POLI 251: American Political Institutions

University of California San Diego | Winter 2021
Tuesday 12:00-2:50pm
Updated December 31, 2020

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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/Weekly Memos (50%)**: To facilitate discussion, each week every student will write a short memo (400-500 words) based on the assigned readings. This memo should address the following questions: (i) What are the most important take-aways from the readings? (ii) What issues do the readings raise but not adequately address? That is, what do the readings suggest about promising directions for future research?

You will be responsible for completing and circulating your memo to the class each week. *Each weekly memo will be due by Monday 9:00am, before each Tuesday class*, to ensure that everyone has time to read each other’s memos before class. We will circulate memos through a class email list.

In addition: Each week, a pair of students will be responsible for starting the discussion. The pair will prepare a 20 minute presentation on the readings. The presenting students should focus on the ideas and theories in the readings, and expand upon the memos that they wrote for the week. We will determine the schedule for this during the first class.
2. **Final Paper (50%)**: 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 12 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 (and are the readings for the weekly memo due the day before that class).

**January 5 – Introduction / Congress: History and Development**

*The Federalist Papers, Nos. 10, 51.*


**January 12 – Congress: Electoral Foundation**


January 19 – Congress: Organizational Structure


January 26 – Congress: Parties and Polarization


Other suggestions:


¹Available through UCSD at: http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft809nb53m/.
February 2 – The Presidency

Neustadt, Richard. 1960. Presidential Power. Chapters 1-5 required, all chapters recommended.3


February 9 – The Bureaucracy

Wilson, James Q. 1989. Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It. Chapters 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 17.


February 16 – Executive-Congressional Relations


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4Available through UCSD at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt15hvxnf.

5Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247947716_The_Politics_of_Bureaucratic_Structure.

6Available through UCSD at: https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/veto-bargaining/F174085E5D19AFF678FDAD2F58129341.


**February 23 – Courts**


**March 2 – Interest Groups and Lobbying**


**March 9 – Literature Reviews Due; Student Presentations**