OVERVIEW

In this course, we will survey some of the vast literature on American political institutions, reading and critiquing research on the internal operations of these institutions and on how they work with and against one another to produce policy outcomes. The course’s goals are threefold: (1) to sharpen your ability to explain and critique scholarship; (2) to develop your ability to contribute to a field of study; and, by way of the first two goals, (3) to broaden your knowledge about these institutions generally.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

You will be able to find many of the readings assigned below at JSTOR. Most of the other readings are available in a packet at Wordsmith. Finally, note that there are several weeks for which multiple chapters are assigned from books. I did not order these books, however, as I thought that doing so would not be justified from a cost standpoint given that we are only reading a handful of chapters from each. At the same time, I could not photocopy them and put them in the packet for copyright reasons. Therefore, let me encourage you to obtain these books through Ohiolink several weeks before the date for which readings are assigned.

The books assigned below are available in the bookstore in the Kent State Student Center:


COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

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 six 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, do the same
for chapters. 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.

Research Paper: As graduate students—especially those of you who are PhD students—it is vital
for you to be able to conduct original research. This assignment is designed to assist you in
developing this capacity. Therefore, this assignment requires you to investigate an important
phenomenon with respect to one or more of the institutions examined in this course. In
conducting research, you should strive to fit the question you examine within the existing
research. This is not to say that you cannot strike out in a bold new direction; rather, it is to say
that you should be responding to some aspect of the literature on one or more of these
institutions. I expect that the paper will be of the quality that could be presented at a professional
conference. This paper is due on the last day of class, Dec. 5. Please note on the schedule of
classes that you will be presenting your research in a conference during class that day. You
should come see me individually to discuss your paper. However, know that you must turn in a
proposal detailing the area of the literature to which you intend to contribute, your basic
hypotheses, and the evidence you plan to rely on on Oct. 3.

Book Review: For one of the six 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 Assessment: For one 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.

Your grade for this course will be determined by the following criteria:

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Article Assessment</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>Book review</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>Paper</td>
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**STUDENTS REQUIRING ACCESSIBILITY**

University policy 3342-3-18 requires that students requiring accessibility be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented accessibility limitation and require accommodations, please contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements for necessary classroom adjustments. Please note, you must first verify your eligibility for these through the Office of Student Accessibility Services (Ground Floor, DeWeese Health Center, 330-672-3391, or visit www.registrars.kent.edu/disability/default.htm for more information on registration procedures).

**COURSE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS**

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

**Aug. 29: Perspectives on Institutions**


**Sept. 5: Congressional Elections**


**Recent & Recommended:**


**Sept. 12: Theories of Legislative Behavior: What do Members Do? Why Do They Do It?**

Hall, Richard L. 1996. Participation in Congress. New Haven: Yale University Press. (Ch. 1, 3-5)


**Recommended:**


**Sept. 19: Theories of Legislative Organization: Committee Organization**


Cox, Gary., and Mathew D. McCubbins. 1993. Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House. (Ch. 4-5)


Recommended:


**Sept. 26: Party and Interest Group Influences on Congressional Behavior:**

**Parties:**


**Interest Groups:**


**Recent and Recommended:**


**Oct. 3: Institutional Change in Congress**


Recent and Recommended:


**Oct. 10: Presidential Elections**


**Recent and Recommended:**


**Oct. 17: The Politicized Presidency: Opportunities and Constraints**


**Recent and Recommended**


**Oct. 24: Lawmaking under Separate Powers: Inter-Branch Policy-Making I**


**Recent and Recommended:**


**Oct. 31: Presidents and Institutional Design: Inter-Branch Policy-Making II**


**Nov. 7: Institutional Design of the Bureaucracy: Inter-Branch Policy-Making III**


**Recent and Recommended:**


Balla, Steven J. 2000. “Political and Organizational Determinants of Bureaucratic Responsiveness.” *American Politics Quarterly.* 28(Apr.): 163-


**Nov 14: Issues in Judicial Politics**

**Judicial Nominations: Inter-Branch Policy-Making IV**


**Certiorari**


**Legal Approach to Supreme Court Decision Making**


**Recent & Recommended:**


**Nov. 21: Explanations of Justices’ Behavior**


Recent & Recommended:


Nov. 28: The Court in the Separation of Powers System: Inter-Branch Policy-Making


**Recent and Recommended:**


**Dec. 5: Research Conference**