

Teaching Portfolio | Carlos Algara

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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

“For the mind does not require filling like a bottle, but rather, like wood, it only requires kindling to create in it an impulse to think independently and an ardent desire for the truth.” -Plutarch, De Auditu

Plutarch’s eternal acumen in the essay *De Auditu* articulates my conceptual approach to teaching. In the essay *De Auditu* (*On Listening to Lectures*), Plutarch argues that the key to “an ardent desire for truth” is not a filled mind but rather an independent mind with the skills needed to foster intellectual curiosity and a passion for truth. As a social scientist, I have the responsibility to teach students the ability to think skeptically about the social world around them and to develop competence in understanding and critiquing theoretical explanations explaining social phenomena. I achieve this using a collaborative and multi-method approach to foster dynamic active learning in a diverse classroom setting. This collaborative approach not only helps with the endeavor of teaching a diverse student population how to think like social scientists, it also makes me a stronger teacher scholar.

I begin every course I teach by setting the stage for robust intellectual inquiry and clear expectations of learning outcomes. Doing so requires close attention to two key components. First, I must design a course that answers the critical “*so what*” question. Second, I must set the parameters of course discussion that fosters active learning and presents opportunities for informal evaluation. With respect to the first component, I begin each class and course component by asking students to articulate the implications of the course material to our understanding of political processes in the real world. For example, I ask students to discuss the potential implications of information costs to the quality of legislative representation in the United States. Highlighting the finding that citizens with higher education and incomes are more likely to participate in the political process, I ask students to discuss the implications of these findings with respect to legislative responsiveness to constituent policy preferences. The hope of these exercises is to set up a Socratic dialogue, creating an active learning environment with students assessing social scientific arguments and their broader implications to the political world outside the classroom. This active learning, through a guided scholarly exchange of ideas, also serves as a way to assess the effectiveness of material presentation and comprehension of instruction.

In my own experience as a first generation college graduate teaching at a majority-minority serving institution, such as the University of California, Davis, I am cognizant of the diversity that exists in my classroom. In undergraduate classes, many will be first-generation college students or speak English as a second language. This rich diversity guides the development of my teaching pedagogy and involvement in various teaching workshops and courses on campus. One critical component of my pedagogy, learned through this involvement, is creating an inclusive space to facilitate active learning and scholarly exchange. Recognizing the potential that classroom discussion may be a pressuring space, I incorporate online survey questions asking all students to share their thoughts in an anonymous platform. This student feedback, presented in real-time before the class, allows for the discussion of ideas from students that may be predisposed to not share before the entire class in a standard discussion format. I employ these interactive exercises at various points in lecture, to not only share the diverse opinions that exists in the class, but also to assess the level of active learning and effectiveness of material presentation.

Through engaging in active learning, I strive to empower students with the skills needed to think critically about social processes in the political world and to communicate effectively. While skepticism comes naturally to many students, many barriers can prevent the cultivation of effective communication, especially in a diverse classroom. To assist students in developing effective communication skills, I

employ multiple assessment instruments designed to encourage social scientific inquiry. In substantive courses, one such exercise is to evaluate a theoretical model explaining a form of political behavior discussed in the course.¹ This exercise helps foster the skills of effective communication by priming students to think through an argument and evaluate the argument in light of evidence or alternative arguments. In a research methods course, this exercise may involve asking students to evaluate the limitations of observational studies in making causal claims of a theoretical explanation. These exercises require that students not only communicate the material effectively but also think independently and develop clear argumentation. Many of these students relish these opportunities and, in assessment of these instruments, students state that this provides an outlet for creative thinking in a social scientific framework.

I view the task of a social scientist as one encompassing the teacher scholar model. I believe that scholarship is an indispensable component of active teaching and helping instill an ardent desire for truth. Cultivating an active research agenda helps convey the relevance of the discipline to the classroom and not only exposes students to salient debates, but also provides them with an opportunity to engage in these debates. This research agenda also fills my lesson plans with empirical evidence to convey thematic concepts. For example, my preliminary work on the changing nature of Senate elections provides an example for the growing salience of the partisan electoral model, with clear implications for partisan polarization and legislative policymaking. Incorporation of my empirical work provides students with exposure to various forms of data visualizations, and their insights on these research examples strengthens my research program.

I hope to extend this component of the teacher scholar model by focusing on developing data literacy as a key learning outcome in my curriculum. My methodological training guides my passion for data literacy and desire to give students the tools needed to critically evaluate empirical claims. In my experience as a methods lab instructor, I am attentive to the challenges of teaching applied data visualization and evaluation methods. I view this challenging task as an opportunity to thoughtfully teach students applied open-source coding that can prepare them for analytical opportunities beyond campus, such as positions in industry or the pursuit of a graduate degree. This emphasis on data literacy can facilitate the strengthening of empirical analytical skills essential for students to think like independent researchers in any scientific field. In my assessment, this exposure to data literacy will enrich and strengthen the education of every student on campus.

In my view, being an effective professor requires instilling Plutarch's assertion of creating "an impulse to think independently" for an "ardent desire for truth." My pedagogy as a social scientist is to provide students with the ability to think critically about the social world and to communicate effectively on the basis of sound argumentation. I hope to improve this pedagogy in the future by collaborating with students outside of the seminar context. I have a strong desire to engage with students on independent research projects and, in particular, to instill the passion for data-based inquiry. While I hope to make data visualization an explicit learning outcome for each of my courses, I hope to mentor students in independent research projects aimed at investigating interesting and relevant political phenomena we observe in the "real-world." I believe that collaborating with students at every step of social scientific inquiry will strengthen my own research and teaching agendas.

1. I present this exercise of describing and evaluating a theoretical model of political behavior in the sample evaluation materials of this teaching portfolio.

Summary of Class Evaluations

Full student evaluations and course materials can be found at <https://calgara.github.io/teaching.html>.

Associate Instructor of Record Class Evaluations Summary

Course Perceptions: “Please indicate the overall education value of the course from (1) poor to (5) excellent.”

- Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 62$): 4.40/5
- Overall Summary Mode: 5 (35/62)

Teaching effectiveness ratings are on the following five-point scale: (1) *poor*, (2) *fair*, (3) *good*, (4) *very good*, to (5) *excellent*. Summary teaching instruction ratings can be found below.

1. “Please indicate the overall teaching effectiveness of the instructor.”²
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 61$): 4.45/5
 - Weighted department average: 4.1/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (39/62)
2. “Please indicate instructor’s knowledge and command of subject matter.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 61$): 4.74/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (49/62)
3. “Please indicate instructor’s openness to discussion and ability to stimulate it.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 61$): 4.56/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (41/62)
4. “Please indicate instructor’s availability for consultation.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 57$): 4.58/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (41/57)
5. “Please indicate instructor’s fairness & impartiality of grading.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 61$): 4.56/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (45/61)
6. “Please indicate instructional value of exams.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 61$): 4.30/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (33/61)
7. “Please indicate instructional value of course assignments (term papers, project, etc).”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 61$): 4.30/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (30/61)

2. Note that the department mean is only available for this measure of teaching effectiveness.

8. “Please indicate clarity of course objectives and organization.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 60$): 4.23/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (33/60)
9. “Please indicate effectiveness of style & methods of class presentations.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 61$): 4.13/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (30/61)
10. “Relevance and educational value of readings and WorldWideWeb resources.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 57$): 4.16/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (25/57)

Discussion Section Teaching Assistant Summary Evaluations Summary

The forthcoming descriptive summary of evaluations are from courses with a discussion section component. In contrast to a conventional course, these courses require one hour of graduate-student led discussion over course material in addition to standard office hour meetings. For substantive courses, discussion sections typically involve a blend of additional lecturing and active learning student exercises.

