OVERVIEW:

This course is the required seminar for the American politics and public policy field. Therefore, we will read, analyze and critique a sample of important literature from this field. The readings itemized below constitute a sample of research from subfields within the study of American politics. They vary by substantive focus, theoretical orientation, methodological approach, weight of contribution (some are seminal books/articles; others are recent refinements) and age (some are classic contributions; others are recent additions). In summary, the course readings are a blend of classic and contemporary research contributions to many subfields of American politics and policy that sample from the theoretical and methodological diversity of the fields. Finally, I selected many readings because of the implications of the research presented in them for understanding the policy-making process in the United States.

By reading and discussing this research, as well as by completing the course assignments itemized below, you will dig a solid foundation for understanding the field of American politics. However, if you are planning to take a field exam in American politics and public policy, merely understanding the contributions assigned for this course will not allow you to pass this exam. You will have to do additional reading in these areas. To give you a start on this reading, I have listed a limited number of “recommended” readings for each week.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

The books assigned below are available in the bookstore in the Kent State Student Center. You will be able to find many of the readings assigned below at JSTOR.

Books:

R. Douglas Arnold, The Logic of Congressional Action
Frank Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, The Politics of Attention
Daniel P. Carpenter, The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy
Gary W. Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins, Setting the Agenda: Responsible Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives
Kevin M. Esterling, The Political Economy of Political Expertise
James Stimson, Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics
**Class Participation:** This course is a seminar. Therefore, I expect you to participate actively in a discussion of the readings. In our discussions, we will consider issues such as the authors’ theoretical contributions, how well authors tested hypotheses (if hypotheses are tested), the quality of data employed, the use of methods, how the research could have been improved, and future directions for research. Starting in week two, for seven of our meetings, you must write a 2-3 page (double spaced) paper arguing which reading is the “best” or “most limited” contribution, noting the theoretical and/or methodological grounds on which you base your decision (Please do not disregard this page requirement). For classes for which we have read books, choose one chapter. To be clear, I am not asking you to summarize a contribution. Nor am I asking you to compare it to other contributions we have read for the week. Rather, I am asking you to analyze the contribution in the way described above. It is my hope that, through discussion, and by writing these papers, you will become adept at critiquing literature, fostering success in future classes, on your exams and as you begin to conduct research. In summary, these short papers and your class participation will determine your class participation grade.

**Book Review:** For one of the books, you must complete a book review (6-8 pages). This review should be modeled after the reviews appearing in *Perspectives on Politics* (prior to 2003, these reviews appeared in the *American Political Science Review*) and the *Journal of Politics*. In your review, you should not only describe what the author did throughout the book but also provide a critical analysis of his/her success in conducting and explaining the research reported therein. Did the author provide a compelling theoretical perspective on the phenomenon s/he studied? Did his/her research provide compelling answers? Did s/he omit consideration of important phenomenon? What are the limitations of the research (Reviewers frequently discuss limitations as avenues for future research)? You must turn your review in before we discuss the book in class. Many of the books assigned have already been reviewed in print. Do not read these reviews prior to writing yours.

**Article Assessments:** For two of the weeks for which articles/chapters are assigned, you will write a paper in which you compare and contrast two of the articles/chapters (6-8 pages). What are the articles attempting to accomplish theoretically and/or methodologically? From what perspective(s) are they coming theoretically? How sound are their hypotheses? If they test hypotheses, do they test the hypotheses well? Are there methodological flaws? How solid are their findings? Do the articles reinforce/contradict one another? Does one build off of the other? You do not have to address all of these questions. Indeed, it would be difficult to do so within the page restriction. Instead, you should limit your critique to several questions at most. You may even decide that it is appropriate to focus on one of these questions—or another question not itemized above—in crafting your critique. In short, I’m asking you to do what we do in our class discussions but to put it in writing. You must turn these assessments in before we discuss the readings in class.

**Final Exam:** You will be required to complete a 15-20 page final examination in this course. This examination will be a take home examination in which you will respond to questions about the assigned readings. This exam is due to me by 5:00pm on Wed., May 10 (a week after our last meeting).
EVALUATION

Class Participation (20%)
Book Review (10%)
Assessments (10% X 2 = 20%)
Final Examination (50%)

A word on attendance: attendance is a necessary condition for effective participation; graduate students should not miss class.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

I reserve the right to revise the schedule of reading assignments.

Class 1—Jan. 22: Some Approaches to Thinking about and Studying Politics


(Some) Recommended Work:


**Class 2—Jan. 29: Public Opinion I: Public Opinion Theory**


**Class 3—Feb. 5: Public Opinion II—Topics in Public Opinion**


(Some) Recommended Work (Theory, Political Trust, Political Knowledge, Priming/Framing, the Role of Race, Stereotypes and Media Effects) on Public Opinion:


**Class 4—Feb. 12: Political Participation: Voting**


**Class 5—Feb. 19: Topics in Political Participation**


(Some) Recommended Work (Turnout, Vote Choice and Social Communication) on Political Participation:


**Class 6—Feb. 26: Parties and Elections**


(Some) Recommended Work on Parties and Elections:


**Class 7—Mar. 5: Interest Groups**


(Some) Recommended Work on Interest Groups:


**Class 8—Mar. 12: Congress I, Members of Congress**


**Class 9—Mar. 19: Congress II, Congressional Organization**


(Some) Recommended Work (The Organization of Congress, Committee Jurisdictions, Parties, Roll Call Voting and Institutional Change) on Congress:


Rohde, David W. 1991. *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House*. Chicago: University of
Chicago Press.


**Class 10—Apr. 2: The Presidency**


(Some) Recommended Work on the Presidency:


**Class 11—Apr. 9: The Bureaucracy**


*(Some) Recommended Work on the Bureaucracy:*


**Class 12—Apr. 16: The Courts**


(Some) Recommended Work (Strategic Behavior, Attitudinal Model, Amicus Decisions, Confirmations) on the Courts:


**Class 13—Apr. 23: Policy-Making I**


**Class 14—Apr. 30: Policy-Making II**


Ordinarily, there would be a 15<sup>th</sup> week during which we would discuss inter-branch policy-making. Here are some recommended readings on this topic:


