

**POSC 803: Proseminar in American Politics**

Mondays, 2.00-5.00pm Eastern

Prof. Phil Jones  
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Student hours:  
Th/Fr 3.30-5.00pm; schedule an appointment [here](#).

This graduate class provides a whistle-stop introduction to the vast political science literature on American politics. Although this type of seminar inevitably sacrifices depth for breadth, we will encounter several themes running throughout the course, among them: how American democracy is supposed to work and how it does; how interests are expressed by citizens and represented in government; and how power is distributed across groups and institutions in society. By the end of the course, students will be familiar with many of the classic works in the subfield, understand the different research designs that scholars use to analyze American politics, and be conversant with some of the major debates that animate our discipline.

Beyond becoming more knowledgeable about the American politics subfield, my hope is the seminar helps you to move from being *consumers* of research to being *communicators* and *producers*. The course and assignments are designed to give you opportunities to develop new skills that will be central to your own teaching and research. Even if American politics is not your main focus, I hope that these skills put you in a good position to succeed throughout graduate school and beyond.

**Required materials**

In an effort to reduce the cost of the course, I have mostly assigned journal articles and excerpts from books. You will need to obtain copies of two books that we will be reading the majority of (used and old editions should be fine):

- (1) Vavreck, Lynn. 2009. *The Message Matters: The Economy and Presidential Campaigns*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- (2) Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

## How your work will be assessed

Your final grade will be based on several assignments, each explained in more detail below:

Reading summaries (6 total)	25%
Response papers (4 total)	20%
Discussion participation and leadership	25%
Final paper	30%

All assignments are due at 11.59pm the night before our weekly meeting.

### Reading summaries

You will submit six summaries of the week's readings total, three from the "behavior" half of the course (Public opinion; Political participation; Voting; Candidates and campaigns; and The media), and three from the "institutions" half (Congress; The Presidency; The Courts; Parties; Interest Groups; Representation and responsiveness). These should be brief and objective descriptions that will refresh your memories when writing your final paper or studying for comps.

Summaries must follow a specific format: no longer than 1 page per reading, with double-spaced 12pt font and 1 inch margins (with the exception of books we read many chapters of; these can be longer if necessary). Each summary must include the following, clearly marked:

1. The full citation for the reading
2. What main research question is the reading seeking to answer?
3. What theory and hypotheses does the reading put forward as a potential answer to the question?
4. What evidence does the reading use? Explain what the data, dependent variable, and independent variable(s) are. How are they used to test the theory and hypotheses?
5. What are the main results?
6. What are the implications of these findings? Do they support the theory? What do they mean for the research question, the literature in this area, our understanding of the subject matter?

Each point should be 1-3 sentences. Keep the information objective: evaluations of the argument, critique of its evidence, etc, should be reserved for response papers and our discussions. These summaries will be evaluated based on how accurate, concise, and informative they are.

### Response papers

You will submit four response papers analyzing and critiquing the readings. It is up to you which weeks you choose to write on. These must be between three and four pages, double-spaced, in 12pt font and 1 inch margins. These are not the place to summarize; instead, note strengths or weaknesses of research designs, questions that went under- or un-addressed in the readings, possible solutions to competing findings, extensions for future work, etc.

### Discussion leadership

To help you move from being consumers to communicators of knowledge, each week one student will prepare several discussion questions for us to consider. These will be circulated on Canvas ahead of time. Discussion questions can focus on one reading at a time, span all the readings, or a combination of the two. They should identify points of interest, confusion, or controversy in the readings, and be crafted to open up a discussion among participants (see the reading for our first meeting; I will usually cover “Knowledge” and “Comprehension” type questions).

### Discussion participation

As you will have figured out, grad school seminars require active participation and this one is no different. Since we will be a small group, you will need to come with your notes and the texts of the readings, fully prepared to engage with our conversation.

### Final paper

To help you move from being consumers to producers of knowledge, you will also submit a final research paper. This can take one of two forms, either:

- (a) A paper that mimics the “front end” of a journal article, including a clear research question, well-synthesized literature review, and detailed research design. You do not have to do the actual research, but should lay out all the necessary steps to do so. In particular, you will want to make sure that someone could write up items (2)-(4) on one of our research summaries for it; *or*
- (b) Two shorter papers that provide reviews of how the literature has answered a “major” question animating the field. One question will be drawn from the “behavior” half of the course, one from the “institutions” half. You will use the required and recommended reading for each week, and extensive additional sources, to give a detailed answer to these questions.

