The University of Texas at Austin

Government 370L (38600):

Public Opinion and Representation

Fall, 2016

Christopher Wlezien

TTh 11:00-12:30

PAR 1

Contact Information:

Office: 4.154 Batts
Office Hours: 12:30-2:30 T; 12:30-1:30 TH; and by appointment
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Course Description

This course examines the relationship between the public and elected officials in representative democracy. It builds on democratic political theory but focuses mostly on empirical practice, particularly in the United States (US). Special attention is paid to the representation of public opinion in the composition of elected bodies, the positions politicians take, and government policy actions themselves. Along the way, we consider the roles played by characteristics of issues, electoral competition, political institutions, and political inequality, among other things. By the end of the course, students should have a good sense for how well and why elected officials represent the public in the US.

Course Format

The course will consist of lectures and discussion. Thus, while the course is not a seminar, class participation is essential. Student will need to keep up with the reading and then be prepared to participate. To encourage this, students will receive extra credit based on the quality—not just quantity—of their contributions to class discussion. (See the description of “Grades” for details.)

Grades

The main graded components for this class are the midterm and final examinations and a paper due toward the end of the semester. Performance in the class will be assessed as follows:

40%  Midterm examination
40%  Final examination
20%  Paper
+0-5% Participation
In allocating grades, the following scale will be used:

- **A** 93-100%
- **A-** 90-93%
- **B+** 87-90%
- **B** 83-87%
- **B-** 80-83%
- **C+** 77-80%
- **C** 73-77%
- **C-** 70-73%
- **D+** 67-70%
- **D** 63-67%
- **D-** 60-63%
- **F** < 60%

Examinations are based on readings, lectures, and discussion and may include multiple choice, short answer questions and essay questions. The final examination is cumulative, meaning that you are required to remember and integrate information from the first half of the course in order to complete the course in good standing.

A paper is due Tuesday, November 22. It must be turned in to me in class that day or else dropped at my office (4.154) in Batts Hall by 4:30 p.m. The paper will consider the extent of representation in any elected unit in the US in which you have lived. More detailed information about the assignment will be provided in class. For now, note that the length of the paper will be 8-10 typed (using 12 point font) double-spaced pages, or 2,000-2,500 words.

**Readings**

The course readings include four books, which are available in the university bookstore:


Various journal articles and book chapters also are required and these—as well as additional reading pertaining to specific subject areas—is listed in the course outline that follows. The required readings will be made available on Canvas. Yet other reading may be distributed during the course, as appropriate.
Disabilities
Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259, http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/.

Academic Dishonesty
UT prohibits academic dishonesty, which includes plagiarism; see http://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/appendices/appendix-c/student-discipline-and-conduct/. Also see the UT Honor Code http://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/the-university/.

Religious Holidays
UT policy allows students to miss a class, examination or assignment to observe a religious holy day. Students are expected to notify professors of the pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day, and will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

August 25: Introductory class.

Required reading:

NONE.

August 30: Why representation?

Required reading:

Madison, James. Federalist papers #10 and #51. (Available on Canvas.)

For further reading:


September 1: Your Experiences with Representation

Required reading:

Mezey book, chapter 3 (to page 64).

Assignment:
Consider your experiences with representation in different electoral units, e.g., at the city, county, state and national levels. Have you been represented well or poorly? Have you been better represented at some levels than others? Why or why not?

September 6: What is representation?

Required reading:

Mezey book, chapter 7 (to page 185).

For further reading:


September 8: Who Gets Represented? The Right to Vote

Required reading:

Uggen, Christopher, Angela Behrens, and Jeff Manza. 2005. “Criminal Disenfranchisement.” Annual Review of Law and Social Science 1:307-322. (Canvas.)

Recommended:

The Sentencing Project: http://www.sentencingproject.org/template/page.cfm?id=133. NOTE: This site advocates for reform but does contain what appears to be good information about laws regarding felony disenfranchisement and actual numbers too.


Required reading:

For further reading:


September 15: Forms of representation: trustee and delegate.

Required reading:

Mezey, *skim* chapter 4; read all of chapter 5.

For further reading:


Assignment:

Consider the topic for your paper and prepare a proposal including a title and (at least) one paragraph outlining the focus.

September 20: On Constituencies and Districting

➔ Initial paper proposals due.

Required reading

Mezey, Chapter 3 (pages 64-84).

September 22: On Districting and Representation, part 1

Required reading:

Brunell, pages 1-74.

September 27: On Districting and Representation, part 2

Required reading:

Brunell, pages 75-125.

September 29: Descriptive Representation: Demographic Characteristics
Be familiar with:


Required reading:

Review Mezey, chapter 3, especially pages 76-84.

For further reading:


October 4: Substantive Constituency Representation: Roll Calls

➤ Final paper proposals due.

Required reading:


October 6: Dyadic and Collective Representation

Required reading:


For further reading:

October 11: A Review Session on Papers and Exams

Required reading:

NONE.

October 13: MIDTERM EXAM (tentative date)

October 18: On Policy Representation

⇒ Graded exams returned.

Required reading:


October 20: Public Priorities and Government Attention

Required reading:


October 25: Traditional Approaches: Consistency and Covariation

Required reading:


October 27: Representation in Policy Outputs: Across Space (in the American States)

Required reading:

Erikson, et al, chapters 1-4

November 1: Representation in the American States continued

Required reading:

Erikson, et al, chapters 5-7
November 3: Representation in the American States concluded

→ OPTIONAL: Submit two-page double-spaced paper outlines for review.

Required reading:

Erikson, et al, chapters 8-10.


November 8: Representation in Policy Outputs: Across Time (in the US and UK and CA)

Required reading:

Soroka and Wlezien, chapters 1-3

November 10: Dynamic Representation continued.

Required reading:

Soroka and Wlezien, chapters 4, 5 and 7.

Optional:

Soroka and Wlezien, chapter 6.

November 15: Dynamic Representation concluded.

Required reading:

Soroka and Wlezien, chapters 8 and 9.

November 17: Who Gets Represented? Income and Political Representation

Required reading:


Papers due.

Required reading:

Http://www.demos.org/publication/why-voting-gap-matters

For further reading:


November 24: NO CLASS—Thanksgiving Day!

November 29: On Implementation and Policy Outcomes

Required reading:


December 1: Final class: On Representation and its Consequences for Politics

Graded papers returned.

Required reading:

Wlezien, Christopher. 2016. “Policy (Mis)Representation and the Cost of Ruling: US Presidential Elections in Comparative Perspective.” Comparative Political Studies, forthcoming. (Canvas.)

Recommended:


December 12: Final examination, 2:00-5:00