POLI 251: American Political Institutions

University of California San Diego | Winter 2022
Tuesday 12:00-2:50pm
Updated January 18, 2022

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This course introduces doctoral students to some of the major themes in American political institutions. It is designed to prepare students for the Institutions portion of the comprehensive exam in the field of American Politics.

Course Requirements
The most important requirement of the course is to read the assignments for each week carefully and critically before class. They will form the focus of our discussions in class. Be aware that some of your reading of some items will affect your reading of other items in the current week or a future week; we will discuss these links.

1. **Class Participation (40%)**: Participation is an integral part of the course. You are expected to come to each class having done the assigned readings and ready to discuss the material. Each student will be assigned two classes to be a discussion leader in; each class will be led by 2 students. For a class that you lead, you will post a list of discussion questions for the rest of the class by 12pm on Monday before class and you will lead the discussion for the first half of the Tuesday class. Your participation grade will reflect both your preparation and leadership for the classes that you lead, as well as your individual participation in classes led by other students. We will assign which classes each student will lead in the first week.

2. **Short Review Paper (20%)**: Over the course of the quarter, you are to complete 1 short paper (2-3 pages double-spaced) in response to an assigned reading. For the reading of your choice, your paper should (a) identify and discuss the empirical, theoretical, or methodological contribution, and (b) explain any weaknesses or potential extensions that could provide paths for future research. Your paper is due by the start of the class in which we will be discussing the reading that is the subject of your paper.
3. **Final Paper (40%)**: There is much in the American institutions literature that is not represented here. Your final paper for this course will be an analytical literature review and in-class presentation on some aspect of the institutions literature that we did not cover – or did not cover as deep as your own interest – in class. You are encouraged to choose a topic that is related to your own research interests.

A few guidelines: Do not merely restate or summarize what has been done; put an analytical frame on the literature, and use that analytical approach to identify what is known and not known on the given subject. Your paper should be approximately 10 pages in length. This is a good opportunity to start exploring an area of research in which you are interested in working.

**Schedule**

The readings under each date are to be completed for that class meeting.

**January 4 – Introduction / Overview**

**January 11 – Congress I**


**January 18 – Congress II**


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\(^1\)Available through UCSD at: [http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft809nb53m/](http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft809nb53m/).


**January 25 – Parties**


**February 1 – The Presidency**


**February 8 – The Bureaucracy**


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3Available through UCSD at: https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/veto-bargaining/F174085E5D19AFF6789FDAD2F58129341.  
4Available through UCSD at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt15hvxnf.  


**February 15 – Executive-Legislative Relations**


**February 22 – Courts**


**March 1 – Interest Groups and Lobbying**


March 8 – Literature Reviews Due; Student Presentations