No matter which option you choose, you will submit a brief note about your choices on Canvas by May 3rd, so that I can provide some feedback and guidance before you start writing. For option (a), this should include the research question you are proposing and a brief overview of your research design. For option (b), this should include the two major questions you are proposing to answer.

### Grading

For each assignment other than the final paper, I will use a simple metric of ✓+, ✓, ✓-, or unscored. These roughly correspond to grades of A, A-, B+, and B, respectively. I am more interested in seeing your skills improve over the semester than mechanistically translating checks into grades however. Therefore, I’ll look at your overall performance and its trajectory before assigning final grades. These initial scores are to give you a sense of where your work is falling throughout the course.

I strongly encourage you to discuss concerns or questions you have about grading, scores, and your performance in the course throughout the semester. Let’s talk in office hours or at another mutually convenient time.

**A note on academic honesty**

I have zero tolerance for academic dishonesty of any kind and report any suspected cases immediately to the appropriate committee.

Please familiarize yourself with [UD's policies in this regard](#). To falsify the results of one's research, to steal the words or ideas of another, to cheat on an assignment, to re-submit the same assignment for different classes, or to allow or assist another to commit these acts corrupts the academic process. You are expected to do your own work and neither give nor receive unauthorized assistance. If you are unsure about what constitutes dishonest work, ask: there are also [UD resources available online](#).

## Course schedule and readings

For each week's topic, I have selected a handful of what I view as the most significant and path-defining works. I have tried to include both classic and more contemporary readings, from a range of methodological and theoretical perspectives. But, to be clear: this is one person's selection, and only a tiny fraction of what we could have covered if we only had unlimited time. So, please think of this *not* as an encyclopedia of the subfield, but rather like a playlist that features some (but not all) of the greatest hits, curated to flow nicely and give a sense of a larger genre. The "recommended" reading on Canvas includes some of the many other books and articles that could have easily been on this list, and I encourage you to look through those pages for topics that pique your interest.

Some of the major overarching questions that the readings tackle are shown *in italics* for each week; these are not the only things we'll be discussing when we meet, but they represent the kind of broad questions each of the subfield literatures are tackling.

Our schedule is not set in stone. It is possible that there may be some changes, but you can expect these to be announced in class and via email with adequate notice. Finally, readings marked with a [C] in the list below are available on Canvas. If you cannot find a reading, ask me for help.

### Feb. 15: Introduction and the *Federalist Papers*

*How did the Founders view humans' political nature? What's the problem with factions (and what was their solution)? Why did they create a system of separated powers with checks and balances?*

Most of this meeting will be taken up with administrative tasks. We will assign discussion leadership responsibilities for the rest of the semester, so make sure you look over the topics and decide which you are most interested in leading discussion on.

To frame the course, we will discuss several of the *Federalist Papers*. These were essays written between 1787 and 1788 to persuade New Yorkers to ratify the new U.S. Constitution. Since two of the three authors had helped write the Constitution, the *Federalist Papers* are still used to interpret the Founders' thinking.

- (1) *Federalist* #1, 10, 39, 47-8, & 51. <https://www.congress.gov/resources/display/content/The+Federalist+Papers>

In addition to this required reading, there are several guides on Canvas that I strongly recommend you look over. These include non-technical explanations of regression analyses and experimental methods; a guide to writing effective discussion questions; and help on efficiently reading large amounts of academic text.

**Feb. 22: Public opinion**

*How ideological is the mass public? How are their attitudes about politics organized? Do surveys measure citizens' real attitudes about politics? What is the relationship between elite politics and public opinion? How do low-information voters make sense of politics?*

- (1) Converse, Philip E. 1964. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics". In *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David Apter. New York, NY: Free Press pp. 206–261. [C]
- (2) Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Chs 2-7, 11 (skim), 12.
- (3) Popkin, Samuel L. 1991. *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Prologue, Chs 1 & 3. [C]

**Mar. 1: Political participation**

*Who takes part in politics? What motivates them to participate? Why does it matter?*

- (1) Brady, Henry E., Sidney Verba and Kay Lehman Schlozman. 1995. "Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation." *American Political Science Review* 89(2):271–294.
- (2) Rosenstone, Steven J. and John Mark Hansen. 1993. *Mobilization, Participation and Democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan. Ch 6. [C]
- (3) Barreto, Matt A. 2007. "¡Si Se Puede! Latino Candidates and the Mobilization of Latino Voters." *American Political Science Review* 101(3):425–441.
- (4) Gerber, Alan S., Donald P. Green and Christopher W. Larimer. 2008. "Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment." *American Political Science Review* 102(1):33–48.

