

POLS 489: SENIOR SEMINAR

NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, SPRING 2016, 3 CREDITS

Basic Information

Professor: Dan Pemstein
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Office: 109 CJPP

Class Location: CJPP 20
Class Time: W 6–8:30
Office Hours: Tu 1–3 or by appointment

Course Description

This course asks you to apply concepts and reasoning from political science to an array of issues raised by digital communication platforms. We ask questions like: How do, and how should, governments regulate cross-national information networks? How can we balance privacy, security, and free speech in the digital age? How does the internet change the nature and strength of social movements? Do the open communications and massive data flows that characterize digital life democratize our politics and culture, or encourage societal segmentation? Digital politics is a vast topic, of which we can only skim the surface, but it provides a venue for examining issues that touch on all aspects of political science, and should appeal to students with diverse interests within the field. We will read a series of books, mostly aimed at a popular audience, that tackle these issues from a variety of perspectives. Most of the works that we will read in this class were not written by political scientists; authors include anthropologists, artists, journalists, sociologists, and technologists. Thus, as a capstone course, this class will ask you to bring your experience as a political science major to bear, and to analyze broad public debates from the perspective of our field. This is a writing and speaking-intensive course and we will spend virtually all of our class time on discussion and peer evaluation of written work. You will be required to read and write regularly throughout the semester, to evaluate your classmates' work, and to incorporate feedback from peers to improve your writing.

Course Objectives

- To better understand the political and policy issues that are endemic to digital life.
- To examine the costs and benefits of ever-denser digital communication networks.
- To better learn how to apply skills and knowledge acquired throughout the political science major to social questions spanning traditional disciplinary boundaries.
- To better develop analytical reasoning and communication skills.
- To improve professional communication skills, such as delivering constructive criticism, defending an argument in a group setting, and incorporating feedback effectively.

Texts

You should purchase the texts below. They are available from the campus bookstore and, often inexpensively, from online retailers.

- Castells, Manuel. 2012. *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Coleman, Gabriella. 2014. *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous*. London: Verso.
- Deibert, Robert J. 2013. *Black Code: Surveillance, Privacy, and the Dark Side of the Internet*. USA: Signal.
- DeNardis, Laura. 2014. *The Global War for Internet Governance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Greenwald, Glenn. 2014. *No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State*. New York: Picador.
- Pariser, Eli. 2011. *The Filter Bubble: How the New Personalized Web is Changing What We Read and How We Think*. New York: Penguin.
- Shirkey, Clay. 2008. *Here Comes Everybody*. New York: Penguin.
- Taylor, Astra. 2015. *The People's Platform: Taking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age*. New York: MacMillan.

The following book is a useful, if dated, reference on internet politics:

- Chadwick, Andrew. 2006. *Internet Politics: States, Citizens, and New Communication Technologies*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Unfortunately the library does not hold a copy of this book, but I have one that I am happy to loan to students for short periods of time.

Evaluation

Summary

Extension Paper	30%
Discussion Leadership	10%
Discussion Participation	10%
Reading Responses	30%
Participation	20%

Extension Paper

You will write one 8-12 page (8 pages means the text makes it onto the 8th page, double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins, no title page, 1 line for your name, 1-2 line 12 pt title, no subheadings, no blank lines between paragraphs, bibliography does not count towards page length, tables and figures should be placed at the end and do not count towards page length) paper during the semester. Your paper will take the form of a extension of one reading (see the schedule). You must sign up for a slot on Blackboard, corresponding to a particular reading. Slots are available on a first-come-first-served basis.

You will ground your paper in some aspect of the reading assigned for the week that you sign up for. I do not expect you to write a thorough review of the reading. Rather, you should use the reading as a foundation or jumping-off point for your argument. Nonetheless, your paper must establish a clear link between your argument and work that inspired it. You will propose an extension to the reading that is grounded in social scientific reasoning. Crucially, you should use the bulk of your paper to propose your own objective (i.e. not normative) argument that builds on the reading. This argument should propose a cause-and-effect theory that could be tested with real data, and should build on your background in political science. The paper should have a clearly stated thesis, elucidate the mechanism that causes the proposed independent variable(s) to affect a specified dependent variable, and draw on relevant literature to support the logical foundations of the argument. You must also discuss what kind(s) of evidence would support or falsify your argument. In some cases, you may even be in a position to provide such evidence, although doing so is not required. You must actively cite work beyond the class reading to support your argument; at least 4 of these citations must be works of political science published in peer reviewed

Section	Criteria	Percentage Points
Grounding	Clear, situates reader, correctly represents reading	10
	Acts as a concise foundation for argument	10
Extension	Clearly stated thesis	10
	Argument is logical, fully developed, and persuasive	30
	Discusses testing/falsification thoroughly and logically	20
	Clearly describes/justifies potential evidence	20
Deductions	Late draft or revision	100
	Missed discussion	100
	Revision lacks bibliography that meets requirements	10-100
	Revision shows poor citation style	10-100
	Revision has too few pages	10/page
	Revision has too many pages	10/page
	Revision has poor grammar, spelling, etc	1-20
Revision ignores formatting instructions	10	

Table 1: Short Paper Rubric

Criteria	Percentage Points
Clearly stated thesis	20
Argument explained effectively	25
Testing/falsification explained effectively	25
Effective use of time	20
Discussion well managed	10
Deductions	
Draft late	100
Miss discussion	100
Draft too short	10/page
Draft too long	10/page
Draft has poor grammar, spelling, etc	1-10
Draft ignores formatting instructions	1-10

Table 2: Discussion Leadership Rubric

journals or university press books and you should make active use of no fewer than 8 sources beyond the class reading. We will read, evaluate, and discuss examples of strong—and not so strong—short papers during the second week of class.