Teaching effectiveness ratings are on the following five-point scale: (1) *poor*, (2) *fair*, (3) *good*, (4) *very good*, to (5) *excellent*. Summary teaching instruction ratings can be found below.

1. “Please indicate the overall teaching effectiveness of the teaching assistant.”³
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 180$): 4.11/5
 - Weighted department average: 4.01/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (69/180)
2. “Please rate: TA is responsive to questions and student requests.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 179$): 4.45/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (109/179)
3. “Please rate: TA demonstrates knowledge and command of the subject matter.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 180$): 4.38/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (93/179)
4. “Please rate: TA is well prepared for section.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 180$): 4.33/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (95/180)
5. “Please rate: TA encourages students to express opinions and respects divergent points of view.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 175$): 4.26/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (90/175)
6. “Please rate: TA explains and clarifies difficult material.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 179$): 4.20/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (85/179)
7. “Please rate: TA helps the student appreciate course topics.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 174$): 4.07/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (71/174)
8. “Please rate: TA is effective in encouraging student participation.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 180$): 4.04/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (90/180)
9. “Please rate: TA provides helpful comments on assignments.”
 - Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 172$): 4.00/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (69/172)

3. Note that the department mean is only available for this measure of teaching effectiveness.

10. “Please rate: TA clearly defines expectations of student.”
- Overall weighted course evaluation average ($N = 178$): 3.97/5
 - Overall Summary Mode: 5 (62/178)

Evidence of Associate Instructor Teaching Effectiveness

Qualitative Evaluations

Summer 2017

1. Clarity of course objectives & design:

Extremely well organized.

Layout of what we would cover, including articles and chapters as well as objectives, was very helpful.

Discussion based course design seems more interesting and effective than typical design used here at UCD consisting only of lectures.

Great links to scholarly articles.

A lot of information to study in a short amount of time but overall good course.

There weren't term papers or projects, which was nice—it did not distract from the readings and from learning the material. This is especially important in short, quick-paced summer sessions.

2. Instructor Ability & Effectiveness:

Class presentations were almost always clear and interesting, the most difficult times were when we covered specific graphs (?) such as spatial model and the voting median filibuster model.

Carlos knows his stuff!

Instructor had a great deal of knowledge about the material. This, and his enthusiasm about the subject, made the material very accessible.

Carlos strongly encouraged discussions. It made the class more interesting. I dreaded taking this class, but I needed it for GE requirements. Carlos made this class really interesting and I learned a lot from him.

Fall 2017

I. Clarity of course objectives & design:

This course has been one of the most organized I have ever taken. The slide sets are labeled by date, meeting, and includes highlighted headings and subheadings on every slide. It was also very helpful that a full class outline with descriptions of each section was placed on the syllabus to follow along.

Grading policies are top notch. Even though I don't expect them to apply to me, such as the All is Forgiven policy or Amnesty Period for Quizzes, they are incredibly helpful to other students who care about their grade and need a second chance to work hard at it.

The essay was helpful in focusing in on one political model. The instructions were straightforward and made writing the essay comfortable.

Students do not sign their names on the blue books, they sign their student ID. This way, there is absolutely no bias when grading exams.

Thanks for an amazing quarter, you are the best professor I've had and I enjoyed your class very much!

I felt that the midterm was a very comprehensive exam of the material we had been taught in the class and I thought it was very straight-forward. While it was still difficult I did not feel that the instructor was trying to trick us in any way which happens a lot with other exams I take.

The midterm was challenging, which is, in my opinion, a great thing. Each part helped strengthen our writing, logical, and analytical skills. The comprehensive study guide was incredibly helpful, it helped me organize the sections in a logical manner that made sense to me and then I was able to remember the material better on test day.

Best exams I've had all quarter with a very fair grading system.

Carlos Algara was a great instructor but the one thing that I found difficult was that this course did not feel like an intro. I felt like a lot of the time he assumed that we knew what specific things meant, and a lot of the time that made me fall behind with the material. In other words, he used a lot of jargon, and as someone who's never taken a Political Science class before, that was difficult. Other than that, he was very enthusiastic about the material which was probably his best quality.

The articles assigned were interesting and relevant to everything we studied. The only downside to this was that when reading the longer articles, I didn't know exactly what to pay attention to. Maybe a few guiding points on which sections to pay attention to, or even questions to answer as we read might help the discussion of the articles in class. Nonetheless, I still felt the articles were important to the lecture material.

The readings are all exceptional troves of knowledge, but there is a lot of material to cover and it can often be a little daunting.

2. Instructor Ability & Effectiveness:

Lectures were very discussion based and students had the opportunity to participate in every step. It was engaging and I really enjoyed learning politics through empirical methods and data, rather than simply reading text. It makes me excited to learn how to actually code political data like that myself.

Carlos always has very well prepared slides and has graphs based on research that he has conducted himself as well as expert statistics. Learning from fresh research findings really makes me feel like I'm learning from someone in the heart of field.

As for this one, there were some points where he would put questions on the presentation and it was up in the air whether the answer would be put up next or not.

I thought the class was presented in a way that was organized/structured very well. Even though knowing that the slides alone would not have all the info I need are what got me to the class in the first place, I would have liked to see a little bit more information on the slides themselves when reviewing for the final.

Instructor is very willing to help and responsive to emails. I found this extremely helpful, thank you!

The instructor was always available after class and had accessible office hours for anyone who needed extra help.

Always available after lectures and during office hours. The average wait time on emails has been 15 minutes and I always receive thoughtful, substantive responses.

His response of emails is amazing! It is so helpful!

The instructor is very confident in the subject matter and is great at communicating it to students. Coming into the class I was not very interested in it, but the instructor made the material interesting and taught it in a way that was organized well. Thanks for a great class!

The instructor was able to explain complex material in a way that was simple to understand. I always felt I understood what was going on, and didn't feel left behind. He always made sure we understood every main point before moving on.

Excellent professor! 12/10

Phenomenal teacher! This class was by far the best political science class I have taken.

Deeply passionate about his subject matter.

Carlos seems tone very passionate about his work. His detailed explanations are very helpful, I only struggle because the statistical data and some of the models are complex.

One of the of the most non biased PoliSci professors I've had, this made for really good conversations.

The instructor would take the time to answer any questions and really push us to figure out the answers, not just simply hand out answers.

Engages the class throughout his lecture by asking questions and emphatically encourages people to speak their mind.

Carlos is always willing to answer questions and back track if a student needs. He is a great instructor!

I would definitely recommend Carlos for intro POL courses!

