Course Overview

This course focuses on the various theories and scholarly findings concerning American political behavior. The aim of this course is five-fold: (1) to develop a thorough understanding of American public opinion dynamics and voting behavior, both at the micro and macro level, (2) to examine the role of the mass media in conditioning public views on politics and policy, (3) to delve into the political behavior of political candidates and how the public reacts to their behavior, (4) to explore questions of accountability with respect to public as well as scholarly appraisals of government performance, and (5) to analyze trends and developments in civic engagement/social capital, mobilization, and social movements. In doing so, we will engage in a discussion over the arguments put forth in the literature and to what extent scholars have formulated a comprehensive understanding of American political behavior dynamics. Please note that course assignments and assessments are developed in line with UTEP’s “Edge Advantages” goals. In line with UTEP’s Edge mission, portions of the class will deal with civic engagement issues and the prospects for key policy reforms in the current political environment, as well as provide opportunities for students to engage in their communities to affect change through voter registration efforts or other means. That said, I look forward to working with you during the course of the semester and I encourage you to be active in our classroom discussions.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

I believe, with adequate effort and willingness, all of you are capable of doing well in this course.

Learning outcomes relevant to Social and Behavior Sciences (SBS) and in line with UTEP’s Edge Mission - Students can expect to learn the following by the end of this course:

(1) to explore and understand the development of theories (and the accompanying empirical findings) related to American political behavior, both with respect to the American public, as well as political actors
(2) to define, understand, and use concepts and terms relevant to the study of the American political behavior (Targeted Edge Advantages: Critical thinking, Problem solving)
(3) to identify, formulate, and answer complex questions related to the dynamics concerning American opinion formation, voting behavior, the role of the media, and the influence candidate behavior (Targeted Edge Advantages: Communication, Critical thinking, Problem solving, Leadership, Confidence)
(4) to develop ideas about the role that public appraisals and measures of accountability play in mediating the behavior of politicians and the performance of the institutions within which they function (Targeted Edge Advantages: Communication, Critical thinking, Problem solving, Leadership, Confidence, Global Awareness, Social responsibility)
(5) To draw valid inferences from statistical analyses by using the scientific method (Targeted Edge Advantages: Communication, Critical thinking, Problem solving)
(6) to apply knowledge and general theories from the literature to evaluate past, current, and overtime events and conditions related to American political behavior (Targeted Edge Advantages: Communication, Confidence, Social responsibility)

**Objectives for Good Citizenship**

As a member of this classroom it is vital that you to adhere to the following principles of professionalism:

- interpret the consequences of one’s own actions (unprofessional conduct will be dealt with swiftly through the university)
- have responsible civic engagement—that is,
- respect different points of view and different cultures
- work effectively as a member of the classroom
- articulate the value to society and the workplace of a diverse and global perspective

**Grades**

Grades will be based on two exams (each worth 20% of the final grade), a class research paper worth 25% of the final grade, as well as a project presentation worth 15% of the final grade. In addition, in-class participation and the weekly talking points to be submitted and discussed will count for 20% of the final grade such that one must attend and participate in class to earn an “A.” Participation will be based largely on in-class responses to the weekly talking points as well as problem solving questions taken from the main readings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading/Exams</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-Class Participation/Weekly Talking Points</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper Presentation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Essay Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Final grades are based on accumulated weighted points, rounded to the 2nd decimal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Grade Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>≥ 89.50% = A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89.49 – 79.50% = B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79.49 – 69.50% = C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69.49 – 59.50% = D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤ 59.50% = F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Required Texts

The course does not include any required textbook. Instead, all of the assigned readings are journal articles that can be accessed through J-STOR (http://www.jstor.org) via UTEP’s library website (http://libraryweb.utep.edu/online/). I will also upload the required readings to Blackboard for easy access (see also the course schedule further below for a detailed listing of these readings). Separately, a number of additional book chapters and journal articles will serve as supplementary reading material, which will be helpful in providing additional context to the weekly discussions and may also serve as an avenue for research paper ideas.