**Mar. 8: Voting**

*Why do people vote the way they do? How should we interpret the meaning of elections?*

- (1) Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York, NY: Harper and Row. Chs 1, 3. [C]
- (2) Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes. 1960. *The American Voter*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chs 2 & 6. [C]
- (3) Fiorina, Morris P. 1981. *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Chs 1-2. [C]
- (4) White, I.K., & Laird, C.N. (2020). *Steadfast Democrats: How Social Forces Shape Black Political Behavior*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chs 1, 3. [C]

**Mar. 15: Recoop Day #1, no class meeting**

*The only requirement for this week is to take some time for yourself without feeling guilty. Binge watch something trashy, make a nicer meal than the usual, look at animal pictures online, whatever chills you out. Just no work for this class.*

**Mar. 22: Candidates and campaigns**

*How much do campaigns matter for election outcomes? What can campaigns do to win? Why are some people more likely to run for office, and does it make a difference to the outcome?*

- (1) Vavreck, Lynn. 2009. *The Message Matters: The Economy and Presidential Campaigns*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. [Skim Ch 6]
- (2) Jacobson, Gary C. 1989. "Strategic Politicians and the Dynamics of House Elections, 1946-86." *American Political Science Review* 83:773–793.
- (3) Fox, Richard L. and Jennifer L. Lawless. 2004. "Entering the Arena? Gender and the Decision to Run for Office." *American Journal of Political Science* 48(2):264–280.

**Mar. 29: The media**

*Do the media affect public opinion? How and why? What have been the major changes in the news landscape over the past few decades, and how have they influenced citizens?*

- (1) Iyengar, Shanto and Donald Kinder. 1987. *News That Matters: Television and American Opinion*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Chs 2, 3, & 7. [\[C\]](#)
- (2) Lenz, Gabriel S. 2009. "Learning and Opinion Change, Not Priming: Reconsidering the Priming Hypothesis." *American Journal of Political Science* 53(4):821–837.
- (3) Prior, Markus. 2005. "News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science* 49(3):577–592.
- (4) Hayes, Danny and Jennifer L. Lawless. 2018. "The Decline of Local News and Its Effects: New Evidence from Longitudinal Data." *Journal of Politics* 80(1):332–336.

**Apr. 5: Congress**

*How should we model congressional lawmaking? Where does power lie in Congress? What drives Members of Congress' votes and activity?*

- (1) Krehbiel, Keith. 1998. *Pivotal Politics: A Theory of U.S. Lawmaking*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Chs 2-3. [C]
- (2) Cox, Gary W. and Mathew D. McCubbins. 2005. *Setting the Agenda: Responsible Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Chs 1-3, 5. [C]
- (3) Lee, Frances E. 2009. *Beyond Ideology: Politics, Principles, and Partisanship in the U.S. Senate*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Chs 1, 4. [C]

**Apr. 12: The presidency**

*How much power do presidents have? What can presidents do to get their agenda passed in a system of separated powers? Has presidential power changed over time?*

- (1) *Federalist* #69-70. <https://www.congress.gov/resources/display/content/The+Federalist+Papers>
- (2) Neustadt, Richard E. 1960. *Presidential Power*. New York, NY: Wiley. Chs 1, 3. <https://heinonline-org.udel.idm.oclc.org/HOL/Contents?handle=hein.presidents/prdtpwr0001>
- (3) Kernell, Samuel. 2007. *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership*. 3rd ed. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press. Chs 1 & 2. [C]
- (4) Howell, William G. 2003. *Power without Persuasion: The Politics of Direct Presidential Action*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chs 1 & 2. <https://www-jstor-org.udel.idm.oclc.org/stable/j.ctt15hvxnf>

**Apr. 19: Recoop Day #2, no class meeting**

*As in March, spend the time you would have done on this class doing something nice for yourself. It's an official break from POSC803.*



**Apr. 26: The courts**

*What is the role of the courts in the U.S. system? How do Supreme Court Justices decide how to rule? Are judges just “politicians in robes”? How does the judicial branch interact with the others?*

- (1) *Federalist* #78. <https://www.congress.gov/resources/display/content/The+Federalist+Papers>
- (2) Segal, Jeffrey A., and Harold J. Spaeth. 2002. *The Supreme Court and the Attitudinal Model Revisited*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Extracts. [C]
- (3) Segal, Jeffrey A., Chad Westerland, and Stefanie A. Lindquist. 2010. “Congress, the Supreme Court, and Judicial Review: Testing a Constitutional Separation of Powers Model.” *American Journal of Political Science* 55(1): 89-104.
- (4) Frymer, Paul. 2003. “Acting When Elected Officials Won’t: Federal Courts and Civil Rights Enforcement in U.S. Labor Unions, 1935-85.” *American Political Science Review* 97(3): 483-499.