Descriptive Quantitative Summary of Associate Instructor of Record Teaching Evaluations

	Summer 2017						Fall 2017					
	Min	Max	SD	Mean \bar{x}	Mode	N	Min	Max	SD	Mean \bar{x}	Mode	N
Instructor's knowledge & command of subject matter	2	5	0.90	4.4	5 (14/23)	23	4	5	0.27	4.9	5 (35/38)	38
Overall teaching effectiveness of instructor	2	5	1.20	4.1	5 (13/23)	23	3	5	0.53	4.7	5 (26/38)	38
Instructor's openness to discussion & ability to stimulate it	2	5	0.93	4.3	5 (13/23)	23	3	5	0.52	4.7	5 (28/38)	38
Instructor's availability for consultation	2	5	0.92	4.4	5 (13/21)	21	3	5	0.62	4.7	5 (28/36)	36
Fairness & impartiality of grading	2	5	1.03	4.4	5 (16/23)	23	2	5	0.71	4.7	5 (29/38)	38
Instructional value of examinations	1	5	1.22	3.9	5 (9/23)	23	3	5	0.65	4.6	5 (24/38)	38
Instructional value of course assignments	1	5	1.33	4.0	5 (9/18)	18	3	5	0.69	4.4	5 (21/38)	38
Clarity of course objectives & organization	2	5	1.24	3.9	5 (11/23)	23	3	5	0.73	4.4	5 (21/37)	37
Effectiveness of style & methods of class presentations	1	5	1.34	3.8	5 (11/23)	23	2	5	0.81	4.3	5 (19/38)	38
Relevance & educational value of readings & internet resources	2	5	1.02	3.9	5 (8/22)	22	2	5	0.80	4.3	5 (17/35)	35

Note: The “overall teaching effectiveness” is originally measured on a 5-point scale from *poor* (1) to *excellent* (5). This measure is recoded to convey a numerical 5 point scale for comparison with other evaluation measures. Proportions below mode category shows proportion of measure sample providing modal response.

Research Methods Teaching Lab Evaluations

Overview of the Course Lab Component

In addition to teaching substantive political science courses, I have also served as a lab teaching assistant for the required undergraduate methods course. This context differs from a substantive lecture, in that I plan and execute lab sections designed to facilitate student comprehension of research design and theory-testing methods of empirical analysis of data. In the lab, I teach the basic theory underlying applied empirical analysis in political science and the coding conventions of R, the open source software environment for statistical computing data analysis and graphics. In addition to this formal lab component, I created a tutorial in advanced data visualization for interested undergraduate and graduate students. This comprehensive tutorial (containing sample data, code, and corresponding output graphics) in advanced data visualization, using the `ggplot` package in the R software environment, can be found on my website here https://calgara.github.io/UCD_PS_ggplot_tutorial.html. This tutorial was also taught to graduate students in the UC Davis political science department as a component of the *Programming & Methods Resources Workshop*.

Teaching this course can be challenging given the variation in student familiarity of social science research design, probability and statistical inference theory, and applied computing data analysis skills. In this section, I provide evidence of teaching effectiveness in a lab setting where students apply the properties of research design in a simulated applied research setting.

Research Methods Teaching Lab Evaluations Summary

Teaching effectiveness ratings are on the following five-point scale: (1) *poor*, (2) *fair*, (3) *good*, (4) *very good*, to (5) *excellent*. Summary teaching instruction ratings can be found below.

1. “Please indicate the overall teaching effectiveness of the teaching assistant.”⁴
 - Overall course evaluation average ($N = 30$): 4.60/5
 - Weighted department average: 4.1/5
 - Mode: 5 (21/30)
2. “Please rate: TA is responsive to questions and student requests.”
 - Overall course evaluation average ($N = 29$): 4.62/5
 - Mode: 5 (21/29)
3. “Please rate: TA demonstrates knowledge and command of the subject matter.”
 - Overall course evaluation average ($N = 30$): 4.60/5
 - Mode: 5 (20/30)
4. “Please rate: TA is well prepared for section.”
 - Overall course evaluation average ($N = 30$): 4.43/5
 - Mode: 5 (21/30)

4. Note that the department mean is only available for this measure of teaching effectiveness.

5. "Please rate: TA encourages students to express opinions and respects divergent points of view."
 - Overall course evaluation average ($N = 27$): 4.59/5
 - Mode: 5 (20/27)
6. "Please rate: TA explains and clarifies difficult material."
 - Overall course evaluation average ($N = 29$): 4.59/5
 - Mode: 5 (21/29)
7. "Please rate: TA helps the student appreciate course topics."
 - Overall course evaluation average ($N = 28$): 4.64/5
 - Mode: 5 (22/28)
8. "Please rate: TA is effective in encouraging student participation."
 - Overall course evaluation average ($N = 30$): 4.57/5
 - Mode: 5 (22/30)
9. "Please rate: TA provides helpful comments on assignments."
 - Overall course evaluation average ($N = 29$): 4.41/5
 - Mode: 5 (19/29)
10. "Please rate: TA clearly defines expectations of student."
 - Overall course evaluation average ($N = 29$): 4.38/5
 - Mode: 5 (18/29)

Research Methods Teaching Lab Qualitative Evaluations

"Very upbeat and always very friendly when asked a question."

"Excellent at helping me understand the material, both in discussion and over email."

"Follows up with emails till they are complete."

AMAZING TA!!!

Course Syllabi

In this section, I enclose sample materials for my undergraduate introductory seminar on American Politics for which I was the Associate Instructor of Record. In this portfolio, I include the following sample items:

1. Undergraduate seminar course syllabus
2. Sample lecture handout designed to create active comprehension of the *Pivotal Politics* model of American national policymaking
3. Sample evaluation rubric of model critique essay assignment. This evaluation rubric is designed to assess student comprehension of social scientific models and their ability to 1) communicate their understanding of theoretical models and 2) competently construct an argument regarding the model's utility in explaining observable political phenomena that the model wishes to explain.

Full materials (such as course lecture slidesets, exam study criteria, class readings, and assignment prompts) can be found on my website: <https://calgara.github.io>. These materials are organized as a GitHub interactive syllabus designed for comprehensive accessibility of materials and seamless course flow.

Syllabi and course materials for other courses in which I have served as a teaching assistant are available upon request and can be found at <https://calgara.github.io/teaching.html>. In my role as a teaching assistant in the University of California, Davis Political Science Department, I have experience in the following courses:

- Research Design & Quantitative Methods | Lab Section Teaching Assistant
- Introduction to American Politics | Discussion Section Teaching Assistant
- Introduction to Comparative Politics | Discussion Section Teaching Assistant
- Introduction to California State Politics & Policy | Teaching Assistant
- Public Opinion of the Mass Public (American political behavior) | Teaching Assistant
- American Environmental Politics | Teaching Assistant
- Policymaking in Comparative Democracies | Teaching Assistant
- Democratization | Teaching Assistant

Pol 1: Introduction to American Politics

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS

Fall 2017

Seminar: Hickey Gymnasium 290: T,TR 8:00-9:20

Discussion & Term Paper Period: Hickey Gymnasium 290: T,TR 9:30-9:50

Instructor: Carlos Algara, Ph.D. Candidate

Office: 663 Kerr Hall

Office Hours: Tuesday 10:00-12:00 & by appointment

Course GitPage & Resources: <https://calgara.github.io/pol1f2017.html>

✉ calgara@ucdavis.edu

Course Objective: How do we study & assess American democracy?

This course offers an introduction to the systematic and meticulous study of American politics. Building on the scientific foundation of political science, this course is designed to provide an understanding into the behavior of *citizens* and *institutions* operating within the national framework of American government. The main question motivating the course is a simple, yet complex one: how well does the American political system live up to the ideals of a representative democracy? Recognizing that representative democracy requires engaged citizens and responsive institutions, the motivating question of the course hinges on understanding:

- How does James Madison's "Republic" provide the fundamental theory that justifies the representative framework which underlies the American political system and what are the role of *citizens* and elites within this "ideal" framework?
- How do individual *citizens* make political decisions, such as which candidate to vote for and what policies & political positions (preferences) to hold? What are the implications of how *citizens* make decisions for Madison's framework and the function of democracy? How do alternative models of representation differ from Madison's framework?
- What incentives motivate how elected elites (politicians) behave within the *institution* (i.e. the Congress and the presidency) in which they serve and what are the implications of differing incentives across *institutions* for responsiveness (policymaking)? How does collective *institutional* behavior, such as gridlock, fit into Madison's view of democracy? How do parties fit (or not fit) in Madison's conception of institutional conflict between the Congress and Presidency?

