20 pages of text in length. It should be typed (of course), in either New Times Roman or Garamond, 12-point font. Use margins of 1.0 inches, and number your pages. Your papers must follow these formatting guidelines. Formatting might seem inconsequential, but I assure you it is not.
To simulate a conference presentation environment, each student will present their paper in a 12-minute presentation on the last week of the semester. Each student will also be responsible for discussing one other students’ paper after the presentation. For this reason, your paper is due one week before presentations are made. We will determine discussant assignments by early November.