**May 3: Parties**

*What are political parties? How do they structure our politics? Are they good or bad for democracy? How do parties and other social groups interact?*

- (1) Revisit your notes on *Federalist* #10 from Feb. 15.
- (2) Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York, NY: Harper and Row. Chs 7 & 8. [C]
- (3) Frymer, Paul. 2010. *Uneasy Alliances: Race and Party Competition in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chs 1-2. [C]
- (4) Mason, Liliana. 2018. *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Chs 3-5 & Appendix. [C]

\*\*\*Final paper proposal due May 3 at 11.59pm\*\*\*

**May 10: Interest groups**

*When and how do interest groups form? Who do groups represent and what do they stand for? What do interest groups get out of lobbying government?*

- (1) Olson, Mancur. 1965. *The Logic of Collective Action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Introduction, Chs 1 & 6. [C]
- (2) Hansen, John Mark. 1985. “The Political Economy of Group Membership.” *American Political Science Review* 79(1):79–96.
- (3) Strolovitch, Dara Z. 2006. “Do Interest Groups Represent the Disadvantaged? Advocacy at the Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender.” *Journal of Politics* 68(4):894–910.
- (4) Hall, Richard L. and Frank W. Wayman. 1990. “Buying Time: Moneyed Interests and the Mobilization of Bias in Congressional Committees.” *American Political Science Review* 84(3):797–820.

**May 17: Representation and responsiveness**

*What does it mean to be represented well? For government to be responsive? How well does the political system represent citizens, and when is it most likely to be responsive?*

- (1) Stimson, James A., Michael B. MacKuen and Robert S. Erikson. 1995. "Dynamic Representation." *American Political Science Review* 89:543–564.
- (2) Gilens, Martin and Benjamin I. Page. 2014. "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens." *Perspectives on Politics* 12(3):564–581.
- (3) Griffin, John D. and Brian Newman. 2007. "The Unequal Representation of Latinos and Whites." *Journal of Politics* 69(4):1032–1046.
- (4) Broockman, David E. and Christopher Skovron. 2018. "Bias in Perceptions of Public Opinion among Political Elites." *American Political Science Review* 112(3):542–563.

\*\*\*Final paper due May 24 at 11.59pm\*\*\*

## ADDITIONAL POLICIES

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### DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

If, at any time during this course, I happen to be made aware that a student may have been the victim of sexual misconduct (including sexual harassment, sexual violence, domestic/dating violence, or stalking), I am obligated to inform the university's Title IX Coordinator. The university needs to know information about such incidents in order to offer resources to victims and to ensure a safe campus environment for everyone. The Title IX Coordinator will decide if the incident should be examined further. If such a situation is disclosed to me in class, in a paper assignment, or in office hours, I promise to protect your privacy — I will not disclose the incident to anyone but the Title IX Coordinator. More information on sexual misconduct policies, where to get help, and how to report information, is [available online](#). UD provides 24-hour crisis assistance and victim advocacy and counseling. Contact 302-831-1001, UD Helpline 24/7/365, to get in touch with a sexual offense support advocate.

### HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION

The University of Delaware works to promote an academic and work environment that is free from all forms of discrimination, including harassment. As a member of the community, your rights, resources and responsibilities are reflected in the [non-discrimination and sexual misconduct policies](#).

The University of Delaware does not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, genetic information, marital status, disability, religion, age, veteran status or any other characteristic protected by applicable law in its employment, educational programs and activities, admissions policies, and scholarship and loan programs as required by Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and other applicable statutes and University policies. The University of Delaware also prohibits unlawful harassment including sexual harassment and sexual violence.

You can report any concerns to the University's Office of Equity & Inclusion, at 305 Hullihen Hall, (302) 831-8063 or you can report anonymously through UD Police (302) 831-2222 or the EthicsPoint Compliance Hotline at [www1.udel.edu/compliance](http://www1.udel.edu/compliance). You can also report any violation of UD policy on harassment, discrimination, or abuse of any person [online here](#).

### INCLUSION OF DIVERSE LEARNING NEEDS

Any student who thinks they may need an accommodation based on a disability should contact the [Office of Disability Support Services](#) (DSS) office as soon as possible. The DSS office is located at 240 Academy Street, Alison Hall Suite 130, Phone: 302-831-4643. We will work together to find accommodations for you that ensure you can get the most out of the class as possible.