These thematic questions may seem daunting, but this course will give you the necessary framework to perform careful political and social science analysis to gain leverage on these questions. This course will provide not only an understanding of how to think of the quality

of American democracy but also how to engage in careful social science analysis. This course emphasizes the tools you need to assess political behaviors, practices, and institutions based on theory and evidence. Welcome to the class!

Course Logistics & Requirements

This section of the syllabus serves as a guide for course expectations (both for me and for you) and logistical information such as grade breakdown and course texts.

Course Texts & Announcements: There is one assigned textbook for this course and the citation can be found below:

- Kollman, Ken. 2017 *The American Political System: Core Edition*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company ¹

The [Course GitPage](#) contains all lectures, supplemental readings, and exam study guides in the interactive syllabus. Course announcements will be made through [Canvas](#).

Grade Breakdown & Schedule:

- ★ 30% Midterm Exam (November 2, 2017)²
- ★ 45% Final Exam (6:00PM, December 14, 2017)
- ★ 15% American Politics Model Evaluation Essay (Due: December 8, 2017 11:59PM)
- ★ 10% Seminar Participation & Research Participation

≥ 97%	A+	87 - 89% B+	77 - 79% C+	67 - 69 D+	< 60% F
93 - 96%	A	83 - 86% B	73 - 76% C	63 - 66% D	
90 - 92%	A-	80 - 82% B-	70 - 72% C-	60 - 62% D-	

Exams: The midterm & final exam will feature three main components: short answer, analytical question, and essay. The short answer component will be both the *definition* and *significance* of a concept discussed in lecture and in the readings. The analytical question will require you to interpret data presented in a graph or table and then analyze how the presented findings relate to a question about course concepts. Lastly, the essays will require you to use the course concepts to **develop an argument** in response to stated essay question. This includes a thesis statement and supporting evidence for the thesis statement. Study guides will be provided a week before the exam along with “what constitutes an excellent”

¹Note that I have designed the course so that readings in the syllabus correspond to *both* the *Third* Edition and the *Second* Edition of the textbook.

²Midterm exam held in regular lecture. Date subject to change with advance notice.

short answer and essay. The midterm is worth 30% while the **cumulative** final exam is worth 45%.

American Politics Model Evaluation Essay: The essay assignment will ask students to choose a model discussed throughout the course of the quarter and write a critical analysis evaluating the model. The first half of the assignment will require the student to outline the model in detail, the mechanisms present in the model, and what the model predicts with respect to political behavior. The second half of the assignment will require the student to evaluate the model and how well the model predicts the political phenomena it seeks to explain. The parameters of this assignment will be outlined in detail and uploaded to the course [GitPage](#). The assignment is to be turned in via the [Canvas](#) portal under the essay assignment tab.

Make-Up Exams: I understand that throughout a quarter many exogenous, unanticipated events, may occur that would require the makeup of an exam. This course offers flexibility for administration of the *midterm exam* for whatever reason, independent of proper documentation such as a doctor's note. Makeup examinations will consist of a robust single essay written during a ninety minute window. However, per university policy, the final exam cannot be given early and will be administered during the schedule time found on the [registrar website](#). Make-up *final exams* outside of this final exam period will *require* formal documentation and coordination at least a week in advance.

Seminar Participation & Research Participation: As stated earlier, there will be unannounced individual and group activities used to both 1) stimulate discussion during seminar and 2) assess student comprehension of a given day's concepts. These exercises will be done through an online survey hosted by the **Canvas** portal or in-class group exercises. These participation exercises will be incorporated into every other lecture and will be graded based on whether a student participated or not. Students may participate on a computer or on their smart phone device. Thus, **attendance** is critical to receiving full points for the seminar participation. If applicable, students may also earn extra credit participating in a political science research experiment. Details will be explained in class and participation will be equivalent for *two course percentage* points in weight.

Academic Dishonesty & Ethics: This course is about developing critical thought and developing personalized skill-sets necessary to examine politics in a systematic and rigorous way. Thus, it is important to develop your own arguments and work to hone in analytical skills. Academic dishonesty is not only a serious breach of ethics in the university community, but it is also detrimental to your scholarly growth. Ethics breaches, such as cheating and plagiarism, will be referred to the [Office of Student Judicial Affairs](#). Students may refer to the [University's Code of Academic Conduct](#) for further clarification or may contact the instructor for any specific questions.

Course Resources: If accommodations are needed for you to succeed in this course, please speak with me and we will work together to make sure you are accommodated. If you are unsure if you need accommodations, please visit the [UC Davis SDC site](#). On another

note, I highly recommend taking advantage of the great campus resources offered by the [Student Academic Success Center](#) for strategies on how to succeed not only in this course but throughout your tenure here.

Successful Strategies for the Systematic Study of Politics

This section of the syllabus provides successful strategies on *how* to succeed in this course.

Note on Reading Scholarly Articles: After the foundational section, many of the readings in subsequent sections will be academic in nature. I understand that, as an introductory seminar, these works may contain empirical analysis that may seem daunting and confusing to read (i.e. lots of equations & statistics). I will convey the article's findings at length in lecture. The *only* expectation from you is to read the article carefully before seminar, attempt to understand the article's main argument (this includes what political phenomena does the article's argument seek to explain), how the article's findings fit with the theory presented, and what the implications of the author's empirical findings are for the function of democracy/course concepts. I will provide a checklist that outlines how to read these works for content and using the content in seminar discussion.

Expectations: Students can expect me to come prepared to seminar. This entails that students can expect me to give a strong effort to convey the given seminar's course concepts and the implications these concepts have for the main questions highlighted in the course description. This seminar will be taught in a *dynamic* fashion which will require full participation from *everyone* in the seminar. As such, most lectures will incorporate activities designed to stimulate student involvement and gauge comprehension of the material. It is critical that everyone (including me) is ***prepared*** to discuss the seminar's assigned reading for that day and come ready to discuss the concepts and what implications these concepts have for assessing the quality of American democracy.

Coming Prepared: Each seminar will introduce *new* theories that, in one way or another, **will provide different conceptions of what the ideals of democracy should be**. It is critical that you (and I) do the assigned readings before the class. Useful class discussion is conditional on both of us doing the readings, being familiar with the reading's argument/main points, and engaging the theories presented during that week. After understanding these different theories of democracy, we will evaluate whether the American political system as constructed works well or is in need of valuable reform. The better we prepare, the better we can assess our democracy.

Keeping an Open-Mind & Importance of Questions: It is critical to challenge partisan predispositions and other biases we may hold, even if that means confronting powerful myths that can bias our perceptions and assessments. Assessing whether our democracy functions well requires **questioning everything**, both of the theories themselves and my interpretation of them. Intellectual curiosity and asking questions is both a strong and de-

sirable virtue. Asking questions and engaging in a conversation by sharing your ideas and thoughts help strengthen our assessments.

