SYLLABUS
PLSC 404 – Selected Problems in Political Science
Loyola University Chicago
Spring 2018

Wednesday 7:00 – 9:30 pm
Mundelein 617 (officially)
Coffey 326 (unofficially)

Instructor
Eric Hansen
Email: ehansen4@luc.edu
Office Location: Coffey Hall 326B
Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 11:00 am – 12:30 pm; or by appointment

Course Description and Objectives
This seminar covers political institutions in the context of the United States. American institutions include not only the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the federal government, but also include state and local governments, electoral rules, extragovernmental organizations, and civic norms. Institutions create incentives for citizens and elites to take some political actions and avoid taking others. However, institutions are far from immutable—they persist as long as they allow the political actors working within them to achieve their underlying objectives.

This course takes a bottom-up approach to political institutions. We start small—studying the institutions that citizens encounter in their day-to-day lives—and work our way up through national governing institutions. We finish by studying the products of our institutions: public policy.

The primary objective of the class is for students to gain skills and confidence in interpreting and critiquing contemporary literature on American political institutions. By successfully completing the class, students should be able to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of research across a variety of subjects. They should also be able to apply lessons from this substantive body of work to their own research interests.

The secondary objective of the class is for students to become more familiar with foundational literature in American institutions so that they are better prepared to teach undergraduate classes in American politics. At least one article each week will be foundational. The remainder of the foundational readings will appear under the “recommended” readings each week as a resource for students to reference outside of our class discussions.

Required Texts
We will read the following books in their entirety.


**Optional Texts**
We will read excerpts from the following books. Scanned copies of reading selections will be posted on Sakai, but students may wish to obtain their own copies.


**Grades**
Final grades for the course will be based on the following scale. I reserve the right to make adjustments to individual grades based on overall performance in the course and/or extenuating circumstances. There will be **NO** extra credit provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Percentage Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>63-66.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60-62.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59.99 or below</td>
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The proportion of each assignment as part of your overall grade is as follows:

- **Participation:** 30%
  - **Active Discussion:** 15%
  - **Discussion Questions:** 15%
- **Writing Assignments:** 45%
- **Final Exam:** 25%
Participation

Participation grades will be comprised of two components: active discussion and discussion questions.

Active Discussion

This seminar requires active participation from students every class period. There may be some days when I prepare a short lecture, but we will spend a vast majority of our time discussing the assigned reading. To spare us from awkwardly sitting in silence, students should prepare by (a) actively reading the assigned material (i.e. reading in a low-distraction environment, taking notes while reading) and (b) coming to class prepared to ask questions—even if those questions are to clarify the reading. Active participation in the discussions will account for 15% of the grade.

Discussion Questions

To help students prepare for discussion and to add some structure to the reading, all students must submit three (3) discussion questions about the day’s reading to Sakai by 9 pm the night before the class meeting (i.e. Tuesday nights). Students should submit them under the appropriate day’s thread in the “Forum” tab on the class Sakai site. I will incorporate the discussion questions that students submit into that week’s lesson plans. I will grade discussion questions on the quality of the question and the timeliness of submission. Discussion questions are worth 15% of the class grade.

Discussion questions should be open-ended and allow for disagreement and extended dialogue among seminar participants.

Examples of good discussion questions:

- Theoretical questions
  - Why does the author think that democratic nations are less likely to go to war? What are other potential explanations?
- Methodological questions
  - Why do you think the author chose this method to provide evidence? What other research design(s) could the author have used?
- Critiques
  - What problems do you see in the author’s use of an online survey sample?

Examples of bad discussion questions:

- Factual questions
  - Where did the author conduct the field experiment?
- Yes or no questions
  - Did the author use multinomial regression to test the hypothesis?
Writing Assignments

Students will complete and submit three “mini” research designs on topics covered over the course of the semester. For each research design, students must choose a topic relevant to the material covered within that third of the semester. The following topics will be in bounds for each of the three assignments:

- Due 2/28: Norms/Attitudes, Civil Society, Interest Groups, Federalism & Subnational Politics, Media
- Due 4/4: Party Formation/Alignment, Campaigns/Elections, Congressional Representation, Congressional Parties
- Due 5/2: Congressional Organization/Procedure, Presidency, Courts, Bureaucracy, Public Policy

Many students taking this course will not have substantive research interests falling in American politics (though the American case is an interesting one in the comparative context!). Students may write research designs on topics related to the course content but set in contexts more immediate to their research interests. For example, a research design for the period covering the week on Congressional representation/the electoral connection would be welcome to write a research design testing theories of constituency representation in Brazil. When in doubt, feel free to ask me to vet your topic ahead of time.

