# 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:

---

[1]This 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 phenomena 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.