Paper drafts are due in digital form (PDF, Word or Open/Libre Office document), no less than 57 hours before the class meeting you signed up for on blackboard (i.e. 9am Monday). Final versions of your papers are due in digital form, two weeks after we discuss them in class. I will not accept drafts or revisions after they are due. Students will forfeit both their paper and associated discussion leadership grades (see below) if they miss the draft submission deadline. Table 1 provides a grading rubric for the short papers.

Discussion Leadership

Students will lead 20-30 minute discussions, based on their short papers. Students will be expected to provide an informal presentation of their paper, lasting roughly five minutes. Students should carefully explain both the logic of their arguments and their reasoning for why the potential evidence that they mention in their paper would support or falsify their argument. After their initial comments, presenters will open the floor to questions from other students and the instructor, and will be expected to respond to questions, and guide the discussion. Discussion leaders should use their time to garner feedback that will help them improve the final versions of their short papers.

Discussion leadership will be graded based on the clarity of the presenter's opening remarks and on the presenter's ability to answer questions and engage the audience. Discussion leaders should strive to make sure that the discussion lasts through the 20 minute mark, and students' ability to keep the discussion going will factor into their grades. To this end, presenters should prepare a series of questions to ask the audience about their papers, with the goal of eliciting feedback that can help them to revise their papers most effectively. Table 2 provides a rubric for discussion leadership grades.

Discussion Participation

Students must read peers' papers before class. Non-presenting students will type up an evaluation form (available on Blackboard) in response to each presenter's paper and must bring two copies of each evaluation to class. These documents should evaluate each presenter's paper according to the rubric in table 1. Students should pay special attention to the presenter's core argument and discussion of falsification/potential evidence. They should prepare two carefully thought-out pieces of constructive criticism for the presenter that focus on these two points (one for each) and explain these critiques, in short paragraphs, containing full sentences, on their evaluation forms. I will grade students' discussion participation on a pass/fail basis. Students will obtain full points for discussion participation on a particular day if they hand in fully completed evaluation forms for each presenter at the beginning of class and the comments on those forms show careful reading and thought about the papers in question. Students should share key points on their evaluation forms verbally during the discussion period, although they are free to go off script. Indeed, while prepared criticisms will help to ensure that we have fruitful sessions, this will work best if students engage in the discussion in real time and voice thoughts that come to mind, rather than relying fully on their prepared comments. Students who miss class or fail to hand in complete and constructive evaluation forms will obtain no points for the day. Total discussion participation points will be distributed evenly across all discussion days, although students may drop their lowest score (i.e. may miss one session without penalty). I will not accept handwritten evaluation forms and students should give one copy of their evaluation forms to the presenters.

Reading Responses

Students will maintain blackboard blogs over the course of the semester. Many weeks, at least 33 hours before class (i.e by 9am Tuesday), each student will submit a blog entry that critically analyzes some aspect of that week's reading. Most of the readings for this class are not explicit works of political science, but because this is a capstone class, you should be in a position to leverage your knowledge of the field to examine the questions that the readings address from the perspective of a political scientist. For example, you might describe how the claims made by an author—or key actors that an author describes—fit into traditions of political ideology, describe a public policy implication of an author's argument, use your knowledge of international relations theory or law to analyze an issue, or use your background in social science methods to question the quality and persuasiveness of evidence provided in support of a given claim. You can also use this space to articulate questions about the readings, although these questions should be in-depth and demonstrate strong engagement with the material. I also encourage you to engage with normative issues in your blog posts, but strive to ground such arguments in political science theory and method. Students must submit at least 6 blog entries (each worth 5% of your grade) over the course of the semester and may not miss three consecutive weeks. Entries should be roughly 300-700 words each. Entries will be graded on a plus (100%)/check (85%)/minus (70%)/fail (0%) basis. Plus-level entries will demonstrate a strong grasp of the source material and draw extensively on students' backgrounds in political science to offer insightful analysis, raise interesting questions, and provide a framework for understanding the reading material. Such entries

will almost always draw from, and cite, work beyond the weekly reading.

