Seminar in Political Participation

Who participates, and why? Does political participation ameliorate or exacerbate social inequalities? How do political institutions promote and inhibit political participation? Does political participation in China mean the same thing as political participation in the United States? Does political participation really matter?

The goals for the seminar are

1. to review the literature on political participation generally, and to enable students to conduct some basic secondary analysis of data which addresses either the conditions that foster (or inhibit) political participation or the consequences of participation for democratic governments. While most of the readings use the United States as a case, about one-third of the readings will be informed by research in non-US settings. Most of those discuss participation in advanced industrial (or post-industrial) democracies, but we will also read about participation in developing democracies and authoritarian polities.

2. provide students with the theoretical background and empirical tools to write a research paper that uses secondary analysis of existing data to answer a basic question about political participation.

The constituencies that I hope to reach with this seminar include doctoral students in political science in political behavior, American politics, or comparative politics, students in cognate fields (including sociology, psychology, or communications) with substantive interests in political participation, and M.A. students in Political Campaigning with practical or research interests in political mobilization.

The weekly seminars will be reviews and discussions of selected readings on various topics, and we will evaluate how well this group of readings answers basic scientific questions about political participation in the United States, in other national settings, across national settings, and among various minority populations. Our review of the readings will be supplemented by research papers by each member of the seminar.

Requirements: Attendance and Participation. The weekly meetings of the seminar should be viewed as opportunities for the exchange of ideas among scholars. You may, on occasion, be able to tell that I am the leader of the seminar, but its overall success depends on the informed participation of everyone. Each student is expected to have completed the readings for the week, and to have something to say about those readings when seminar begins.

Weekly Essays and participation: Each student will prepare a paper which addresses some theoretical or methodological concern in that week's reading.

In weeks in which we read several articles, these papers may be critiques of one or more of the readings, or may offer some theoretical insight which builds on the readings for the week. Ideally, these papers will integrate several of the readings to offer a theoretically meaningful commentary on
the state of knowledge on the topic of discussion. Students also may (but are not required) to incorporate a "rough data analysis" into the essay, provided that the data analysis is described in terms that show an understanding of the assigned readings. These essays should be approximately 400-500 words (or about one single spaced page), and should be uploaded to Sakai by 6 p.m. the day **before** seminar. (Please post as text, not as Word documents or other attachments.) The essays will become the basis for our discussions during seminar, and I will endeavor to return brief comments to you.

In weeks in which we read just one book (or the readings include a substantial portion of one book), these essays may take the form of a book review that might appear in *Perspectives on Politics* or another appropriate academic journal. A good book review will alert the reader to the major theme of the book, summarize the chapters' major points and findings, and evaluate its overall contribution to our understanding of the topic.

Occasionally, I may ask students to prepare written and oral summaries of recommended readings for the rest of the seminar. These summaries will be in lieu of the regular essays.

Comprehensive assigment: Each student will either write a research paper OR will take a final exam.

**Research Paper (Option 1)**

Papers typically will be 20 to 25 pages, will show an understanding of the development of knowledge in a chosen area, and demonstrate a basic secondary analysis of data which extends knowledge in that area. You may want to review relevant materials from the Conduct of Inquiry Seminar in conjunction with this assignment.

Students will present their basic research results in our final seminar meeting on December 6. The final paper will be due at noon, April 28. Further guidelines for the research presentation and paper will be forthcoming.

**Final Exam (Option 2)**

The final exam will be similar in format to a comprehensive graduate (MA Campaigning or PhD) exam. Two questions will be distributed at noon on April 28, and essays answering both questions will be due 24 hours later, at noon on April 29. (The exact 24 hour period may be changed with the unanimous consent of the instructors and all students who opt for the exam.)

Grades will be based on your participation, weekly essays, and research paper / final exam (roughly equally weighted). No collaboration on any assignment is allowed without my specific express permission.

You may wish to purchase one of more of them from your favorite brick and mortar or virtual bookseller.


The following is a tentative calendar for the course.

**January 6: Introduction to the Seminar**

During this class period, we will set the agenda for the semester. I expect to discuss seminar requirements, as well as a general overview of the research traditions in political participation. It would be helpful for me and the other participants to understand your research goals or career interests.

I expect that the seminar will include doctoral students whose primary or secondary field is Political Behavior, doctoral students in other disciplines with an interest in political participation, and second-year M.A. students in the Political Campaigning program. My experience has been that diverse groups can lead to productive exchanges of ideas that encourage all participants to question their assumptions about the causes and consequences of mass political behavior. In and of itself, that would be a significant accomplishment for this seminar.

For an overview of the literature on political participation, read:


(No written essay due.)

**January 13: How do you think you know what you think you know about political participation?**


**January 27: The Haves Have It! The SES "Model"**

Seven-Nation Comparison. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1-5.


**February 3: Are the rich really just like the rest of us, except for the money?**


**February 10: How hard can it be? Registration and "Convenience" Laws**


optional


**February 17: Does separation of powers separate voters from non-voters?: Political Institutions**


**February 24: Does participation even make sense? The puzzle of rational choice**


**March 10: Reach out and Touch Someone: Mobilization**


* Rosenstone, Steven J. and John Mark Hansen. 1993. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in*


Supplemental:


March 17: Data sources for research papers

This seminar period will be devoted to talking about data sources for final papers. We'll talk about using data from the American National Election Studies, the Comparative Studies of Electoral Systems, and replication datasets available from the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research.

March 24: Empowerment


**March 31: My Neighbor Made Me Do It: Social Connectedness and Networks**


Supplemental:


**April 7: Reach Out and Squelch Someone: Participation in Authoritarian Societies**


Supplemental:


**April 14: The Peasants Are Revolting! (How revolting are they?)**


* Barnes, Samuel and Max Kaase, et al., *Political Action: Mass Participation In Five Western Democracies*, Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979, Chapter 12 by Inglehart.


**optional**


**April 21: Who cares?**


**April 28: Optional Final Papers Due at noon (Hard, absolute, drop-dead, no exception deadline) submitted via Sakai**

**April 28-29: Final Exam to be distributed at noon, April 28 and to be submitted via Sakai noon, April 29**

Supplemental:

**Location, location, location**


**The Decline (and Rise) in Voter Turnout**


