COURSE DESCRIPTION
“Political psychology, as an interdisciplinary pursuit, applies psychological concepts and methods to test theories about elite and mass political behavior” (Lavine 2002). Political psychologists have gone “inside the mind” of citizens and political elites in an attempt to explain a host of political phenomena from how people interpret political information and make decisions to the role that emotions, identities, and group dynamics play in forming opinions and evaluating political options.

In this course, we will use leading work in political psychology to investigate critical issues in American politics. After introducing political psychology’s history, methods and major themes, we will look at the psychological aspects of campaign politics, public opinion, intergroup relations and leadership.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
As a senior seminar, this class has certain objectives.

• First, it serves as an introduction to the study of political psychology, which is intended to broaden your understanding of politics, and American politics in particular. In other words, it encourages you to think about politics in a slightly different way – to think about the psychological processes that shape political thoughts and actions.

• Second, this class provides an opportunity to hone your analytical and discussion skills. You will read challenging material and be asked to work through the author’s approach to determine its uses and implications. You will also be asked to demonstrate your mastery of the material in both verbal and written forms. You must engage, consider, and grapple with the readings as well as develop insights about them.

• Third, this seminar allows you to take on a major research project. Drawing on both class material and outside knowledge, you will craft your own research project that synthesizes your thinking on a major political topic.

REQUIREMENTS
You are expected to come to class each week having carefully read and considered the required readings. The optional readings are simply there if you are interested. (Please see me if you cannot locate any of the optional readings.) I fully expect that you will have something insightful—if not brilliant—to say in class about each required reading.
The following books are required for the course. They are available for purchase online and at the college bookstore. I have also asked for one copy of each book to be placed on reserve in the library. (I do not recommend that you rely on the reserve copy.)


Assignments and Grading

You are required to complete all of the following assignments to pass the course.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflection Papers</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>(due each Wednesday by 10:00 am)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prospectus</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>(due November 18th at 2:00 pm)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prospectus Review</td>
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<td>(due November 20th at midnight)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
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Class Participation

Your participation grade is based on your attendance in class, your attitude, and most importantly, your ability to discuss the course material. In terms of your active participation in class, comment quality matters much more than quantity – insightful comments that reflect an interest in and understanding of the course material will be rewarded much more than frequent commentary on how this stuff reminds you of a personal anecdote.

Good participation is critical to the success of any seminar. I have provided two attachments at the end of this syllabus to help you become an engaged consumer of the class material and an effective classroom discussant. Please read and follow them closely.

Reflection Papers

Starting the second week of the semester (September 14th), you will write a one-page (single-spaced) reflection paper that evaluates the method, argument, and contribution of the week’s

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1 Adapted from Prof. Dawson’s syllabus for Polt 305: The Presidency.
reading. Your first objective is to show that you have read the material carefully. This does not mean going into great detail about every single point. In fact, given that you only have one page, you will need to think very carefully about the parts of the reading on which you will focus. You should try to center on broad themes while remembering that you will have a chance during class discussion to further demonstrate that you have done all of the reading. Your second objective is to reflect on the reading and demonstrate an ability to think carefully about what it means. You might discuss: (1) critical limitations of the study and how they could be improved; (2) the broad implications of the findings; and/or (3) how the readings relate to other scholarship with which you are familiar. Obviously you are welcome to discuss other things that come to mind beyond this list. (Examples of past reflection papers are available on Blackboard.)

Each reflection paper must be uploaded to Blackboard before 10:00 am on Wednesday. I will read the papers before class to get a sense of your reactions. This will help me organize the class discussion for that day. I will grade your papers, however, after our class discussion.

You will have the chance to write 8 of these reflection papers throughout the semester although your grade for this part of the course will be based on your top 6 scores. I will write comments on each paper and then assign it a grade out of 5. A paper that fails to prove that the reading had been completed or that fails to reflect on the readings (i.e., only summarizes) will receive a 0 or 1. A paper that receives a 2 is one in which there may be some doubt as to the thoroughness with which the reading was done and/or the reflection is very sparse. Papers that clearly demonstrate mastery and reflection will receive a 3 or 4 while those that show significant insight and/or profound observations will receive a 5 (these will be very rare).

Final Paper: Prospectus, Presentation, and Final Draft
The first step in completing your final project is to identify an interesting topic. You will meet with me to discuss your final paper idea during the week of November 14th to 18th, if not before. I will offer suggestions, guidelines, and expectations although you will have considerable freedom in choosing a topic that interests you. Once you have settled on a topic, you will decide how to approach it. There are two basic options: a complete research paper or a research design.

