CLASSICS IN AMERICAN POLITICS

COURSE DESCRIPTION
The purpose of this seminar is to introduce the core questions, concepts, and theories of the field through the "classic" works. We developed this seminar in response to graduate students who believed that too many graduate courses in American politics had lost sight of the forest by examining the trees in too much detail (or in some cases, by putting parts of each branch and leaf under a microscope). Advanced seminars typically focus on cutting edge research that often assumes the reader is familiar with the foundational questions and theoretical debates. However, most graduate students do not have time to go back and read the original works that motivate contemporary research. This seminar will provide that opportunity. A related issue concerns the methodology employed in classic and current research. Many first-year students (and other advanced students who have not had statistics) have difficulty plowing through the technical work that is assigned in many American politics seminars. The onslaught of numbers, equations, and formal models in the APSR or AJPS can be impenetrable. The classic works assigned here rarely employ any methods more sophisticated than descriptive statistics or simple OLS. While it is vital to master the more technical approaches, a prior requirement is to understand the important theories and issues in the field.

What defines a “classic?” In my view, it depends on whether a work identified an enduring insight, changed the direction of a subfield, asked a vital question nobody had thought to ask previously, or served as a foundation for subsequent developments and insights with an influence that may have lasted for decades (or yet remains).

Most of them are from the 1970s and earlier, although there are a few from the 1980s or 1990s.

Learning Outcomes: While the primary aim of the seminar is to introduce you to the central questions and concepts in the field, we will spend some time each week developing your research skills. We will examine the methods employed by the authors, discuss whether the methods were appropriate for answering the question at hand, how the methodological choices may have helped shape the research, and how more recent work that you are familiar with has extended (or undercut) the insights of these classic works. Another way to do this is to ask (a colleague at OU has envisioned this as a possible career-capping book), What if V.O. Key had Stata?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1) The quality of this seminar depends on participation from all of you. Everyone is expected to read the required readings by the day of the seminar and be willing and able to participate meaningfully in discussions. It is essential to have a good understanding of each

1 I mean this. The rule is simple: you are welcome to drop in any time. I will either see you right there, or we will make an appointment for a convenient time in the next few days.
reading, not only individually but also how they fit together. Before each seminar you may find it useful to write down an outline of the questions and issues that you see as central (and make sure to bring these up, even if discussion seems to be heading in a different direction).

2) You will write five short papers (three to four pages) that critically review the readings for a given week. You will not be required to do outside reading for these papers. The papers should be heavy on the critique and light on the review of the various articles and books.

3) You will be responsible for a presentation, during a week of your choice, of the research that was spawned by a given classic (or set of classics for that week). You also will be responsible for preparing an annotated bibliography for that week of the subsequent work on the topic and how the work has influenced contemporary research. Your presentation, which should be about 10-15 minutes, should outline the main directions of research, a critique of the body of work, and remaining important questions on the topic.

4) There will be a take home final paper. We will discuss the format in class.

5) The normal expectation is that students spend 2 hours in reading and preparation for each credit. I regard that as a minimum.

6) The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Please see me if you require such accommodations.

COURSE EVALUATION

Seminar participation (including the bibliography and presentation) is 35% of your grade, the short papers are 40% (8% each), and the final exam is 25% of the final grade.

COURSE READINGS

The following books are required. I did not place an order at the bookstore, as I am certain you can get a better deal on used copies at any number of places (there are also plenty of library copies available):


The other readings will be available on Canvas at Learn@UW.
COURSE OUTLINE

I. Introduction
January 29th – Studying American Politics (We will discuss the following readings in the first seminar meeting).

II. Political Institutions

A. February 5th – The State (and Congress)

B. February 12th – The President

C. February 19th – The Courts

D. February 26th – The Bureaucracy


**E. March 5th – Political Economy**


**III. Parties and Groups**

**A. March 12th – Pluralism and the Collective Action Problem**

*Federalist* #10


Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, 1965, 1-51 (you may skip 22-33 and read the "non-technical summary"), 111-67


**B. March 19th – Political Parties**


**March 26th – Spring Break**

**C. April 2nd– Partisan Realignments**


**IV. The Individual in Politics**

**A. April 9th – Voting**


**B. April 16th – Participation**


**C. April 23rd – Public Opinion**


**V. Who Governs?**

**April 30th**

