1 Course Description

This course introduces students to the study of political behavior, particularly as it pertains to mass publics in the United States. Political behavior is construed broadly so that it encompasses the psychology of political decision-making and the dynamics of opinion formation, as well as concrete political behaviors like voting and political action. The course is designed to introduce the major theoretical approaches, methodological controversies, and enduring questions dealing with these subjects.

I have three goals for students in this class. First, I expect them to grasp the basic concepts, arguments, data, methods, and findings found in political behavior research. Second, I anticipate good students will do more than simply learn the material, opting instead to use their critical faculties to develop a sense of the subfield’s limits. Finally, students are required to make a scholarly contribution by conducting research on a relevant topic.

These are ambitious goals, but consistent with what you will find in other graduate courses in the discipline. Consequently, there is a heavy workload in this class. Most recognizably, substantial reading is assigned each week (see the attached graphic). Some of it is highly technical, employing advanced statistical techniques or mathematical models that take some time to interpret. We will grapple with statistical or modeling questions in class to some degree, but students should also try to interpret this material by themselves. To be perfectly blunt, this means that class preparation will take multiple days each week since students must read and reflect on each assigned reading.

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By appointment
The usual caveat for graduate courses applies here—this syllabus is a only subset of research that is available for consumption. Ph.D. students who plan to test in the American politics subfield must move beyond the assigned readings when preparing to write for exams. Moreover, true understanding of research in this subfield can only come through additional reading, thought, and criticism. For those who want to pursue a deeper understanding of citizen politics, the syllabus provides some recommended readings.

2 Course Philosophy

The study of political behavior is associated most strongly with an American brand of political science, one that has its roots in the scholarship of Charles Merriam (a failed politician) and his contemporaries at the University of Chicago during the 1920s. In broad strokes, the underlying issue revolves around the capacity of people for engaged and reasoned democratic citizenship. Drawing on ideas espoused by Mills, Rousseau, Locke, and others, the idea is that a basic condition of democracy is for citizens to be capable of acquiring, processing, and acting on political information in a manner consistent with their preferences.

While this emphasis leaves out a number of important political behaviors (e.g., how do people act in non-democracies?), it outlines two basic themes that stretch through behavioral research. One focuses on the capacity of citizens. How much knowledge do people possess about politics? What factors influence how much information they possess? How do people use information to formulate political preferences and make political judgments? What is it that people think about politics? How engaged are they? A second theme focuses on how the social and political environment facilitate citizenship. Does the mass media expose people to sufficient amounts of factual information? Does that information influence how people perceive politics? What are the consequences of social and geographic context for political behavior? Do those consequences produce better or worse aggregate outcomes? These questions can all be boiled down to whether the environment facilitates citizenship and whether people are capable of filling the role prescribed to them by democratic theory.

The selection and organization of course material reflects these themes. The first section focuses on the foundations of political behavior research, outlining the primary normative questions and definitions that underpin this subfield. The second section outlines theoretical traditions, each of which highlights different processes that influence how people think and act politically. The range of ideas introduced here ranges from psychological dimensions of behavior to the influence of national context on human action. The third section takes up substantive issues. Here we will examine what research on political behavior has to say about topics that are of most interest to current scholars.
3 Course Requirements and Graded Evaluation

3.1 Overview
There are four requirements for this class: class preparation and participation, weekly memoranda, a supplemental reading review and presentation, and a research paper. The weight assigned to these requirements is below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Reaction Memoranda</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supplemental Reading Review</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Week of your choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>April 23rd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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3.2 Class Preparation and Participation
Attendance and participation are mandatory for this course. It is imperative that you come prepared to discuss all course material each week. Be prepared to answer the following questions for each of the assigned readings:

1. What is the main contribution of the reading to scholarly knowledge?
2. What theoretical tradition is the reading working within or in contrast to?
3. What hypotheses are offered for empirical analysis?
4. What are the data and measures used in the paper? What methodological techniques are used to analyze the data? Are the data and methods appropriate for evaluating the theory and hypothesis?
5. What are the main findings?
6. What are the implications of the theory and results for our understanding of political behavior?
7. What are your criticisms of the research?