In the first option, you would pose a question and answer it using case studies and extant research as your evidence. You might, for example, use existing work to address why, during the 2008 South Carolina primary, the Clintons invoked race as part of their strategy against Barack Obama. Or, you could use Ghaemi’s work to assess the leadership potential of a 2012 presidential candidate.

The second option is a research design. In this option, your paper would pose an interesting question, present a literature review, propose a theory (based on past research) and explain your plan for gathering data and testing hypotheses about causal mechanisms and processes. In short, you would propose a study without actually collecting any of the data. (Of course, if you have

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2 You have limited space so you must try to synthesize and economize your writing. Simply mentioning each chapter does not mean that you have read each carefully. It really should be quite obvious after reading your reflection paper (and listening to your discussion in class) the degree to which you have engaged with the material.

3 Please do not assume that these examples are perfect. They are good and provide an idea of how one might organize a reflection paper. Do not think, however, that copying them will assure you a perfect score.

solid statistical skills, you are welcome to actually conduct the study although this would require much more time and effort, as well as IRB approval—you would have to start very early in the semester.) If you select the research design option, you might propose a study/experiment aimed at understanding, for example, the conditions of threat under which people will start to support a retraction of civil liberties. Or, you might design a study aimed at explaining how voters evaluate candidates who do not fit their preconceived stereotypes. In the past, students have gone on to complete the project as a private reading the next semester.

After our meeting, you will write a 5-6 page (double-spaced) prospectus in which you describe your thinking about the project you hope to complete. The prospectus must be emailed to your assigned reviewer (see below) and posted on Blackboard by 2:00 pm on Friday, November 18\textsuperscript{th}. Your prospectus should address the following (and any other points you think are important):

- What is your research question?
- Why is this question important? Why will people want to read about it?
- What does the literature say about this question? What do we already know? How does your question relate to the literature both in political psychology and more generally? Are you trying to fill a gap in the existing literature? Are you trying to extend our knowledge beyond past research?
- What are your preliminary thoughts about the answer to your question? What is your theory? What are your exact hypotheses?
- How might you research this question and test your theory/hypotheses? Will you think about designing an experiment, using case studies, or some other method?
- What might an answer to this question contribute to our understanding of politics?

During the last three weeks of the semester (November 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 30\textsuperscript{th}, and December 7\textsuperscript{th}), students will present their research to the class. You will have 15-20 minutes to walk the class through your research, answering questions as you go. These presentations are intended to be “workshops” in which you present information for feedback from your colleagues. They are meant to help you work through issues and get advice that will be useful in completing your paper. As such, you will gain the most by being well-prepared and organized. (Please see ‘Attachment Three: Conducting a Good Workshop’ for further guidance.)

Finally, you will write a major research paper that is between 15-20 pages (double-spaced) and is due via Blackboard on Monday, December 19\textsuperscript{th} at 11:00 am. The final paper is worth 35% of your final grade. Because papers are being submitted during the exam period, they cannot be late. In other words, late papers will not be accepted without prior approval from Oberlin College. It’s simple, if you miss this deadline, you will receive a 0 on the paper and fail the course—plan accordingly!!

\textit{Prospectus Review}

\footnote{Also adapted from Prof. Dawson’s “presidency” seminar.}

\footnote{This is an absolute deadline—there will be NO exceptions. To be safe, you should assume that all of the following will happen to you 24 hours before your paper is due: (1) you will get in a fight with your roommate; (2) your computer will crash; (3) the fire alarm in your building will go off repeatedly in the middle of the night; (4) you will contract some curious sickness for which Health Services has no cure; and (5) 6 feet of snow will fall within a 2 hour period. In short, you do not have the luxury of leaving your paper until the last minute!}
Peer review is a major part of scholarly life. Near the end of the semester (November 20th), you will submit a review of a classmates’ prospectus. Your review should be 3-4 pages (double-spaced) and should provide feedback on how to improve the final paper project. Specifically, you should comment on the following:

- Question: Is it clear? Does it seem important?
- Literature Review: Is the cited literature relevant? Does the review seem complete? What could be added to the review?
- Theory: Is the theory coherent and logical? Is the theory testable and falsifiable?
- Research Design: Does the proposed research design accurately test the hypotheses? Is it creative/clever? Is it parsimonious? Are other tests needed?
- Implications: Do the proposed implications make sense? Have all of the implications been considered?

Your review should be emailed to your classmate and uploaded into Blackboard by midnight on November 20th. Your review will be graded on its thoroughness, even-handedness, and helpfulness. You will be called upon to discuss your review during your classmate’s final paper workshop.