Course Road-Map

This section of the syllabus outlines the course schedule & readings³. The course will be divided into three distinct sections outlined in the course objective. Understanding of these three questions will help assess the behavior of *citizens* and *institutions* and the implications these behaviors have for the functioning of the American political system as a representative democracy. It is imperative that you treat each section as a part of a **framework** by which we judge the functioning of American democracy. Each section objective articulates the role of the section within the **framework**

1. Madison's Republic: Foundation of American Democracy

Section Objective: Madison's theory of representative democracy, outlined in *Federalist 10 & 51*, outlines the justification for the American constitution and our representative form of government. This section provides an understanding of the motivation underpinning a representative form of democracy, centered around Madison's argument about human nature, how representatives behave in political life, and the consequences of Madison's argument on political change. Ask yourself, is Madison's Republic democratic relative to other forms of democracy and how well does this theory explain the American system today?

1. Meeting 1: Course Overview & "First-Attempts" at American Democracy
 - *Kollman Text*: Chapter 1: *Introduction*
 - [The Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union. 1777.](#)
2. Meeting 2: The Problem of Human Nature: Self-Interest, Factions, & Collective Action
 - Madison, James. 1787. "Federalist 10." In [United States Congress Resources](#)
 - *Kollman Text*: Chapter 2: *The Constitution*: Sections: What Do Constitutions Accomplish & Origins of the American Political System
3. Meeting 3: Madison's Theory: Self-Interest & Ambition as the Solution
 - Reread: Madison, James. 1787. "Federalist 10." In [United States Congress Resources](#)
 - Madison, James (or Alexander Hamilton). 1788. "Federalist 51." In [United States Congress Resources](#)
 - [Constitution of the United States](#). 1788. *Particular* emphasis on Articles I, II, IV, & VI.

³Each seminar slideset and supplemental material will be uploaded before seminar on the [Course GitPage](#).

2. Citizen Political Behavior: Functioning as Critical Principals

Section Objective: It's clear that Madison's Republic posits an important role for citizens in a representative democracy. This section highlights how citizens function as *principals* of their elected representatives (i.e. agents). This section provides an understanding of which type of citizens participate in politics, what the incentives are to be "disengaged" from the political process, how well elections work, and what role parties play (if any) in helping citizens make political decisions. Pay close attention to some key questions. What are the implications of the "disengagement" incentive for the functioning of Madison's Republic? Do elections help citizens make a more "representative" form of government and how do we know when they do? How does the pluralist theory challenge Madison's republic? And, perhaps the most important question, is an informed electorate **NECESSARY** for Madison's theory to work?

1. Meeting 4: Variation in Citizen Participation: Resources and Free-Riding Incentive

- *Kollman Text*: Chapter 10: *Political Participation*
- Schudson, Michael. 2000. "America's Ignorant Voters." *The Wilson Quarterly* 36(3): 16-22.

2. Meeting 5: Developing Political Preferences: Citizen Self-Interest

- Zaller, John & Stanley Feldman. 1992. "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences." *American Journal of Political Science* 36(3): 951-971.
- Linn, Suzanna, Jonathan Nagler & Marco A. Morales. 2013. "Economics, Elections, and Voting Behavior" In Jan E. Leighley eds., *The Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2015.

3. Meeting 6: Overcoming Limited Information: How Citizens use Short-Cuts to Act

- *Kollman Text*: Chapter 9: *Public Opinion*
- Lau, Richard R. & David P. Redlawsk. 2001. "Advantages and Disadvantages of Cognitive Heuristics in Political Decision Making." *American Political Science Review* 45(4): 951-971.

4. Electoral Dynamics: The Role of Campaign & Valence Context in Voting Choice

- Abramowitz, Alan I., Brad Alexander & Matthew Gunning. 2006. "Incumbency, Redistricting, and the Decline of Competition in U.S. House Elections." *Journal of Politics* 68(1): 75-88.
- Stone, Walter J. & Matthew K. Buttice. 2010. "Voters in Context: The Politics of Citizen Behavior" In Jan E. Leighley eds., *The Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2015.
- *Kollman Text*: Chapter 13: *Elections & Campaigns*

5. Meeting 8: An Alternative to the Madisonian Model of Representation: Pluralism & By-Product Representation through Interest Groups
 - *Kollman Text*: Chapter 11: *Interest Groups & Social Movements*
 - Olson Jr., Mancur. 1965. *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. **Read Chapter IV: The “By-Product” & “Special Interest” Theories (p. 132-167)**
6. Meeting 9: Does Pluralism Provide Equitable Representation? Critiques of the By-Product Model
 - Gilens, Martin & Benjamin Page. 2014. “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens.” *Perspectives on Politics* 12(3): 564-581.
 - Schattschneider, E.E. 1960. “The Scope & Bias of the Pressure System” In *The Semisovereign People: A Realist’s View of Democracy in America* New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
7. Meeting 10: Review for Midterm & Catch-Up.

Meeting 11: Midterm Examination (November 2, 2017)

3: Post-Election: How Institutions Function within the Framework

Section Objective: This section turns our focus from citizens, the principals in a representative democracy, to elected representatives, the agents. This section focuses on two institutions, the Congress and the Executive, and assesses the *incentives* they have to be faithful agents for voters and *whether* they provide accurate political representation. This section begins with how **Party Theory** provides a framework of representation and policymaking. Pay close attention to how **Party Theory** differs from Madison’s conception of district-centered representation. This section wraps up with a discussion on collective **institutional** behavior. Critical questions for this section focus on comparing & contrasting Madison’s model of representation, Pluralism (By-Product Theory), and Party Theory. Speaking to institutions, think about how do the differing electoral incentives found in Congress and the Presidency inherently create a *status quo bias*? How does polarization exasperate this bias, which *types of citizens* get represented, and is the system in need of reform in light of Madison’s theory?

1. Meeting 12: Parties in the Electorate: Helping Citizens Make Political Decisions at a Trade-off (**Party Theory I**)
 - Levendusky, Matthew S. 2010. “Clearer Cues, More Consistent Voters: A Benefit of Elite Polarization.” *Political Behavior* 32(1): 111-131.
 - Bafumi, Joseph & Robert Y. Shapiro. 2009. “A New Partisan Voter.” *Journal of Politics* 71(1): 1-23.

2. Meeting 13: Parties as Organizations: Implications of the American Party System & Procedural Cartel Theory (**Party Theory II**)
 - Fiorina, Morris. 2006. "Parties as Problem Solvers" In Alan S. Gerber & Erik M. Patashnik eds., *Promoting the General Welfare : New Perspectives on Government Performance*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institute. 2006.
 - Cox, Gary W. & Matthew D. McCubbins. 2005. "Setting the Agenda: Responsible Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives." In Steven S. Smith et al. eds. *The American Congress Reader*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. 2009.
 - **Optional:** *Kollman Text*: Chapter 12: *Political Parties* Sections: What are Parties? & In Comparison: Parties
3. Meeting 14: Congressional Incentives & "*The Textbook Congress*": Representation & Getting Re-Elected
 - Mayhew, David. 1974. "The Electoral Connection and the Congress." In Terry Sullivan & Matthew Sullivan eds., *Congress: Structure and Policy*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. 1987.
 - Evans, C. Lawrence. 2011. "Congressional Committees" In George C. Edwards III, Frances E. Lee, & Eric Schickler eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the American Congress*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2015.
 - Evans, Diana. 2011. "Pork Barrel Politics" In George C. Edwards III, Frances E. Lee, & Eric Schickler eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the American Congress*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2015.
 - **Optional:** *Kollman Text*: Chapter 5: *Congress*: Section: Congressional Elections.
4. Meeting 15: Change in Representation: Are Citizens Represented in the System?
 - Bafumi, Joseph & Michael C. Herron. 2010. "Leapfrog Representation and Extremism: A Study of American Voters and Their Members in Congress." *American Political Science Review* 104(3): 519-542.
 - Bartels, Larry M., Joshua D. Clinton & John G. Greer. 2014. "Representation" In Richard Valelly, Suzanne Mettler, & Robert Lieberman eds., *The Oxford Handbook of American Political Development*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2016.
5. Meeting 16: The Presidency: At-Large Constituency & Presidential Representation
 - Moe. Terry M. & William G. Howell. 1999. "Unilateral Action and Presidential Power: A Theory." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 29(4): 850-873.
 - Canes-Wrone, Brandice. 2001. "The Presidents Legislative Influence from Public Appeals." *American Journal of Political Science* 45(2): 313-329

6. Meeting 17: Executive-Legislative Bargaining: Inherent Status-Quo Bias

- Krehbiel, Keith. 1993. "Pivotal Politics: A Theory in U.S. Lawmaking." In Steven S. Smith et al. eds. *The American Congress Reader*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. 2009.

