

Syllabus, PSC 202, Spring 2014

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course website

All the information you need for the course is at a site we've set up on google sites (**not** on blackboard). The address is: <https://sites.google.com/site/the202site/>

the theory of this course

Most courses in the political science department are meant to help you to master a particular body of substantive knowledge. For instance, when I teach a course on the U.S. Presidency, I aim to have my students understand (among other things) how the content of legislation restricts the range of actions available to the President. PSC 202 is very different. I am not trying to convey knowledge of any particular subject, but instead to help you develop a set of **skills** and **habits**. Broadly, these skills and habits are meant to help you become a **participant** in political science — not just spectator, but a person with his or her own critical perspective, who is able to gain understanding and see the implications of any given piece of original writing in the field. In short, by the end of this class you should be able to pick up any article from political science journal and know how to go about understanding it and forming your own views about its claims, arguments and significance.

course meetings

With the exception of the first and last meetings (1/16 and 4/30), this course is divided into 8 3-meeting blocks and 1 2-meeting block, with each block associated with a single reading:

block	meeting	reading
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	dates	
1	1/21,23,28	Andersen, R., & Fetner, T. (2008). Economic inequality and intolerance: Attitudes toward homosexuality in 35 democracies. <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> , 52(4), 942-958.
2	1/30, 2/4,6	tbd
3	2/11,13,18	tbd
4	2/20,25,27	Kelly, N. J., & Enns, P. K. (2010). Inequality and the dynamics of public opinion: The self-reinforcing link between economic inequality and mass preferences. <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> , 54(4), 855-870.
5	3/4,6	tbd
6	3/18,20,25	tbd
7	3/27, 4/1,3	Rigby, E., & Wright, G. C. (2013). Political parties and representation of the poor in the american states. <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> , 57(3), 552-565.
8	4/8,10,15	tbd
9	4/17,22,24	tbd

Your core work in this class is to construct three types of responses to every reading: A sketch of the **research logic**, ideas for **possible extensions** and a characterization of the reading's wider **significance**. Our class periods are working sessions in which you will actively engage with your peers to construct these three products. The amount of time within each three-day block that we allocate to each of these tasks will vary through the semester. For instance, we will use all three sessions of the first block to work on research logic. I will keep you up-to-date on our plans for each session throughout the semester -- and those plan will change depending on how the class is doing.

You are not required to attend any class meetings. In fact, for many of our sessions, *you have to do work to earn the right to attend*. I do this through a system called **ticket to class**. A ticket to class is a short assignment that you do on the web before coming to class. For any session in which a ticket to class is required, you must submit your ticket (i.e. complete the assignment) by 11:59 pm on the night before the session. The ticket to class system is there to make sure that everyone comes prepared to engage in the work we do, and to allow me to assess what we need to focus on in our class time. Note also that tickets to class are not graded. The act merely as their name suggests: determining whether or not you may attend class. In general, they amount to "best guesses" on questions about the reading -- so, if you choose, you can earn your "ticket" with a very small amount of work.

Which class sessions will require a ticket will vary from one block to another. The relevant class

session and the deadlines for the tickets will be posted on this website.

required work and grading

There are three different types of assignments on which you will be graded:

- research logic briefs
- extension papers
- synthesis papers

Research logic briefs

You will be graded on one research logic brief for each of the 9 blocks in the course. The research logic brief for each block amounts to short answers to three questions about the reading we are studying in that block:

1. What is the author's/authors' main claim? *Or* What is the author's/authors' main question?
2. What does/do the author/authors take to be the observable implications of his/her/main claim? *Or* What does/do the author/authors take to be the possible answers to the main question, and what does/do he/she/they take to be the observable implications of each answer?
3. What does/do the author/authors do to try to confirm or disconfirm those observable implications?