Active participation accounts for 200 points towards your final grade. These points are based on my qualitative assessment of how actively you engage the material and class, the quality of that engagement, and your ability to forcefully but respectfully engage classmates.

3.3 Weekly Reaction Memoranda
Every student is required to turn in weekly memoranda that summarize reactions to and reflections on the week’s readings. After they are written, they should be posted online by no later than 12:00 p.m. each Monday. Memoranda should not summarize the readings, but should outline thoughts on the week’s theme and/or specific readings for the week. Students will receive one of three grades—completed, acceptable, or outstanding—on each weekly memoranda. The final grade for the semester will be based on the instructor’s subjective view of how diligently and competently these memoranda were completed.
3.4 Supplemental Reading Review and Presentation

Each student will select one topic on the syllabus for in-depth focus. They will read an assigned book on that topic (listed under “Presentation”) and write a 3-4 page summary for distribution to their classmates. Grades will be based on the clarity of writing, the quality of the summary and critique, and the overall thoughtfulness of the paper. The paper is due on line the day of the assigned reading.

3.5 Research Paper

The primary requirement of this class is a research paper (15-20 pages) on a topic of the students choice. The goal is to identify a research question in the field of political behavior and to conduct an empirical investigation aimed at answering this question. Students who have passed POLS 500b or a comparable methods course are required to use data in their paper (although they need not use quantitative data). Students who have not yet passed a quantitative methods course have the option of turning in a combined literature review/research design in lieu of an empirical paper. Ideally, this paper will eventually be a conference paper and/or journal submission. You may work on your paper with a classmate, as long as you secure my permission. And if you are also enrolled in Prof. Habel’s seminar on “Media & Politics,” you are welcome to submit the same paper in this class if you 1) secure his permission, 2) secure my permission, and 3) write a paper that is appropriate for both classes.

3.6 Grading Scale

1000 to 900  A
899 to 800  B
799 to 700  C
699 to 600  D
Below 600  F

4 Class Policies

4.1 Absences

You are expected to attend every class period. If you arrive after attendance is taken, you will be considered absent for the day. If you must miss class for some reason, you can receive an excused absence by contacting me in advance. I reserve the right to see documentation for your absence and to decide what constitutes a reasonable excuse. If you must miss class, you are responsible for finding out what you missed.
4.2 Missed Assignments
All assignments are due on the date assigned. Any assignment not turned in on time will lose half a letter grade for each day it is late. Any assignment more than 48 hours late will not be accepted. **It is considered bad form to turn in late work in graduate classes, so I encourage you to meet your deadlines.** See “Problems and Emergencies” for the only exceptions to this policy.

4.3 Incompletes
There will be no incompletes given in this class except in cases of emergency or where university policy applies to the contrary.

4.4 Cheating and Academic Misconduct
Any student engaging in academic misconduct will receive an F in my course and be reported to the Dean. I will also recommend your expulsion from the graduate program. I suggest that, as a start, you use the following common sense criteria to ensure your work does not violate scholarly standards:

- Group work not approved by the instructor constitutes academic fraud.
- Representing anyone else’s written work as your own is plagiarism.
- Representing anyone else’s ideas as your own is academic misconduct.
- Using unauthorized resources on exams or in papers is cheating.
- Turning in work from other classes without permission is academic misconduct.

If you have any questions about what constitutes cheating or academic misconduct, you should examine the university policy and/or ask the instructor prior to turning in any assignment.