7. Meeting 18: Polarization: Implications for Policymaking & Accountability

- Rohde, David W., & John G. Greer. 2014. "The President and Congressional Parties in an Era of Polarization" In George C. Edwards III & William G. Howell eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the American Presidency* New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2016.
- Jones, David R. 2010. "Partisan Polarization and Congressional Accountability in House Elections" *American Journal of Political Science* 54(2): 323-337.
- **Optional:** Fiorina, Morris. 2014. "The (Re) Nationalization of Congressional Elections." *A Hoover Institution Essay on Contemporary American Politics*.

8. Meeting 19: Reform Needed? Potential Reforms from Comparative Systems

- Shugart, Matthew S. 2006. "Comparative ExecutiveLegislative Relations." In Sarah A. Binder, R. A. W. Rhodes & Bert A. Rockman eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions* New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2008.

9. Meeting 20: Review for Final & Catch-Up

Meeting 21: Final Exam (6:00PM December 14, 2017)

Executive-Legislative Bargaining: The Pivotal Politics Model

Pol 1: Introduction to American Politics

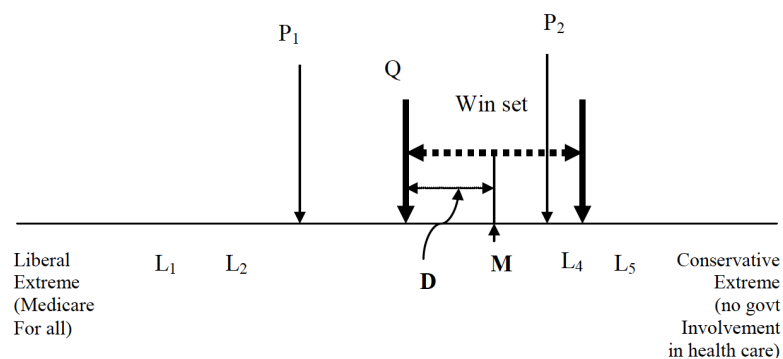
FALL 2017

1 Assumptions of the Pivotal Politics Model

*The following conditions apply to the Pivotal Politics Model of Policymaking:*¹

- ▷ The **Pivotal Politics Model** is a spatial model of policymaking where policies are debated and considered in a single, left-right ideological dimension of conflict.
- ▷ Each legislator (L_1, L_2, L_3, L_4, L_5) has an “ideal-point” where they want policy to be and will **vote for proposals closer to their ideal-point relative to the status-quo**.²
- ▷ Q is the status quo policy. For legislators in the model, the choice is always between Q and a proposal to change the status quo, P .
- ▷ M is the median voter’s ideal point. Recall that the median voter is the legislator in the **MIDDLE** of the distribution of legislators and not necessarily in the middle of the issue or ideological space. In other words, the median legislator need not be a moderate (for example: the median legislator in California is a relative liberal while the median legislator in Idaho is a relative conservative).
- ▷ D is the distance between M & Q and the win-set is $M + / - D$. The win-set is the policy space where any proposal can pass relative to the *status quo*.

2 Policymaking in a Simple Legislature



¹Please note, this is an enhanced version of the *Pivotal Politics* overhead prepared by course instructor.

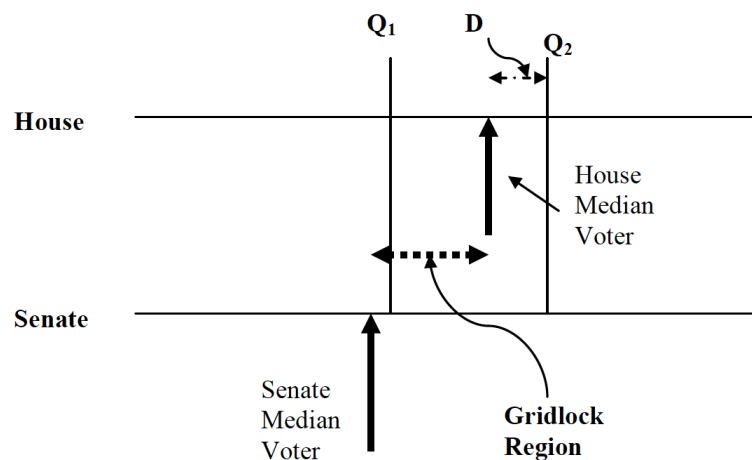
²This is the same logic specified in the **spatial model of vote-choice**, where citizens chose the candidate closest to their ideological ideal-point (preference) relative to the other candidate in the two-candidate election. Both spatial models are “**party-less**” models, where choices are driven by ideological preferences rather than partisan preferences.

Consider the following simple legislature with one majoritarian chamber. This example focuses on differing liberal-conservative preferences on Healthcare Reform. There are two proposals (P_1 & P_2) and a status quo showing the location of current Healthcare policy (Q). Using the figure, *please answer the following questions*.

1. Why does Proposal P_1 fail and proposal P_2 win. What do the legislative coalitions look like?
2. What is the new win set if P_2 passes and becomes the new Q ?
3. Why will any policy proposal within the win set pass as an alternative to Q ?
4. Why does policy converge to equilibrium at the preferences of the median voter M ? Under what conditions does policy change after it converges to M ?
5. How does one change the location of M ?

3 Policymaking in a *Bicameral* Legislature

Now, consider the following model of a bicameral legislature with a House and Senate. For the time being, assume no filibuster so policy can be passed in this legislature with a simple majority in the House and Senate.



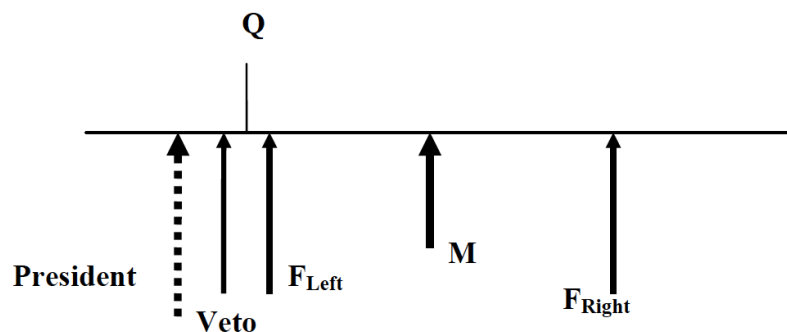
Note: Q_1 = Healthcare status quo (Obamacare) and Q_2 = GOP conservative proposal to replace Healthcare status-quo (Obamacare).