Research designs should consist of four single-spaced (or eight double-spaced) pages. Research designs should consist of the following elements:

- Statement of a theoretical puzzle or problem
  - A research question that is interesting and important, and that has not been answered (or at least satisfactorily answered) in previous research
  - A “Why” question is necessary—a good research design will seek to explain rather than describe a political phenomenon.
- Theory (and Literature Review)
  - A good research design should have a theory—an explanation of a political process—at its core.
  - Avoid spending too much time reviewing relevant literature. Citations should be added in support of your original thinking in developing the theory. The theory section should not be a summary or laundry list of previous works.
  - Students should not be afraid to assert their original thoughts in articulating a theory. Replicating and extending prior work can contribute valuable knowledge to the field, but relying too much on prior work to generate ideas can prevent students from overturning conventional wisdom (when appropriate) and developing new knowledge. Previous research should help inform the theory—but it’s not always the most important part.
- Hypothesis Formation
  - Students should explicitly present one or more hypotheses derived from the theory.
Hypotheses are testable implications of an abstract theory. Ask yourself, “If the theory were true, what sorts of events or outcomes could we expect to observe in the real world?”

Methodology

- Students are not required to gather data and test the hypotheses for this assignment. However, students should make extensive plans for how they would plan to test their hypotheses using current, accepted research methodologies.
- Be specific in describing the research methodology. The following scenario might be helpful to giving you an idea of an ideal research design. Imagine that you and a fellow student are given your research design, put into separate labs without the ability to communicate, and asked to execute your design. Your fellow student should be able to replicate exactly the tests that you intend to conduct based solely on the text of the research design.
- Make sure you describe the data you would use (or you would need to collect) as well as the statistical test or method of analysis you would use to analyze the data. If you plan to collect original data, describe how exactly you would collect the data.
- Make sure you also address the appropriateness of your proposed test for answering the question in the theory section. For example, if there are potential issues of generalizability or selection bias, address them.

Final Exam

The final exam is intended to be practice for your comprehensive exams. The exam will consist of essay questions designed to test your comprehension of the assigned material. Even more importantly, the final exam will test your ability to synthesize the material and apply lessons from it to conduct your own research and answer to more fundamental questions the discipline faces.

The final exam will be a take home exam. Students can think of it as a “mini-comp”—questions will be designed similar to the way that students will see them in the comprehensive exams. I will email students the exam at the beginning of finals week. Students must return their exam to me by email no later than the end of the scheduled final exam period.

The final exam will be designed to take no longer than four hours to complete. Students are strongly discouraged from spending more than four hours on the exam. Quite frankly, you have better things to do with your time than spending an entire day or several days on one exam. (Good test grades won’t get you a job—good publications will.) Moreover, since this exam mimics the comprehensive exam, this is a golden opportunity for students to simulate the comp and practice performing under time pressure.

Communication, Office Hours, Question about Grades

Please direct all communication with me outside class or office hours through my campus email account, which can be found in the header of this syllabus. I check my campus email account several times daily and will try to reply to student emails as quickly as possible. That being said, students should not necessarily expect me to reply immediately to emails sent to me at the last
minute. I may not be able to reply to questions about course material the morning of an exam or provide resources for writing assignments the night before it is to be turned in.

My office hours exist solely for you to visit me with questions about this class. If you can’t make those times, email me to schedule a more convenient appointment time. Email is only for brief communications. If you have long and complicated questions, come to my office hours. After I have graded and returned your assignments, there is a twenty-four hour moratorium before I will answer questions about that assignment.

