This course provides a general introduction to the field of American Political Institutions and Behavior. It is structured as a “survey” course, providing both an overview of the classic works and coverage of important contemporary pieces in the major subfields of American Politics. Given finite time and vast literatures, breadth will be emphasized over depth, so that once the course is completed, students should have a basic working knowledge of each field. This will provide a solid framework for further courses and a subsequent comprehensive exam in American Politics.

Course Requirements
There are several requirements for this class:

(1) You must come to class prepared, which means that you have done all of the week’s readings in advance. You are also expected to participate in class discussion. Participation is what makes a seminar a useful learning experience – you learn as much from the in-class discussion as you do from the readings themselves. Moreover, given that this is your chosen vocation, you should be active in fostering your professional development.

(2) Each week, each student will serve as a “discussion leader” for a given paper (or a section of a book). This means that you will present the paper (book section) in class – covering the theory, substance, and empirics in a thorough and critical manner. My role will be more of a “moderator,” providing background context and steering the discussion in various directions.

(3) The course grade will be a function of short essays (30%), class participation (30%), and a final exam (40%). You will write two short essays, the goal of each will be to summarize, analyze, and critique a given week’s readings both individually and collectively. Each essay will be due before the class meets to discuss that particular week’s readings. Finally, a take-home final exam will be given, the timing and specifics of which will be discussed in class.

Course Materials:
The readings for the course will be a balance between books and journal articles. Most of the journal articles are available electronically, and I indicate their URL sources below. For those journal articles that are not available electronically, as well as for relevant book chapters, I will provide copies in the lounge on the 3rd floor of Scott Hall.
Six books are required. All are available at the Norris Center bookstore:


The following four books are recommended. We will only read selections from them, so I will provide copies of the relevant chapters in the Scott Hall copy room. Nevertheless, they are “important” books that you might at some point like to own.


Below is a week-by-week list of reading assignments. Required readings are marked with a *. Recommended readings are marked with a #.

**Week 1 – September 22: Introduction**

Overview of the course, expectations of the students, etc.

**Week 2 – September 29: Participation**


**Week 3 – October 6: Ideology, Political Knowledge, and Public Opinion**


Week 4 – October 13: Voting


*V.O. Key, Jr. 1966. _The Responsible Electorate_, Chapters 1-2.


Week 5 – October 20: No Class

Week 6 – October 27: Congress: Representation and Roll-Call Voting


Week 7 – November 3: Congress: Institutional Organization


Week 8 – November 10: Presidency


**Week 9 – November 17: Supreme Court**


**Week 10 – November 24: Political Parties**

*John H. Aldrich, *Why Parties?*. All*


Week 11 – December 1: Interest Groups

