Basic Information

Professor: Dan Pemstein  
Email: daniel.pemstein@ndsu.edu  
Slack: NDSUPOLS762.slack.com  
Phone: 701-231-6563

Class Location: TBD  
Class Time: TBD  
Office Location: Putnam 104C  
Office Hours: TBD

Course Overview

Bulletin Description

This course surveys the new institutionalist literature in political science and examines applications of rational choice theory, and its extensions, to problems of politics and governance, while drawing on both theoretical and empirical research at the intersection of economics and political science.

Course Objectives

The goal of this course is to provide students with a strong grounding in the scholarly literature on political institutions, and the literature on institutionalism as a mode of analysis. After completing this course students should be able to:

- describe and understand core theories of institutional analysis,
- think critically about institutional design, emergence, and evolution,
- demonstrate broad knowledge about how institutions structure political and economic behaviors and outcomes
- develop clear research designs to study question about political institutions, and
- effectively consume, critique, and communicate current scholarly literature about political institutions.

Required Student Resources

All readings are available on Blackboard. I will send students an invitation to join the course Slack workspace at NDSUPOLS762.slack.com. I expect students to regularly check this workspace for announcements and to use it to communicate with the instructor and classmates outside of class.
Evaluation

Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Leadership</td>
<td>30% (2 × 15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Proposals</td>
<td>36% (3 × 12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>34%</td>
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Discussion Leadership

Each of you will be a discussion leader for two weeks of the course. Each course session will have 1–2 discussion leaders. When there are two discussion leaders, these two individuals should work together and coordinate in advance of the course session to complete the discussion leader tasks.

Discussion leaders have two tasks. Leaders should generate 7–10 questions that delve into specific readings, tie the readings together, and/or connect the readings to previous weeks. I expect discussion leaders to be particularly familiar with the week’s readings and to lead a significant portion of class discussion. I also expect them to be able to answer specific questions that may arise about the reading. Leaders should circulate discussion questions to the Slack workspace no later than 7 PM the day before class.

The discussion leader(s) will also give short conference-like presentations on one of the required readings for the week in question. This presentation should be no longer than 15 minutes and should present the research as clearly and succinctly as possible. The rest of the class should engage the discussion leader in approximately 5 minutes of conference-like Q&A. The purpose of this task is two-fold. It will give each person professional experience giving a short conference-length presentation and it will also help to get the discussion going each day. If you want to talk with me about your presentation or discussion questions ahead of time, please feel free to contact me through Slack.

Research Proposals

Students will produce three 3–6 page research proposals over the course of the semester, jumping off of one week’s readings. Each research proposal will identify a research question, propose a clear thesis based on that question, generate two testable hypotheses from that thesis, and describe data collection and analysis strategies for testing those hypotheses. We will discuss the research proposals in more depth during the first week of class.

Participation

I expect you to attend all class meetings. This is your opportunity to ask questions, discuss readings and other course material, and engage in activities that will deepen your understanding of course topics. Your participation grade will be based on both attendance and the quality of your participation, including demonstrating that you have thoughtfully completed the reading. I expect students to come prepared, and to be respectful of one another, attentive, and actively engaged. In-classroom discussions and activities are the foundation of this course, and fundamental to mastering the course material. In this class it is ok to
demonstrate misunderstanding when speaking up but it is not ok to hang back and not participate.

Towards the end of the semester, each student will write a short (1-2 page) paper making an evidence-based case for the participation grade that she feels she deserves. These papers, and the persuasiveness of their arguments, will form the basis for students’ participation grades. Although you have substantial leeway in how you make your case for your participation grade, your self-evaluation should follow this rough rubric:

A Perfect attendance, frequent and thoughtful verbal participation, deeply engage the material
B Perfect attendance, regular and thoughtful verbal participation, deeply engage the material
C Strong attendance, less regular verbal participation and/or lack of deep engagement with the material
D Missed more than 2-3 classes and/or little to no verbal participation in class
F Frequently miss class, no verbal participation

Class Policies

Grades

I use a flat grade scale: A=90–100, B=80–89, C=70–79, D=60–69, F=59 or lower. If you have a complaint about a grade you must type a formal appeal describing the problem. Your appeal should make a cogent argument for improving your grade. If applicable, attach a copy of the original assignment to your appeal.