Final letter grades will be assigned in the following way:

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**TOPICS AND READINGS**

**Class One** (September 7th): What is Political Psychology and How is it Studied?

Beyond introducing the course and its syllabus, this class will provide a brief overview of political psychology and how it is commonly studied. We will pay particular attention to the rise and evolution of political psychology while also spending some time discussing the research methods used by political psychologists. Please read Houghton’s book before class as it provides an excellent grounding in the literature.

**Required Reading:** (to be completed before our first class)

**Optional Reading:**
Class Two (September 14th): Emotions in American Campaigns

This week, we will ease into the study of political psychology with an approachable analysis of how emotions affect Americans’ political decisions and the campaign strategies of the two major parties. Westen’s *The Political Brain* introduces many concepts about political emotions and reasoning that will come up again throughout the semester. In many ways, Westen’s book is “political psychology-lite” and thus a nice place to start.

Required Reading:

Optional Readings:

Class Three (September 21st): Affect and Cognition in American Campaigns

The book for this week—*Affective Intelligence and Political Judgment*—adds cognition to the study of affect and emotions in American campaigns. It shows how emotions can trigger different cognitive processes in the evaluation of candidates and their policies. As such, it offers a fairly complete and theoretically rich interpretation of how voters vote.

Required Reading:

Optional Reading

Class Four (September 28th): Personality and Public Opinion
Rarely is public opinion seen as the product of our individual personality traits. We typically think of public opinion as being driven by things like partisanship, ideology, or current events. In this week’s class, we will consider the role that personality plays in shaping opinions on political matters. What is the connection between our personality traits—e.g., extroversion, emotional stability—and our political opinions?

Required Readings:

Optional Readings:

**Class Five** (October 5th): Authoritarianism and Public Opinion

Ever since World War II and Adorno et al.’s *The Authoritarian Personality*, scholars have sought to understand how authoritarianism develops and how it affects political decisions. This week we will look at the relationship between authoritarianism and the polarization of American public opinion. To what extent do authoritarian predispositions explain diverging attitudes toward public policies?

Required Reading:

Optional Reading:

**Class Six** (October 12th): Intergroup Relations and Ethnocentrism

Much of the work on intergroup relations in the United States has focused on race and racial tensions. This week, however, we will focus on broader ethnocentric tensions—i.e., the idea that the “folkways” of one’s group are correct and superior to those of other groups. In *Us Against Them*, Kinder and Kam show how these ethnocentric attitudes affect opinions on topics ranging from foreign policy to same sex marriage.

Required Readings:

Optional Readings:

Class Seven (October 19th): Discrimination and Dominance

Political psychologists have long been interested in political identities and how they structure society and relations between groups. Indeed, the tensions between groups in American society – based on race, gender, sexuality, class, etc. – represent some of this country’s most enduring challenges. This week we will examine race and gender relations with a focus on what they mean for political opinions and social policies in the United States.

Required Reading:

Optional Readings:

Fall Break

Class Eight (November 2nd): Elite Decision-Making

Scholarship on the psychology of elite decision-making has tended to either analyze leaders and their decisions or looked at how group dynamics affect Oval Office debates. This week’s reading provides a controversial new theory about mental health and leadership. It is sure to stir debate and generate insight into some of the world’s most well known leaders.
Required Reading:

Optional Reading:

Class Nine (November 9th): Understanding Threats

Terrorism is perhaps the single most immediate challenge to national security in post-9/11 America. Scholars have been particularly interested in the causes and consequences of suicide terrorism. This week’s reading uses clinical studies to explore the psychological and social aspects of suicide terrorism.

Required Reading:

Optional Reading:
Class Ten (November 16th): Final Paper Conferences and Prospectuses

We will not be meeting as a class this week. Instead, please meet with me early in the week (if not before) to discuss your final paper idea. Once we have discussed your idea, you will write a 5-6 page (double spaced) prospectus (see instructions above). Your prospectus must be emailed to your assigned reviewer and posted on Blackboard by 2:00 pm on Friday, November 18th. Once you have received your partner’s prospectus, please email your review back to him/her and post it on Blackboard by midnight on Sunday, November 20th.

