Course Overview

This research seminar is intended as a broad survey of the literature on electoral behavior and politics. The central focus of the course will be on congressional elections, but much of what we discuss will have direct relevance for the study of elections more generally. As such, we will focus on the behavior of “strategic” politicians, the electoral connection, the incumbency advantage, congressional campaigns, representation, and election outcomes. Since this is an election year, we will also be spending some time understanding how political scientists seek to explain why some candidates seeking elective office win while others lose. Throughout the course, we will pay attention to current political and scholarly controversies (as well as some “classics”) in terms of identifying important research questions as well as examining and improving upon existing research designs. By the end of the course, you should have a better understanding of the nature of elections research, even thought it would be impossible to cover all facets of electoral behavior in a single graduate seminar.

Required Texts


Course Materials

The readings for the course will be drawn from the list of books above, in addition to several scholarly articles each week. On occasion, we may also read unpublished papers (which will generally be made available electronically). Required books are available for purchase from the usual sources or may be checked out from the library. Unless otherwise indicated, articles for a given week can be downloaded from www.jstor.org or from the UGA library (http://www.libs.uga.edu/ejournals/). Please keep in mind that assigned readings or the course schedule may be altered at the discretion of the instructor.

Course Expectations and Evaluation

You will be required to complete a number of written assignments in this course. First, there will be three critical evaluations of the assigned readings, each for one of the weeks of the course. I would expect this to run something like 5-6 double-spaced pages. These reviews should summarize, analytically synthesize, and critique the literature in the particular area of emphasis. More effort and attention should be focused on analysis and criticism and comparatively less on summarization. You have some leeway in terms of when to turn in your critical evaluations, with the only restriction being that two must be completed prior to the midpoint of the semester (October 2nd) and the remaining one due before the Thanksgiving break. These writing assignments will represent 30% of your course grade.

The other writing assignment will involve you completing a research paper on a selected topic by the end of the semester. These research projects will be judged by the same criteria I would apply to a paper delivered at a professional conference or one submitted to a journal. Your completed research paper will be due no later than December 4th, when all students will be required to make a brief presentation about their specific paper topic. This paper will represent 40% of your overall course grade. I will provide more details on each of these assignments in the first few weeks of the course and I would encourage each of you to contact me as early in the semester as possible to begin making arrangements for your research project.

The remainder of your grade (30%) will depend on your active participation in the course. On any given day, you may be asked to lead the discussion on one or more of the assigned articles or books. As such, you are expected to read all of the assigned material, to analyze it seriously, and to demonstrate that you have read and mastered that material by sharing your views and evaluations with the class (you want to understand what the author is trying to say and do, and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the author’s theoretical framework, methodology, and substantive conclusions). If you do not do this, you will not be able to receive an “A” in the class. Remember that this class is a collaborative enterprise. For the seminar to be a useful learning experience you must come to class every week and be prepared to participate in discussions. You alone are responsible for taking an active role in shaping your intellectual development and your research agenda. Both energetic and thoughtful participation in graduate seminars is a necessary step in that process.

Incompletes and Late Assignments

A survey of graduate studies directors would reveal that incompletes are one of the best predictors of failure to complete a graduate program. In addition, they cause numerous headaches for students and faculty. As such, incompletes will only be given in this course under exceptional circumstances. As a rule, late assignments will not be accepted unless approval is obtained in advance from the instructor.
Instructor Availability

If you would like to speak with me outside of class time, feel free to stop by my office (Baldwin 304B) or schedule an appointment. Keep in mind that occasionally I have meetings during the day and may be unavailable. To ensure that I am in my office on a given day, email me (carson@uga.edu) ahead of time to set up a specific time to meet. I generally also respond quickly to email inquiries.

Academic Integrity and Special Needs

All students are responsible for maintaining the highest standards of honesty and integrity in every phase of their academic careers. The penalties for academic dishonesty are severe and ignorance of the policy is not an acceptable defense. Students with special needs that require accommodation should notify me and the Office for Disability Services as soon as possible so the appropriate arrangements can be made.

Tentative Course Schedule (Assigned readings are to be completed by the dates listed below)

August 14 – Introduction and Overview of Course

August 21 – The Electoral Connection in Congress


Recommended:


August 28 – Congressional Elections and Electoral Accountability


Recommended:


September 4 – Congressional Primaries


Brady, David W., Hahrie Han, and Jeremy C. Pope. 2007. “Primary Elections and Candidate Ideology: Out of Step with the Primary Electorate?” Legislative Studies Quarterly 32(February): 79-105.


Recommended:


September 11 – Ambition and Strategic Politicians


Recommended:


September 18 – The Incumbency Advantage


Recommended:


September 25 – The Incumbency Advantage II


**Recommended:**


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**October 2 – Redistricting and Representation**


**Recommended:**


October 9 – Money and Election Outcomes


Recommended:


October 16 – Money and Election Outcomes II


Recommended:


**October 23 – Congressional Campaigns**


Recommended:


October 30 – Media and Elections


Recommended:


November 6 – Presidential Elections


Recommended:


**November 13 – Midterm Elections**


Recommended:


**November 20 – No Class (Thanksgiving Break)**
November 27 – U.S. Senate Elections


Recommended:


December 4 – Research Presentations

December 6 – Final Exam Period (3:30-6:30 p.m.)