Make-Up Assignments

You have substantial flexibility in when you sign up for discussion leadership and research proposals. In general, if you have a valid reason for missing a class session for which you have signed up, you may shift your leadership or proposal to a subsequent session. Students should therefore not require make-up assignment opportunities, except in exceptional circumstances. Students must arrange such make-ups on a case-by-case base and the instructor will only grant make-up opportunities when clearly justified and absolutely necessary.

Academic Honesty

The academic community is operated on the basis of honesty, integrity, and fair play. [NDSU Policy 335: Code of Academic Responsibility and Conduct](https://www.ndsu.edu/academichonesty) applies to cases in which cheating, plagiarism, or other academic misconduct have occurred in an instructional context. Students found guilty of academic misconduct are subject to penalties, up to and possibly including suspension and/or expulsion. Student academic misconduct records are maintained by the [Office of Registration and Records](https://www.ndsu.edu/academichonesty). Informational resources about academic honesty for students and instructional staff members can be found at [www.ndsu.edu/academichonesty](http://www.ndsu.edu/academichonesty).

Please make sure that you understand common standards of academic integrity and plagiarism and consult the instructor if you are ever in doubt. I have a no tolerance policy for
academic misconduct and students who commit such misconduct should expect, at minimum, to receive a failing grade for this class.

**Discrimination and Harassment**

NDSU is committed to providing a safe and non-discriminatory learning, living, and working environment for all members of its university community. NDSU’s policy on discrimination and harassment is available at [www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/policy/156.pdf](http://www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/policy/156.pdf) and the equity office provides information about filing complaints here: [www.ndsu.edu/equity/filing-a_complaint_at_ndsu/](http://www.ndsu.edu/equity/filing-a_complaint_at_ndsu/). Any form of violence or harassment, including sexual assault, relationship violence, and stalking is unwelcome at the University. NDSU provides a Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment and Sexual Assault Resource Guide at [www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/equity/Resources/Sexual_Harassment_Guide_PROV_1437.pdf](http://www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/equity/Resources/Sexual_Harassment_Guide_PROV_1437.pdf).

Low-grade discrimination and harassment can be especially pernicious in a classroom setting. Please read the following blog post and work to avoid the behaviors that the post describes: [bit.ly/36wuaus](http://bit.ly/36wuaus).

Please note that the instructor has a mandatory responsibility to report instances of discrimination, harassment, sexual assault, and retaliation, as described here: [www.ndsu.edu/equity/reporting_responsibilities/](http://www.ndsu.edu/equity/reporting_responsibilities/). What this means is that as your professor, I am required to report any incidents of such misconduct that I observe, or that students or others report to me.

**Electronic Devices**

Students should put away their cell phones during class, although students with good reasons (e.g., parents of young children) may keep their phones on vibrate in case of emergency. I discourage using a laptop for note-taking because research shows that students retain information better when they take notes by hand and because they can be distracting to other students.

**Students with Special Needs**

Any students with disabilities or other special needs, who need special accommodations in this course, are invited to share these concerns or requests with the instructor and contact the Disability Services Office ([www.ndsu.edu/disabilityservices](http://www.ndsu.edu/disabilityservices)) as soon as possible.

**Attendance**

According to NDSU Policy 333 ([www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/policy/333.pdf](http://www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/policy/333.pdf)), attendance in classes is expected. In this course, attendance is mandatory unless you have a valid reason to miss a session. If possible, you must notify the instructor in advance if you need to miss class.

Veterans and student service members with special circumstances or who are activated are encouraged to notify the instructor as soon as possible and are encouraged to provide Activation Orders.
Written Communication

I expect students to take care with their written communication, to proof-read their work, and to ensure that their writing is grammatical and clear. Scientific writing often uses passive voice, includes overly complicated vocabulary and prose, and makes comprehension unnecessarily difficult for readers. As a graduate student it is natural to copy this style as you build your own scholarly voice. In this course I will push you to develop a simple, clear, efficient, and engaging writing style. To get started on this process, and to see who is reading the syllabus, I will grant one percentage point of extra credit to any student who corrects all of the passive voice in the University-mandated language in this syllabus, and posts these corrections to my private channel in the Slack workspace.

Schedule

1  Studying Institutions 1


2  Studying Institutions 2


3 Institutional Emergence 1


4 Institutional Emergence 2


5 Institutional Change


6 Collective Action


7 Principal-Agent Problems


8 Commitment Problems


9 Informal Institutions


10 Political Regimes


11 Electoral Institutions


12 Parties and Party Systems


13 Coalitions


14 Distributive Politics


15 Political and Economic Development


16 Wrapping Up