1. Why might the median voters M be located in different positions in the House & Senate?
2. Consider that this is divided government in the 114th Congress with a conservative House & a relatively liberal Senate and the House wants to overturn Obamacare Q_1 for a replacement proposal Q_2 , why couldn't it change policy?

3. Under what conditions could Q_1 change?
4. What happens if the status quo policy, Q_2 , is outside the *gridlock region*?
5. What is the “win set” for Q_2 ? What happens if the Senate median voter moves in the direction of the House median voter, like it did following the 2014 elections?

4 Policymaking in the United States Congress

Now, consider the following model with extraordinary majorities, like those found in the United States Senate. In the Senate, legislation needs the support of 60 out of 100 Senators to overcome a minority filibuster and pass the Senate.³



In the Figure above assume an ideological space found with a Democratic President:

- ▷ M = the ideological location of the *median legislator*
- ▷ F_{Left} = the ideological location of the *liberal filibuster pivot*
- ▷ F_{Right} = the ideological location of the *conservative filibuster pivot*
- ▷ **Veto** = the ideological location of the *congressional veto pivot*, the location of the Senator pivotal to overriding a presidential veto.

Please answer the following questions:

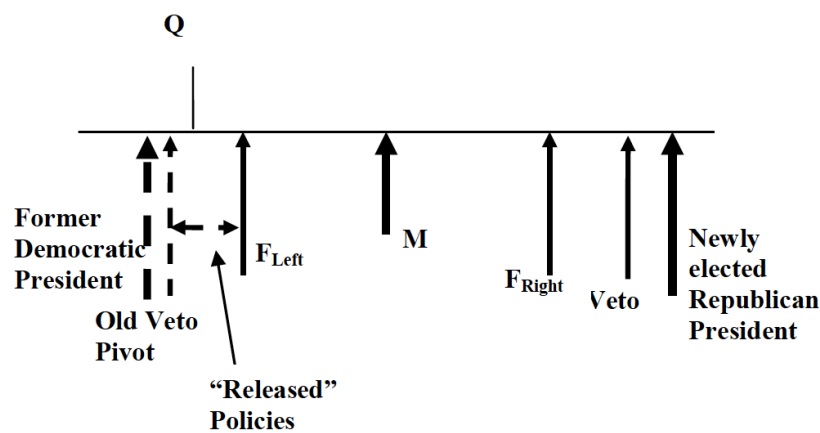
1. What is the rule for stopping a filibuster (*cloture*)? Explain what that means for the definition of the two filibuster pivots.
2. What happens to the gridlock region under an extraordinary-majority rule such as the filibuster? Who is pivotal & under what conditions?

³Note: Most legislation is subject to the 60-vote threshold in the Senate. Only budget reconciliation bills, and executive/judicial nominations, such as those for the Supreme Court or executive agency heads, are not subject to the 60 vote threshold and can be passed with a simple majority (51 votes) as in the U.S. House.

3. What is a filibuster-proof majority?
4. How does partisan polarization affect the placement of the Left and Right filibusters in the absence of a filibuster-proof majority?
5. Why do you think the model drops bicameralism? Under what conditions would the unicameral model be inaccurate?
6. What is the rule for overriding a presidential veto? Explain what that means for the definition of the veto pivot.
7. Why is the veto pivot **ALWAYS** on the same side as the president? Can any status quos (Q) be changed that fall between **Veto** and F_{Left} .

5 U.S. Policymaking: Changing the Presidential Pivot

Now, consider the following Congress with a presidential turnover found this last year. In other words, consider the following iteration of the *Pivotal Politics Model* positing what happens to U.S. policymaking when a Democratic President is replaced with a Republican President. Please answer the following question:



1. What happens to Q when a Republican President succeeds a Democratic President? Define the win-set for Q under this circumstance.
2. In light of your analysis of the win set, what policy P should M propose? Why would M not propose a policy at her ideal point?
3. Why might "released policies", such as Q in this example, contribute to the appearance of a presidential honeymoon?

Pol 1: Introduction to American Politics
American Politics Model Evaluation Essay
FALL 2017

1 Assignment Introduction

This assignment is designed to get you to think about some of the dominant political science models that are prevalent in the systematic inquiry of American politics. Throughout this course, we describe these models in detail and the implications of these models on how well American democracy functions. Your task in this assignment is to choose a model discussed throughout this course, describe the model in detail, and evaluate how well this model explains the American political phenomenon it seeks to explain. The latter part of the paper, your analysis of the model, should feature an argument as to the usefulness of the model in explaining a certain aspect of political behavior. A comprehensive list of the models we discuss in depth throughout the course are listed below.

- ★ Madison's Model of Representation
- ★ Madison's Model of Institutional Conflict
- ★ Zaller's *Top of the Head* Model of Voter Preferences
- ★ The Partisan, Spatial, and Valence Models of Vote-Choice
- ★ By-Product Theory of Representation (Pluralism)
- ★ Party Theory of Representation
- ★ *The Textbook Congress* Model of Congressional Representation
- ★ Moe & Howell's Model of Unilateral Presidential Action
- ★ *Pivotal Politics* Model of Policymaking

The next section of this prompt describes the requirements of the assignment. Pay close attention to this section of this assignment. It is **highly** recommended you outline your paper along these points. The essay should be between **3-5 double spaced pages**.¹

2 Assignment Parameters

2.1 Introducing & Describing the Model

After choosing your model, be sure to describe the model in detail. Consider the following points:

¹This is a **recommended length**. I recognize many stellar & comprehensive essays may go over the five page recommendation. That's ok! However, I would be hard-pressed to believe one can write a thorough essay in under 3 double spaced pages(equivalent to 1.5 single-spaced pages).

1. **What's your model and what does it explain?** What political phenomenon does the model seek to explain and at what level of analysis? For example, does your model speak to how *individual citizens* develop political preferences or does your model speak to how *collective institutions* interact with one another? Think of this section as identifying the key dependent variable of the model (what it is explaining).
2. **Does your model make any assumptions about the behavior of its units?** After identifying what your chosen model explains and at what level of analysis, ask does the model make any assumptions? For example, does your model assume sophisticated or ambivalent voters? Does your model assume that politicians are motivated by re-election or something else? Be sure to state the assumptions of your model, if any.
3. **What's the step-by-step process of how the model works?** After describing the assumptions, describe the "moving parts" (i.e. mechanisms) of your model. Essentially, this section should be concerned with describing how the model works. For example, applying *Party Theory* to Congress posits that the majority party will operate like a procedural cartel and monopolize all agenda setting power in order to create a record of legislative accomplishments all their members can seek re-election on. Another example could be that the *Spatial Model* of voting posits that citizens weigh their ideological preferences (self-interest) relative to both election candidates and, as a consequence, will vote for the candidate closest to them in ideological proximity. This is the real substantive area of the model introduction part of the essay and the model should be described in careful detail.

2.2 Critiquing the Model

1. **What's the utility of the model?** After introducing the reader to the model (i.e. what it tries to explain, its assumptions, how it works), state whether you think the model does a "good job" explaining the political phenomena it seeks to explain or if the model falls short. For example, one could argue that the *Pivotal Politics* model falls short in explaining policy change because it does not account for the role political parties in setting the agenda (thereby constraining the number of legislative proposals that are considered). A good strategy could be to compare & contrast your model with another model seeking to explain the same political phenomena, if applicable, or point out whether the model leaves out an important variable (consideration).
2. **Is there evidence for your argument?** Provide evidence for the argument you present above. You could use other scholarly sources or data analysis done by other publications to strengthen your argument. Empirical sources could include FiveThirtyEight, Vox, the New York Times, etc. For example, if you are writing about the partisan model of voting, you could use exit polls from the 2016 election to argue the model's utility.
3. **Sum up your argument:** Provide a short conclusion (paragraph) as to what the model explains and whether it does a serviceable job of explaining political phenomena.

