

POL 196A: Seminar in American Politics, UC Davis
Spring 2020
Dr. Travis Baker

Class Times: Wednesday 8-11

Location: UC Center Sacramento

Office Hours: Wednesday 1-2, Friday 12-1,
and by appointment

Email: tjbaker@ucdavis.edu

Purpose of the Course

Political Science 196A is a four-unit course designed to bridge the practical and academic experiences of students by providing an introduction to political science research in the field of American politics and public policy, with a particular focus on the state of California. This will be a small discussion-based class that is run similar to a graduate seminar. This course will cover various theoretical and empirical issues that arise in the study of American and Californian politics and public policy. Given the size of these fields, topics covered will, in part, be determined by topics that interest students the most. In this way, the course is designed to help complement the original research students will be conducting through other courses in the program. By guiding students through the process of finding and analyzing current research, this course should help students to focus and develop their own research instincts.

Grading

Course grades for POL 196A are based on the following components:

Attendance and Seminar Participation (30% of your grade)

Presentations (3 x 10 = 30% of your grade)

Short Papers (3 x 10 = 30% of your grade)

Take-Home Final (10% of your grade)

Attendance and Seminar Participation:

As this course is designed to be similar to a graduate seminar, the success of this course depends on everyone being an active participant. Students are expected to attend all classes and come prepared to discuss the assigned readings for the week. Students should bring copies of that week's readings to class. When reading, students should not only try to understand the content of the material, but also they should attempt to think critically about the readings. Any student that has two or more unexcused absences will not be able to receive a passing grade for the class.

Presentations:

Each student is required to give three separate presentations on readings from the course. Each presenter, with help from the instructor, will choose a recently published academic article on a topic in American/California politics or public policy that interests them.

Each presentation will cover one reading for the week. The goal of the presentation is to concisely summarize the important aspects of the reading and its implications.

Instructions for presentations will be provided to you, and they will be available on Canvas.

Short Papers:

For each reading that students present on, they will also be required to do a short write-up that thoughtfully analyzes that reading. These papers are due at the beginning of the class for which they are assigned. These assignments should be a minimum of two pages, double-spaced. The objective of these papers is to critically analyze, not just summarize the reading. For example, short papers may discuss potential alternative explanations for findings, or ways to approach the topic of research; relate to other readings from current or previous weeks; evaluate the conception, operationalization, and measurement of important variables; suggest hypotheses for future research; and discuss potential implications for these findings for California and the United States, among others.

Take-Home Final:

Students will also be required to complete a Take-Home Final that will be due during the week of finals. For your final, you will write a 7-page analysis on the topic of your choosing. This paper will be a more substantial and in-depth version of the short papers you wrote throughout the quarter. All finals must be turned in via Canvas. Further requirements, instructions, and official due date for the Take-Home Final will be introduced later in the quarter.

Tentative Course Schedule

Week 1 (1/8): Introduction

Week 2 (3/11): Representation in the U.S. Congress

Fenno Jr., Richard F. 1977. "U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration." *American Political Science Review* 71:3 (September): 883-917.
Bafumi, Joseph and Michael C. Herron. 2010. "Leapfrog Representation and Extremism: A Study of Voters and Their Members of Congress." *American Political Science Review* 104:3 (August): 519-42.

Week 3-8: Readings TBD

Finals Week: Take-Home Final due via Canvas

Course Policies

Attendance and Participation:

Class attendance is mandatory. All students should come to class prepared to participate in class discussion and to participate with the in-class activities.

Late Policy and Make-Up Exams:

Make-up exams and extensions will be allowed only in the event of a medical or family emergency. The emergency must be documented [doctor's note] in order to be able to take a make-up exam or to have an extension. If documentation is provided, then a

decision will be made regarding whether you will be granted a make-up exam or receive an extension. Any requests for an incomplete must be accompanied by a written medical report.

Grade Appeals:

Students will have one week from when grades are posted to appeal their grade. All appeals must include a typed, double spaced statement explaining why you are requesting a grade appeal, and you must justify with evidence from your exam, paper, or summaries. If you choose to appeal your grade, the instructor reserves the right to increase or decrease the existing grade.

Academic Honesty:

As a University of California student, you have agreed to abide by the University's academic honesty policy. Cheating and other violations of academic honesty are serious offenses. Students are expected to work independently on all graded assignments. Please refer to the UC Davis policy on integrity of scholarship for further details. Students who engage in cheating will earn an F grade.

Students with Disabilities:

Any student who, because of a disability, may require some special arrangements in order to meet any of the course requirements should contact the instructor as soon as possible to make necessary accommodations. It is the responsibility of the student to request accommodation for individual learning needs. UC Davis will make every attempt to accommodate all qualified students with disabilities.

Laptops and tablets are permitted in-class for note-taking only. Please do not disrupt your classmates by surfing the web or engaging in other activities.