Due dates for the research logic briefs are as follows:

block	research logic brief due-date
1	Wednesday, 1/29 by 11:59pm
2	Friday, 2/7 by 11:59pm
3	Wednesday, 2/19 by 11:59pm
4	Friday, 2/28 by 11:59pm
5	Friday, 3/7 by 11:59pm
6	Wednesday, 3/26 by 11:59pm
7	Friday, 4/4 by 11:59pm
8	Wednesday, 4/16 by 11:59pm
9	Friday, 4/25 by 11:59pm

Extension papers

An extension paper is a short (no more than 5 pages) essay in which you propose and describe a possible extension to the research described in one of the assigned readings. In particular, your paper must

- State a question left un-answered by the reading, and explain why the answer to that question

matters.

- Describe a strategy for getting an answer to that question.

During the semester, you are required to write 4 extension papers. If you do not turn in 4 extension papers, you fail the course. (so, turning in 4 blank sheets of paper called "extension papers" by the relevant deadlines is potentially better than turning in nothing at all). You have the option to write more than the minimum number of extension papers. In the end, only the 4 highest-graded of the extension papers you submit count towards your grade. You can write an extension paper on any of the blocks starting with block 2. Thus you can write 8 extension papers, only the best 4 of which will count towards your grade.

To be counted, any paper you submit must be submitted by the deadline. I only accept late papers if you obtain permission to submit late from me **before** the deadline, and in the case of documented genuine emergencies. I only accept extension papers that are properly formatted -- they must be no more than 5 pages, double spaced, in no-less-than 12 pt font, and with no-less-than 1-inch margins. The deadlines for the extension papers are:

paper	deadline
extension paper for block 2	Sun, 2/8 by 11:59pm
extension paper for block 3	Sun, 2/23 by 11:59pm
extension paper for block 4	Sun, 3/2 by 11:59pm
extension paper for block 5	Sun, 3/16 by 11:59pm
extension paper for block 6	Sun, 3/30 by 11:59pm
extension paper for block 7	Sun, 4/6 by 11:59pm
extension paper for block 8	Sun, 4/20 by 11:59pm
extension paper for block 9	Sun, 4/27 by 11:59pm

Synthesis papers

The idea behind synthesis papers is for you to tie multiple pieces of political science research to a single "big question" that is important for persons who might care about or be interested in actual politics, but have no particular interest in political science -- for instance, students on campus who are not political science majors. Every synthesis paper should have the title:

A big question about XXXXX: What three political science studies contribute to finding the answer and why it matters.

Where you replace XXXXX with a question you've identified. There are 3 synthesis papers assigned during the semester. You may submit all three, but only your highest-scoring 2 count towards your grade. As with extension papers, I don't accept late synthesis papers without prior agreement or a documented genuine emergency. Extension papers may be no more than 6 pages long (double spaced, in no-less-than 12pt font, with no-less-than 1 inch margins).

The deadlines for the synthesis papers are:

paper	deadline
synthesis paper 1	Sun, 2/23 by 11:59pm
synthesis paper 2	Sun, 3/30 by 11:59pm
synthesis paper 3	Sun, 4/27 by 11:59pm

Final Grade

Each of the three types of assignments you submit on time is given a grade on a 4 point scale. To calculate your final grade I compute an overall four point score according to the following formula:

(final 4 point score)=

$0.2 * (\text{average score of all research logic briefs}) +$

$0.8 * 0.5 (\text{average score of your 4 best-scoring extension papers}) +$

$0.8 * 0.5 (\text{average score of your 2 best-scoring synthesis papers})$

Thus your overall work on your research briefs counts for 20% of your final grade, and your work on your extension and sythesis papers each count for 40%. Once that final 4 point score is cacluated, I assign you a letter grade for the semester according to the following rules:

average 4 point score	final letter grade
at or above 3.85	A
at or above 3.5, less than 3.85	A-
at or above 3.15, less than 3.5	B+
at or above 2.85, less than 3.15	B
at or above 2.5, less than 2.85	B-

average 4 point score	final letter grade
at or above 2.15, less than 2.5	C+
at or above 1.85, less than 2.15	C
at or above 1.5, less than 1.85	C-
at or above 1, less than 1.5	D
less than 1	E