4.5 Problems and Emergencies
If a problem or emergency arises that prevents you from attending an exam, turning in a paper, or coming to class, you should contact Professor McClurg as soon as possible. The best way to contact me is via email (mcclurg@siu.edu). If you do not hear back from me within a reasonable amount of time you may call me. Students contacting me **prior** to missing an assignment will receive greater leniency. You are welcome to clarify what I consider to be an acceptable excuse to me at any point in the semester.
4.6 Grading Policies and Standards

Graded material is returned as promptly as possible. When students receive an assignment back and are dissatisfied with their grade, they must wait at least two days before asking for a review. To request such a review, the student must submit a single-spaced, one paragraph note explaining why the original grade is inappropriate. All assignments submitted for review can be graded up or down by the Professor.

4.7 Disability Policy

It is the policy of this university and professor to help disabled students succeed in the classroom. The student is responsible for notifying the professor and university of any special problems or needs as soon as possible. The professor and university is responsible for doing whatever they can within university policy to accommodate that student’s needs. It is in your best interest to notify the professor and university immediately so that arrangements can be made as soon as possible. More information is available from Disabled Student Services.

5 Reading Assignments

This course is an intensive learning experience. You will learn primarily by reading and then discussing that material with your peers. Accordingly, there is a lot of reading for this course. A great deal of this reading is in five required books that are available from the University Bookstore. Other readings are available on-line at JSTOR (http://www.jstor.org), in the library, or through the Desire2Learn website (accessed at http://online.siu.edu).

5.1 Required Books


5.2 Recommended Books


6 Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

6.1 Foundations

6.1.1 Week 1—January 15. Why study political behavior?

Required Reading.


**Recommended Reading.**


6.1.2 Week 2—January 22. What are opinions and preferences?

**Required Reading.**


**Recommended Reading**


### 6.1.3 Week 3—January 29. Rationality and reason

**Required Reading.**


**Recommended Reading.**


6.2 Theory

6.2.1 Week 4—February 5. Thinking about politics and why it matters

**Required Reading.**


**Recommended Reading.**


**Presentation.**


### 6.2.2 Week 5—February 12. Families, peers, friends, and groups

**Required Reading.**


- Rolfe, TBD

**Recommended Reading.**


**Presentation.**


### 6.2.3 Week 6—February 19. Local geography and context.

**Required Reading.**


- Gelman et al., Chapters 1, 2, & 3


**Recommended Reading.**


**Presentation.**

6.2.4 Week 7—February 26. Elites and media.

Required Reading.

- Zaller, Chapters 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, and 12.

Recommended Reading.


Presentation.


6.2.5 Week 8—March 5. Cross-national context and institutions

Required Reading.

- Gelman, Chapters 4 (skim), 5 (skim) & 7


**Recommended Reading.**


**Presentation.**


6.2.6 **Week 9—March 12. Spring Break**

6.3 **Substance of Political Behavior**

6.3.1 **Week 10—March 19. Public opinion.**

**Required Reading.**


• Gelman, Chapters 6 & 8


Recommended Reading.


Presentation.


6.3.2 Week 11—March 25. Political knowledge.

Required Reading.

• Prior, Chapters 1 (skim), 2 (skim), 3, 4, & 5

Recommended Reading.


**Presentation.**


**6.3.3 Week 12—April 2. Voter turnout.**

**Required Reading.**


- Rolfe, *TBD*

**Recommended Reading.**


**Presentation.**

6.3.4 Week 13—April 9. Political participation.

Required Reading.


Recommended Reading.


Presentation.


6.4 Special Topics

6.4.1 Week 14—April 16. Disagreement and deliberation.

Required Reading.


Recommended Reading.


Presentation.


6.4.2 Week 15—April 23. Tolerance, fear, and identity.

Required Reading.


**Recommend Reading.**


**6.4.3 Week 16—April 29. Political communication and persuasion**

**Required Reading.**


• Prior, Chapters 6, 7, & 8

**Recommended Reading.**


Other Papers of Potential Interest


Figure 1: This graph shows roughly the number of assigned pages for each class week. Plan accordingly, especially since much of this technical reading.