PO 711: American Politics Field Seminar

Instructor: Katherine Levine Einstein
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Office Hours: Mondays 1-3 and by appointment

Class Time: Mondays 9:00 AM-12:00 PM

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar acquaints graduate students with both classic and more recent approaches to studying major questions in American politics. Substantively, the course surveys a range of topics from civic engagement to the functioning of and interactions between political institutions to American political behavior. Furthermore, the readings employ diverging methodologies spanning the gamut from historical-institutional analyses, to formal models of politics, to quantitative approaches. While the course is designed to provide graduate students with a solid foundation from which to begin their preparation for the general examination in American politics, it cannot provide a complete survey of the American subfield in a single semester. Students should be sure to familiarize themselves with the list of recommended readings supplementing those from the course itself in preparing for their examinations.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Sixty percent of your grade for the course will be comprised of one midterm examination (35%) and class participation (25%). Because this is a seminar course, participation in class discussions is particularly important – please come to class each week prepared to discuss and engage one another about all of the materials for that week.

The second half of your grade is comprised of an original research project. In addition to beginning students’ preparation for the general exam in American politics, one of the course’s primary goals is to give every student the experience of preparing and presenting a research paper akin to one that you might present at a professional conference. A formal, conference-style presentation (approximately 10-12 minutes) of your research given on the last day of class to your peers will count for 15% of your grade. Power point, overheads, etc. will be available to assist you in presenting and discussing your research. The final paper itself, of approximately 20-25 pages, will comprise the final 25%. For the paper, you may either write a traditional seminar paper or a research proposal describing a slightly more ambitious project. While research
proposals do not require you to actually execute the proposed analysis, they should review and interpret the relevant literature, develop a significant hypothesis about some facet of American politics and situate it within the relevant literature, and clearly describe a research design by which you could test the hypothesis. The paper will be due, in electronic format by email, at 5pm on May 5. Late papers will be docked a full letter grade for each day late.

ACADEMIC CONDUCT:

As a reminder, plagiarism or cheating of any kind is strictly prohibited. Please be aware of the following Boston University policy: “All students are responsible for having read the Boston University statement on plagiarism, which is available in the Academic Conduct Code. Students are advised that the penalty for cheating on examinations or for plagiarism may be ‘… expulsion from the program or the University or such other policy as may be recommended by the Committee on Student Academic Conduct, subject to approval by the dean.”

REQUIRED BOOKS


THE LINEUP

January 26: INTRO/AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

Steinmo, Sven. 1994. “American Exceptionalism Reconsidered: Culture or Institutions.” In The


February 2: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT


Skocpol, Theda and Morris Fiorina, ed. 1999. Civic Engagement in American Democracy.


February 9: PUBLIC OPINION, POLITICAL BEHAVIOR


February 16: No class (PRESIDENT’S DAY)

February 17 (TUESDAY): MEDIA POLITICS

Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.


February 23: ELECTIONS

Lynn Vavrek. The Message Matters. Chapters 1-3, 5


March 2: PARTIES


Key, 1949. Southern Politics in State and Nation, chs. 1, 15, 24

March 9: Spring break
March 16: CONGRESS


March 23: PRESIDENCY


March 30: INTER-INSTITUTIONAL DYNAMICS


April 6: BUREAUCRACY


April 13: MIDTERM EXAM

April 20: No class. Patriot’s Day

April 22 (Wednesday): COURTS


April 27: RACE AND GENDER


April 29: INTEREST GROUPS AND POLICY AGENDAS AND RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

