This course provides a general introduction to the field of American Political Institutions. It is structured as a “survey” course, providing both an overview of classic works and coverage of important new research in and across the major subfields of American Political Institutions. 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 the important literature in and across each field. This will provide a solid framework for further graduate courses (such as Seminars on Congress, the Presidency, etc.) 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 take an active role 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 two short essays (20%), class participation (50%), and a take-home final exam (30%). The goal of the essays 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 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, usually at JSTOR and sometimes at the journal’s webpage. For those articles (or book chapters) that are not available electronically, I will have copies scanned (into PDFs) and sent to you roughly a week before such readings are covered in class.
We will be reading most or all of twelve books, all of which are available at the UVA Bookstore:


Below is a week-by-week list of required reading assignments:

Meeting 1 (September 3): Course Overview and Introduction to Institutional Research

    Essays by Kenneth Shepsle, Elizabeth Sanders, and Ira Katznelson & Barry Weingast

Meeting 2 (September 10): Congress I


Meeting 3 (September 17): Congress II


Meeting 4 (September 24): Presidency


Meeting 5 (October 1): Supreme Court


Meeting 6 (October 8): Bureaucracy


**Meeting 7 (October 15): Political Parties**


**Meeting 8 (October 22): Interest Groups**


**Meeting 9 (October 29): Divided Government I**


**Meeting 10 (November 5): Divided Government II**


Meeting 11 (November 12): Delegation


Meeting 12 (November 19): Presidential-Congressional Relations I


Meeting 13 (December 3): President-Congressional Relations II


Meeting 14 (December 10): Presidential Appointments

