COURSE OVERVIEW
This course surveys major theoretical approaches and empirical research in the field of political behavior. (This class is variously called Public Opinion and Political Socialization or Public Opinion and Political Psychology in the course catalog, but Political Behavior better reflects its broader scope.) It focuses on psychological approaches to understanding individual citizens’ attitudes and actions, and on the implications of individual choices for both collective outcomes and for the quality of representative democracy. We will also encounter other theories, including personality, rational choice, information-processing, social influence, and group identity and conflict. Among the many substantive topics we will investigate are political socialization, ideology, the media, and voting behavior. The majority of empirical research that we will discuss centers on American politics, although we will also read and discuss research that is cross-national or comparative in scope.

This course has four learning objectives:

- You will become familiar with a wide range of literatures that are routinely part of Ph.D. field examinations, particularly in American politics.
- You will understand contemporary debates in the study of political behavior.
- You will be able to think both appreciatively and critically about social scientific research.
- You will develop a research question and make progress on a paper intended to result in a dissertation topic and/or publication.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
This course is a seminar, which means it will be driven by class discussion. You are expected to come to class prepared to engage in a thoughtful, critical, and lively conversation about the questions, issues, and debates raised in the week’s required reading. The more you participate, the more you will benefit from the course.

Each week, one student will be designated to lead the seminar. On your week, you will be responsible for organizing and stimulating a discussion of the week’s readings. This should not take the form of a lecture or lengthy summary of the material. Instead, you should
highlight the most important questions arising from the collection of readings and use those to generate discussion among the rest of us. To facilitate this, you should circulate (by e-mail) a list of 8-10 questions for discussion by 5pm the Wednesday before the class.

Every other week, you will submit a short paper (no more than 2-3 pages, double-spaced) responding to the week’s readings. (I will divide up the weeks alphabetically, so that half of the class will be writing a paper each week. All told, you will write six papers.) These should be e-mailed to me by 12pm the Wednesday before the class meets, and I will return them to you in class. The papers should critically discuss a portion of the week’s readings. You do not need to shoehorn in every article or chapter, but you should address several works. There is no single template for a good paper, but you should minimize the summary of the readings; I am more interested in your discussion of their strengths and weaknesses. Here is an incomplete list of questions that might animate your weekly papers:

- Are there competing explanations of, or approaches to understanding, a single substantive phenomenon?
- Is there a fundamental argument between or among authors?
- Do different authors employ different methods? Do those differences lead them to draw different conclusions? Would another methodological approach be better?
- Are there major shortcomings in a set of readings on a topic? How could they be addressed?
- What questions for future research emerge from the readings, and how might those questions be answered?
- Does the empirical evidence support an author’s (or authors’) claims?

At the end of the semester, you will be required to submit a research paper of 15-20 (double-spaced) pages. The paper may take one of two forms. First, you may write a paper based on original empirical research, similar to much of the work we’ll be reading this semester. Second, you may write a paper that addresses a debate in the literature and proposes a research project, including a research design, to engage the topic. At some point during the semester (with the date to be determined), I will ask you to submit a paragraph describing your proposed final project. The due date for the paper will be announced later in the semester. Finally, you will be expected to present a preliminary version of your paper at a mini-conference during our last class session, on April 24. It will be fun.

Your course grade will be determined by an overall evaluation of your participation in class, your weekly papers, and your final research paper.

**Readings**

There are six required books. The list is below. The bulk of the course reading, however, consists of journal articles, chapters from edited volumes, or excerpts from books. Most of the readings are available through JSTOR and/or the GW library’s electronic journal collection.

Some readings, however, are not available online. Those are marked with (*) below, and I have placed them under “Files” on our course Blackboard page.
Books


COURSE SCHEDULE (Readings marked with [*] are posted on Blackboard.)

Week 1 (January 16): Introduction

Huddy et al., Chapter 1


Week 2 (January 23): Personality, Biology, and Politics

Huddy et al., Chapters 2, 8


**Week 3 (January 30): Political Socialization**

Huddy et al., Chapter 3


**Week 4 (February 6): Political Knowledge and Democratic Competence**


Lewis-Beck et al., Chapter 10


**Week 5 (February 13): Public Opinion and Political Attitudes**


Zaller, 1-7, 11


**Week 6 (February 20): Information Processing and Decision Making**

Huddy et al., Chapters 4-6


**Week 7 (February 27): Groups and Political Behavior**


Huddy et al., Chapter 25


**Week 8 (March 6): Media Influence**

Arceneaux and Johnson, entire


Huddy et al., Chapter 18


**Week 9 (March 13): Spring Break**

**Week 10 (March 20): Social Networks and Social Influence**

Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side*, entire


**Week 11 (March 27): Voter Turnout and Participation**


Lewis-Beck et al., Chapter 5.


**Week 12 (April 3): No Class**

**Week 13 (April 10): Vote Choice**

Lewis-Beck et al., Chapters 1-4, 6-8, 11-15.

Zaller, Chapter 10


**Week 14 (April 17): Opinion and Policy**

Gilens, entire


Zaller, Chapter 12

**Week 15 (April 24): Mini-Conference**