This seminar focuses on the study of modern democratic institutions and their political consequences. We will emphasize both theoretical ideas and empirical research on political institutions and consider some of the core topics of inquiry in the comparative study of institutions. These include: electoral systems and party systems, legislatures, parliamentary and presidential institutions, coalition formation, courts and judicial power, federalism, etc. Added emphasis will be placed on ideas that can or have been subjected to empirical scrutiny, and a good part of the seminar will be devoted on assessing the strength of certain theories in light of empirical evidence. The ability to interpret statistical evidence is a prerequisite for mastery of course material and all participants are expected to have completed at least one course in data analysis. A review of background concepts and nomenclature will be presented in the first class meeting.

Assigned reading consists primarily of journal articles, book chapters, and occasional notes that I will hand out in class. Unless otherwise indicated, reading should be completed before class meetings and students are expected to participate in discussion. While the amount of required reading is relatively small, some readings are likely to prove challenging at the beginning of the course. You are advised to start reading early in the week and to seek my advice in office hours should any questions arise. I will request written summaries of specific readings ahead of class meetings. During each meeting, I will expect you to contribute significantly in summarising and discussing assigned readings. Your overall contribution in class discussions will form a significant component of your final grade.

EVALUATION

Your grade will be based on:
- class participation (20%),
- written summaries (5%),
- midterm exam (30%), and
- final exam (45%).

If you are taking the ‘W’ version of the course, then grading is based on:
- class participation (15%),
• written summaries (5%),
• midterm exam (20%),
• term paper (30%), and
• final exam (30%).

EXAMS

The midterm exam will take place in class on October 18 and will consist of identification terms and essay questions. I will make a list of possible identification terms available ahead of time. The final exam is scheduled for Monday, December 19. It is going to have the same format as the midterm.

EXTRA WRITING REQUIREMENT

Students that opt for the ‘W’ version of the course, are required to complete a term paper. The paper should be ten to twelve (10-12) pages long (excluding annotated bibliography) and focus on one of the topics covered in class. It should contain a succinct statement of the question you are trying to answer, a literature review, and a presentation of the evidence brought to bear on the question. You may choose from a set of sample paper topics that I will make available in class. You are requested to submit a one-page summary of your paper by October 15. An annotated bibliography is due no later than October 31st. A draft should be submitted by the end of November. The final paper is due on December 15.

MISCELLANEOUS POLICIES

I expect all deadlines to be met. Extensions are granted rarely and only under serious extenuating circumstances. There are no extra credit provisions.

OUTLINE OF THE COURSE

Week 1 (9/6): Organizational meeting.
A refresher on reading and interpreting regression analysis. The spatial model. Agenda setting and veto power. Course overview.

Week 2 (9/13): Electoral systems I
• Ordeshook, P. and Shvetsova, O. 1994. "Ethnic heterogeneity, district magnitude, and the number of parties." AJPS, 38 (Feb.): 100-123.
Week 3 (9/20): Electoral systems II

Weeks 4 (9/27): Legislative Procedures

Weeks 5 (10/4): Veto players
• Notes to be distributed in class.

*** W REQUIREMENT: ONE PAGE SUMMARY OF PAPER DUE 10/15 ***

Weeks 6 (10/18): Midterm

Weeks 7 (10/25): Presidential systems

*** W REQUIREMENT: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE 10/31 ***

Weeks 8 (11/1): Coalition formation
• Notes to be distributed in class.

Weeks 9 (11/8): Cabinet allocation

Weeks 10 (11/15): Government survival

Weeks 11 (11/22): Courts and Bureaucracy

Weeks 12 (11/29): Federalism and Decentralization

*** W REQUIREMENT: DRAFT OF PAPER DUE ON 11/29 ***

Weeks 13 (12/6): Policy Outcomes I

Weeks 14 (12/13): Policy Outcomes II

*** W REQUIREMENT: PAPER DUE ON 12/15 ***

*** FINAL EXAM SCHEDULED FOR MONDAY, DECEMBER 19 ***