Technology Use
I will allow the use of laptops, tablets, or other devices in class. However, if I suspect that devices are being used for purposes other than a resource to further discussion or take notes, I reserve the right to curtail or prohibit their use in class. The use of cell phones or other mobile communication devices is strictly prohibited during class, except in the event of an emergency. Cell phones minimally should be put on silent but preferably should be turned off. Students discovered using their phones during class time will be asked to turn off their phones and place them out of reach.

Students with Disabilities
Loyola University Chicago provides reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with Services for Students with Disabilities (SSWD), located in Sullivan Center, Suite 117. Students should provide me with an accommodation notification from SSWD, preferably within the first two weeks of class. Students are encouraged to meet with me individually in order to discuss their accommodations. All information will remain confidential. For more information or further assistance, please call (773) 508-3700 or visit http://www.luc.edu/sswd.

Academic Integrity
Students are responsible for adhering to university policy on academic honesty and avoiding acts of plagiarism or cheating. Students can find more information about what constitutes plagiarism at the Writing Center’s website: (http://www.luc.edu/writing/studentresources/onlinereresources). Consult the College of Arts and Sciences’ statement to learn more about college policy: (http://www.luc.edu/cas/advising/academicintegritystatement). I reserve the right to case-by-case discretion in assigning penalties for acts of academic dishonesty. Generally speaking, however, students should expect to receive a score of “0” on any assignment or exam where they are observed plagiarizing, cheating, or passing off someone else’s ideas as their own. If a student commits more than one act of academic dishonesty during the semester, I will fail that student in the course. I report all instances of academic dishonesty to the Office of the Dean of the College of Arts and Science.

Readings
Students are expected to complete weekly reading assignments in preparation for class. Read carefully and be ready to discuss the material, as discussions based around these readings will form the basis of the participation component of your grade. I reserve the right to make changes to the reading list and will inform students well in advance of any changes.
All reading assignments are to be completed by the beginning of class on the day the assignment is listed. Students are responsible for obtaining their own copies of the books by Skocpol (1/24), Boydstun (2/14), and Lee (3/21). All other chapters and articles will be posted on Sakai. Students may not share course materials with others outside of the class without my written permission.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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| 1/17 | Introduction; Civic Norms and Democratic Attitudes | **Required: Introduction**  
- This syllabus  

**Required: Norms and Attitudes**  

**Recommended**  

| 1/24 | Civil Society | **Required**  

**Recommended**  
- Alexis de Tocqueville. 1840. *Democracy in America.*  
**Required**


**Recommended**

Federalism & Subnational Politics

**Required**

**Recommended**

Media

**Required**
### Recommended:

- Jeffrey Berry and Sarah Sobieraj. 2014. *The Outrage Industry: Political Opinion Media and the New Incivility*.

### Required


### Recommended

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Parties, Campaigns, and Elections</th>
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**Required**


**Recommended**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3/7</th>
<th>Spring Break – No class meeting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3/14</td>
<td>Congress: Electoral Connection and Representation</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Congress:</td>
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• Laurel Harbridge. 2015. *Is Bipartisanship Dead?* |
<p>| 3/28  | Internal  | Required                                                                 |</p>
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<tr>
<th>4/4</th>
<th>Presidency</th>
<th>Recommended</th>
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<th>4/11</th>
<th>Bureaucracy</th>
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<td><strong>Recommended</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>4/18</td>
<td>Courts</td>
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<td>• Ryan Black and Ryan Owens. 2016. “Courting the President: How Circuit Court Judges Alter Their Behavior for Promotion to the Supreme Court.” <em>AJPS</em> 60:30-43.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommended</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Jeffrey A. Segal and Harold J. Spaeth. 2002. <em>The Supreme Court and the Attitudinal Model Revisited.</em></td>
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<tr>
<th>4/25</th>
<th>Policy Making</th>
<th>Required</th>
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</table>
### Bibliography


### Recommended

- Bryan Jones and Frank Baumgartner. 2015. *The Politics of Information: Problem Definition and the Course of Public Policy in America*.

### Disclaimer

I reserve the right to make any changes to this syllabus as circumstances change throughout the semester. Any changes will be announced over email and, when possible, verbally in class well in advance of the changes taking effect.