These blog entries will serve as a starting point for our class discussion and will be integral to framing the debates we engage in throughout the semester. Therefore, I expect students to read each other's entries before class and to comment on other students' entries—either directly on the entry or in response to another comment—each week. While these comments may be short, they should have intellectual substance, and provide either a constructive criticism, an additional insight, substantively support the poster's argument, or otherwise contribute to the content of the blog post or ensuing discussion. Simply agreeing or disagreeing with the blog poster does not constitute a constructive contribution to the discussion. *Failing to regularly comment on other people's entries will adversely affect your grade.* Specifically, if you fail to provide a constructive and reasoned comment on at least one entry (other than your own) for more than two weeks, each additional missed week will reduce your overall grade by 1 percentage point.

Participation

You are expected to attend every class and to participate in class activities and discussions. Participation is worth 20 percent of your final grade and will reflect your engagement in and contribution to class discussion, not simple attendance (which should be a given, although lack of attendance will negatively impact your grade). Participation can take many forms, including—but not limited to—asking questions, answering my queries, engaging in class debate, taking an active role in group activities, actively engaging in discussion on blog posts, and providing useful feedback on paper drafts during our in-class discussions of those drafts. 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 Strong attendance, frequent and thoughtful verbal participation in every class, frequent contributions in paper discussions, frequent and engaged comments on blogs
- B Strong attendance, regular and thoughtful verbal participation in every class, regular contributions in paper discussions, regular and engaged comments on blogs
- C Strong attendance, verbal participation in every class, irregular contributions in paper discussions, minimum required comments on blogs
- D Poor attendance or little or no verbal participation in class, lack of engagement in paper discussions and blogs
- F Frequent absences or no verbal participation, lack of engagement in paper discussions and blogs

I strongly suggest that you write down two or three discussion questions, based on the reading, before each class. These questions should focus on issues that you wish to delve into in more depth with your classmates and can be based on the discussion surrounding the week's blogs. Thinking a little bit about what you want to discuss before class starts will make it easier for you to meaningfully contribute during class and to establish a strong pattern of 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. Attach a copy of the original assignment to your appeal.

Reading and Discussion

You **must** do the reading ahead of time to succeed in this course. It is necessary not only to participate in class, but to complete your blog entries, respond to other students' posts, write your review & extension papers, and to meaningfully comment on other students' paper drafts. Finally, this is a seminar, and we will spend much of our in-class time discussing the readings. This is not a lecture class and it will be a painful experience for all of us if you do not come prepared for discussion and debate. You should expect to read 100-150 pages a week, on average, over the course of the semester.

Late Assignments and Missed Discussion Sessions

I will not accept late assignments except in extreme, and unexpected circumstances. Students should notify the professor of discussion leadership scheduling issues at least two weeks in advance. You will need a very good reason to reschedule a discussion leadership session. As participants, students will be penalized for missed discussion sessions unless they have a documented and valid (e.g. medical) excuse. Students must provide such excuses ahead of time if possible (if you get hit by a truck, and you survive, you can tell me after the fact).

Academic Honesty

The academic community operates on the basis of honesty, integrity, and fair play. NDSU Policy 335: Code of Academic Responsibility and Conduct 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. Please do make sure that you understand common standards of academic integrity and plagiarism. You can find information about academic honesty at www.ndsu.edu/academichonesty. I will deal with academic dishonesty and plagiarism *harshly*. If you violate accepted standards you will certainly fail the relevant assignment. In most cases, you will, at minimum, fail the class.

Professionalism and Personal Conduct

While I encourage constructive disagreement and debate, I expect students to adhere to the university's code of student behavior (<https://www.ndsu.edu/reslife/publications/>

code_of_student_behavior/). In particular, I expect you to conduct yourself in a professional manner when interacting with other students, both during class and in online exchanges.

Electronic Devices

You may never use a cell phone in class. Current research indicates that students that take notes by hand comprehend and retain material better than those who use a laptop (<http://www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/news/releases/take-notes-by-hand-for-better-long-term-comprehension.html>). While there may be times when it makes sense to have a laptop or tablet handy—this is a class on digital politics after all—students should keep their electronic devices in their bags unless I explicitly instruct them otherwise.

Students with Disabilities

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 (<http://www.ndsu.edu/disabilityservices/>) as soon as possible.

Veterans

Veterans and student soldiers with special circumstances or who are activated are encouraged to notify the instructor in advance.

Schedule

Date	Reading
1/13	Introduction
1/20	Farrell (2012), Greenwald (2014) Ch. 1–2
1/27	Greenwald (2014) Ch. 3–6
2/3	Deibert (2013) Ch. 1–7
2/10	Deibert (2013) Ch. 8–13, 15
2/17	Castells (2012) Ch. 1–6
2/24	Coleman (2014) Ch. 1–6
3/2	Coleman (2014) Ch. 7–12
3/9	DeNarids (2014) TBA
3/16	Spring Break
3/23	Shirkey (2008) Ch. 1–4
3/30	Shirkey (2008) Ch. 5–8
4/6	Pariser (2011) Ch. 1–4
4/13	Pariser (2011) Ch. 5–11
4/20	Taylor (2015) Ch. 1–4
4/27	Taylor (2015) Ch. 5–7
5/4	Wrap-Up, Catch-Up, Participation Due

Syllabus Contract

I have read and understand the course policies described in this syllabus and agree to adhere to these policies.

Name

Signature

Date