Classes Eleven, Twelve and Thirteen (November 23rd, 30th, and December 7th): Research Presentations

During the last three weeks of the semester, students will present their work in progress. See instructions above and Attachment Three below for more details.

| Final Papers are Due Monday, December 19th at 11:00 am |
Attachment One: How to Actively Engage with the Readings

Almost anyone can read a book or journal article. In this class, it is important that you really engage with the reading to ensure that you have gained a good sense of the author’s argument and evidence. To do this, you might answer the following questions about each article or book you read in this class (or in any class):

- What is the author(s) central question(s)? Why is the question(s) important?
- What is the author’s theory? What predictions does s/he make about the answer to the question? What does s/he expect to find and why?
- What is the author’s method for investigating his/her question and testing his/her hypotheses? How does the author go about testing his/her theory?
- What does the author find? What are the results of his/her analysis? What evidence does s/he offer to support or refute the proposed theory?
- What are the implications of the findings? What do the findings tell us? Why might these findings be important?
- What are some of the limitations of the research? How might these limitations be overcome?
- What are your reactions to the research? What questions are raised by the study? What comes to mind when you step back and think about the research?

If you can answer each of these questions, in detail, you have probably engaged sufficiently with the material. When it comes to evaluating each reading, you should keep the following simple rules in mind:

Rule # 1: Don’t Whine! It is unfair to criticize a piece of scholarship until you completely understand it. Even then, your criticism ought to be followed by constructive suggestions for how the problems might be addressed.

Rule # 2: Understand the Limitations of Research! Conducting research is a daunting and challenging endeavoring. Researchers often do the best they can with what they have. Until you have conquered the challenges of primary research yourself, you may want to take it easy on those who have taken the leap.

Rule # 3: Don’t Believe Everything You Read! The research you will read in this class (and most of what you will read in college) has been vetted by reviewers and editors to ensure its high quality. However, mistakes and misinterpretations can still get into a final manuscript. It is your job to read everything with a healthy level of skepticism – don’t be a jerk, but then again don’t believe everything you read just because it has been written in a peer-reviewed book or article.
Attachment Two: The Do’s and Don’ts of Classroom Discussion

Your participation grade in this class is largely based on your ability to effectively engage in discussion of the class material. Here are some hints on how you might become an effective discussant.

Do Not…

- Do NOT dominate the conversation
- Do NOT drone on or make vague statements
- Do NOT let anyone else (including the professor) dominate the conversation or drone on (actively, but politely, interject)
- Do NOT whine after class about the discussion (it is, after all, your discussion – take some ownership)
- Do NOT be disrespectful to others as they speak

Do…

- DO be prepared for the discussion
  - You should actively read the assigned material and practice verbalizing the thesis and evidence offered by the author. You should also reflect on the readings so that you will have something to say about them in class.
- DO turn monologues into dialogues by asking others for their views
- DO state your point (succinctly and specifically) and ask others for their opinion
- DO interject when someone is droning on by asking questions about what they are saying
- DO strive to make the discussion better by actively trying to improve it
- DO relate your understanding of the class material to the wider world and other phenomena
- DO speculate about the significance of the text and the possible research questions it suggests
Attachment Three: Conducting a Good Workshop

Your objective is to engage your classmates in a discussion of your research. This ought to be interesting to them so that they might offer suggestions that you can use when writing your final draft. Here are some pointers on conducting a good workshop.

1. The biggest sin is to be boring. You should come to your presentation with a controlled level of excitement. You should be well prepared and, please, do not read anything aloud.

2. The second biggest sin to b--- s---. This is no time to make it up or to engage in a rant in which you vent your personal feelings in the absence of logic and evidence.

3. You must engage the members of the seminar in your research process. To do so, make sure they understand the question (What is it you are trying to figure out?) and, from time to time, come back to it, reminding them what you are trying to do.

4. To engage them in the research process, realize that you are trying to tell them how you actually went about looking for an answer to your research question. You want to show how your thinking on this topic has evolved and the steps you have taken along the way.

It is understood that your presentation is of research-in-progress. Still, your presentation should address as many of these questions as possible.

• What is your question? How did you come to this question? Why do you want to know the answer to this question? Why is this question important?
• What is the state of the literature? What have other researchers already found out? What do the seminar’s required readings and other works say about your topic?
• What is your theory? What do you hypothesize the answer to be? Is there a proposition – a statement of a relationship you expect to observe? Why do you think that?
• If you are right, so what? What would that teach us? And if you are wrong, what will we learn?
• How did/will you find out? What research activities did you/are you going to engage in? Where did/are you going to look?
• What will you take as evidence? How will you know if your hypotheses have been verified? For example, if you propose that male voters rely on emotions less than female voters, what “facts” (empirical indicators) are you going to use to signal that this is true?
• What do your findings mean? What inferences can you make from the evidence?
• What is the “take-home” point of your project?
• What does your project suggest about psychology and politics more broadly?