Proposed Courses

I. Substantive Course Seminars

The United States Congress

Relative to other national institutions (the courts & presidency), the U.S. Congress is the institution that is both the most contemporary barometer of the American electorate and the institution chiefly responsible for national policymaking. The goal of this seminar is to provide students with an in-depth understanding of the complexities of U.S. Congressional politics, politics that are pivotal to policy responsiveness to the wishes of citizens. This seminar assesses three broad and important questions. (1) What drives the ideological policy preferences of legislators and the voters that elect them? (2) What are the institutional rules that dictate how Congress functions as a collective institution and why have these rules changed over time? (3) How does Congress interact with other institutions in the policymaking process and why does the policymaking role of Congress potentially differ from one policy domain to the next? Assessment of these questions will rely on detailed discussions of subtopics relating to congressional elections, constitutional design and procedural rules governing the U.S. House and U.S. Senate, and competing incentives of the Congress, the Presidency, and Courts.

American Political Behavior & Opinion

This seminar provides a comprehensive treatment of the major themes dominating contemporary political science research on American political behavior. This seminar focuses on two dependent variables of American political behavior: (1) political participation (voting propensity, degree of political sophistication/activism) and (2) political preferences (vote-choice, ideological preferences, political value-traits). This seminar also pays close attention to partisanship, both in a discussion as a dependent variable (i.e. what determines a citizen's partisan preference) and an independent variable (i.e. what role does partisanship play in determining electoral choice and how has this role changed over time). This seminar leverages both classical and contemporary cutting-edge research to provide a broad overview of this important American politics subfield.

American Political Parties

This seminar provides a comprehensive theoretical and empirical examination of political parties in the United States. This course provides a treatment of American political parties in three domains. First, we consider political parties *in the electorate*. In this section, we explore the salience of partisanship and the nature of party coalitions, both in contemporary and differing eras of American political life. Second, we consider political parties *as organizations*. This section provides a treatment of parties as analytical units of elite coalitions, designed to provide for the recruitment of candidates and campaign-oriented infrastructure. Lastly, this course considers political parties as analytical units *in government*. This provides for a detailed perspective of how parties, through the lens of *party theory*, solve collective action problems in the legislature. We contrast this view with traditional theories of legislative partisan influence and David Mayhew's view that "no theoretical treatment of the United States Congress that posits parties as analytical units will go very far."

Elections & Voting Behavior

This seminar provides a unified approach to assessing individual and macro level factors influencing election participation and outcomes in the United States at varying levels. This course begins with

the question of who participates in American elections? In this section we consider both individual-level explanations of voter turnout (education, income, etc.) and how election turnout in the U.S. compares to other advanced democracies. We also consider potential institutional reasons for variation in voter turnouts, with special attention to how institutions may (or may not) lower the cost of electoral participation by citizens and the role of campaigns in motivating the public. The second half of the course assesses multiple theories of voter decision making. In this section we focus on three prominent models of voting: 1) the retrospective valence (economic & candidate-centered) model, 2) the partisanship model, and 3) the spatial model. In this section, we unpack each model of vote-choice and discuss both the strengths and weaknesses of each model in explaining voter behavior. We also pay close attention to the Michigan model and rational-choice (Rochester) model of partisanship as it relates to voting. By the end of the course, students will be to “dissect” the effectiveness of our electoral institutions in providing outcomes congruent with aggregate preferences of the electorate.

American Political Polarization in the Mass Publics & Elites

This seminar examines the defining characteristic of contemporary American political life, political polarization. Contemporary political science research suggests polarization pervades all facets of the political arena: the legislative process, executive authority, judicial politics, elections, voting behavior, political parties, mass political participation, and political-economic linkages. Since Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal launched the academic study of contemporary political polarization with their 1984 article “The Polarization of American Politics”, polarization (and scholarly attention to it) continues to trend upward. This gives us the opportunity to study a phenomenon that has obvious relevance to our political system. This seminar will examine the nature, causes, and consequences of polarization and its impact on both elite political actors and the mass public.

The American Presidency

This seminar provides an in-depth treatment of the American presidency and how this institution functions across multiple perspectives. First, we consider the *formal* constitutional role of the presidency. Second, we consider the institutional development of the American presidency and the executive branch at-large. This section pays close attention to constituent demands of the presidency and how this shapes the incentive of unilateral presidential action, particularly in response to stochastic events (such as an economic collapse or foreign policy event). Lastly, we consider competing theories of presidential leadership. In this last section, we consider Neustadt’s theory of presidential power, Kernell’s theory of strategic presidential agenda setting, and Barber’s theory of presidential character and performance. These perspectives are designed to assist students in understanding the nature of presidential action in the American political system.

II. Political Methodology Courses

Introduction to Research Design & Methods

This course provides students with an overview introduction to political methodology by emphasizing which types of questions can be studied using quantitative methods (experimental & observational) and qualitative methods (interview & ethnographic methods). At the undergraduate level, this course focuses on the principles of social scientific inquiry, such as the role of theory building, the need for design-based inference, and the limitations of various methodologies. As such, this course is organized into three key components. The first component provides students with an overview of formulating a social scientific research question and specification of causal theories and testable implications (hypotheses). The second component provides an overview of qualitative methodologies, such as

process-tracing and qualitative interviews. The last component introduces students to conventional quantitative approaches of social scientific research, such as large- N studies and experimental designs. This course culminates in students specifying a research design for a political science question of their choosing, with individual exercises designed throughout the course to facilitate this final product.

Quantitative Political Analysis

This seminar provides students with an introduction to quantitative research methods in political science. The goal of this course is to provide students with the skills needed to be competent consumers and communicators of quantitative methods used in political science. This course provides students with an introduction to fundamental concepts of quantitative research design, data collection, probability theory, quantitative measurement, and applied statistical inference. Students will have exposure to multiple elementary methods of hypothesis testing (analysis of variance, bivariate & multiple regression) in the form of interpreting political science research articles and completing problem sets. The course will also feature exercises to facilitate completion of an original set of quantitative analysis of a political science research question.

Data Visualization & Literacy: Introductory Data Exploration with R

This seminar provides students with an introduction to data management and visualization in the R computing environment for data analysis, a widely used system in industry and academic research. This course introduces students to data science analysis through applied case studies of working with data to derive descriptive narratives using elementary aspects of the R programming language. This is done through introducing students to multiple examples of “real-world” (and often messy) data formats and critically thinking of strategies to quantify and measure concepts of interest. Students will also learn how to visualize data for exploratory analysis and how to effectively communicate this analysis to diverse audiences.

Introduction to Survey Research & Measurement

This methods seminar is designed to provide a comprehensive review of the critically important methodology tool of surveys. The learning outcomes of this course are to provide students with the awareness of the utility of survey research to academic behavioral research, as well as policy evaluation. This course will also leverage case studies to varying sampling methods and to investigate potential sources of error and bias. Particular attention will be paid to the use of surveys in measuring latent variables. This course culminates in students producing and fielding a survey instrument assessing a question of interest.