Classroom Policies

- Coming to the class prepared is important particularly because when calculating your final grade, I will consider your class participation and the quality of work provided in your weekly talking points. In addition, exams will cover material from the readings and the lectures, so doing just one or the other will leave you at a disadvantage. If I consistently detect a pattern of only a few students reading, there will be graded “pop-quizzes,” which will become part of the 20% attendance and participation portion of the final grade. Note that the class participation portion of each student’s grade is non-negotiable and left solely to the discretion of the instructor.
- I will deduct a full letter grade for a late assignment for each day it is late after the due date (including weekends). For example, a “perfect” assignment turned in two days late would receive an 80 out of a 100.
- Make-up exams will only be given if you have a university excused absence and follow university guidelines (see “Excused Absences” section below for more details). If you miss a test due to an emergency or illness, or if you have a university-approved excuse ahead of time, you must notify me as soon as possible to arrange a make-up exam. Note that if you miss an exam, I expect you to contact me immediately afterward (I expect later that day or the following day at the latest). You may contact me by e-mail, telephone, or visit during office hours to arrange a make-up. If you miss a test and do not have a university acceptable excuse, you will receive a “0” on the test. Keep in mind that a make-up exam may be of a different format than the original exam.

Weekly Talking Points

Starting with the second week of class, each student will need to submit one talking point every Tuesday (due via e-mail by midnight the day before the lecture) in response to the assigned readings for the following evening’s class session. The talking points will be utilized to help shape our weekly seminar discussions, so they should be the most interesting questions or arguments that the student has identified based on the week’s readings. In turn, I will incorporate these talking points into the lecture (as many as possible, time permitting) in an effort to actively engage each member of class, directly answer questions of interest, and, more generally, provide additional guidance on how to interpret and follow the readings. The talking points should be submitted in the form of a short paragraph outlining your question or argument. Each talking point should refer to one or more specific sections of the weekly readings (with page references where appropriate). Talking points should be about 100-200 words (those that fall under 75 words and/or are submitted late will not be accepted).
Class Project Research Paper
I will provide the full details and instructions for this project on the day it is assigned.

Extra Credit
I will be providing up to 2 bonus points added to the final average for those who complete 2 hours of voter registration outside of class on their own. Essentially, you can do 1 hour for 1 bonus point or 2 hours for 2 bonus points (I will provide more information about this opportunity at the time I assign it for those who are interested).

Note: This community engagement activity allows one to put into practice some of the skills being developed for the course that fall in line with UTEP’s overall longstanding mission of outreach as well as our current UTEP Edge Advantage mission of engagement, with a particular focus on community leadership, building self-confidence by getting out into the community, global awareness of voter participation needs, social responsibility in helping to fill that need, and communication in engaging others in a nonpartisan manner about active participation in the electoral process. As such, Targeted Edge Advantages for this activity apply particularly to the categories of Leadership, Confidence, Global Awareness, Social Responsibility, and Communication.

Excused Absences
I will excuse absences only when a student participates in an official university-recognized activity, observes a recognized religious holiday of her/his faith that happens to coincide with a class meeting, is called to and participates in active military service for a reasonably brief period, or confronts extraordinary circumstances, such as a prolonged illness, extended jury duty, or a major personal crisis. Any excused absences must be documented. Please do not ask me to excuse absences for minor illnesses or scheduling conflicts (e.g. sports practices or games, play rehearsals, meetings, conferences, appointments with other professors or advisors, student teaching, doctor's appointments, court dates, jobs, job interviews, having your cable installed, etc.). I am aware that students have other interests and obligations, but you should nevertheless make this class a priority. If you are likely to have recurring conflicts, please take another course.

See academic regulations in UTEP Undergraduate Catalogue for a list of excused absences: http://academics.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=54418. According to UTEP Curriculum and Classroom Policies, “When, in the judgment of the instructor, a student has been absent to such a degree as to impair his or her status relative to credit for the course, the instructor may drop the student from the class with a grade of “W” before the course drop deadline and with a grade of “F” after the course drop deadline.”

E-mail Protocol
When e-mailing me, please put the course and section number in the subject line. In the body of your e-mail clearly state your question. At the end of your e-mail, be sure to put your first and last name and UIN (University Identification Number). Do not e-mail me about information you can obtain from the syllabus. I do not answer substantive material from lectures
or readings via e-mail as it is not an effective means of communicating. If there is class material you are confused about, please come and see me during my office hours.

**Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty**

Academic integrity and standing require a respect and adherence to the grading policies, rules against cheating, and plagiarism. As commonly defined, plagiarism consists of passing off as one’s own the ideas, words, writings, etc., which belong to another. In accordance with the definition, you are committing plagiarism if you copy the work of another person and turn it in as your own, even if you should have the permission of the person. Plagiarism is one of the worst academic sins, for the plagiarist destroys the trust among colleagues without which research cannot be safely communicated.

Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Violations will be taken seriously and will be subject to disciplinary action. Students may be suspended or expelled from UTEP for such actions. For further information, please refer to [http://studentaffairs.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=4386](http://studentaffairs.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=4386).

**On Cheating and Complicity**

Cheating includes looking at another student’s examination, using cheat sheets or other unauthorized notes during an exam, having others conduct research or prepare work that you turn in as your own (includes the use of commercial term paper companies, buying answer sets from a tutoring company, or obtaining answers from other unauthorized sources). Complicity, meanwhile, refers to any collaboration for aiding other(s) in the act of cheating, including allowing others to cheat off of your paper, taking an exam for another student, or providing another student’s signature in their absence for in-class assignments or attendance sheets. You may also not submit work for this class that you did for another class without my expressed consent.

**ADA Statement**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal antidiscrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the university regarding services for students with disabilities.

**Copyright Statement for Course Materials**

The course materials used in this course are copyrighted. By course materials, I mean all materials generated for this class, which include but are not limited to syllabi, quizzes, exams, lecture notes and PowerPoint slides, in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets. This also includes any information posted on the course webpage. Because these are copyrighted, you do not have the right to distribute the course materials, unless I expressly grant permission.
# Course Schedule

Note: This is a provisional schedule of our course. With advanced notice, I may introduce specific changes based on progress in class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assigned Reading Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 8/29 | Introduction to American Political Behavior | Syllabus and class introduction:  
“The Democratic Dilemma and Vote Choice in American Politics”  
Class Assignment:  
Review syllabus and begin the assigned readings for 9/5 |
| 9/5 | The Black-and-White Public Opinion Model & the Minimalist Paradigm | Assigned Reading Material:  
Supplemental Reading Material:  
| 9/12 | Political Knowledge & Sophistication | Assigned Reading Material:  
Supplemental Reading Material:  
*Discuss paper project – paper proposals and rubric handout* |
### 9/19
**UT System Student Success Summit (NO CLASS)**

No class – work on your proposals for your paper projects.

---

### 9/26
**Information Cues & Heuristics**

**Assigned Reading Material:**

**Supplemental Reading Material:**

*Submit paper proposals*

---

### 10/3
**The Role of Core Values, Attitudes, Beliefs, & Emotions**

**Assigned Reading Material:**

**Supplemental Reading Material:**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assigned Reading Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 10/10 | **Public Evaluations of Candidates & Voting in Elections**  
**Supplemental Reading Material:**  
| 10/17 | **Collective Rationality: A Look at the Macro Level (Parts I & II)**  
**Supplemental Reading Material:**  
### Role of the Media: Framing, Sources, & Policy Preferences

**Assigned Reading Material:**

**Supplemental Reading Material:**

### Candidate Behavior & Communication Tactics in Political Campaigns

**Assigned Reading Material:**

**Supplemental Reading Material:**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 11/7    | **Why Trust Matters: Public Sentiments Towards Political Figures & Institutions**  
**Assigned Reading Material:**  
**Supplemental Reading Material:**  
| 11/14   | **Attribution, Responsibility, & Accountability: Public & Scholarly Assessments of Political Figures & Government Performance**  
**Assigned Reading Material:**  
**Supplemental Reading Material:**  
| 11/21   | **Thanksgiving Holiday (NO CLASS)**  
No class – continue working on your paper projects. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assigned Reading Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
**Supplemental Reading Material:**  
| 12/5     | **Research Paper Presentations**                                                            | Individual Student Presentations and Discussion/Commentary                                  |
|          | *Final Essay Exam Distributed*                                                              |                                                                                             |
| 12/7     | *Final Papers Due                                                                           |                                                                                             |
| 12/12    | **FINAL EXAM SESSION @ 7-9:45pm**                                                           | *Final Essay Exams Due                                                                      |