Course objective: This seminar is designed with two objectives in mind: (1) to prepare Ph.D. students for the UO’s comprehensive exam in U.S. politics, and (2) to provide a Ph.D. level overview of the field of political behavior. These aims are obviously not mutually exclusive. In as systematic a manner as possible we will attempt to cover a majority of the readings on the department’s U.S. comp exam list that deal with political behavior.

The course will be divided into five parts as follows:

1. The first section is a condensed intellectual history of the study of political behavior and an overview of the canonical works in the field.

2. The second section develops models of preference-driven (and non-preference driven) behavior in an effort to understand what motivates individuals to engage in any given political behavior. We will study the contributions of social psychology and economics that have historically dominated political scientists’ scholarship on political behavior.

3. In the third section we will discuss the motives and means of various political actors in the U.S. to influence political behavior. We will discuss the role that institutions play in shaping mass preferences.

4. The fourth section discusses the study of mass political behavior—i.e., the aggregation of the individual behaviors discussed in section 2. Here we will review several famous theories that deal with mass political behavior—e.g., critical elections theory, the realignment literature(s), and the lit on “vanishing marginals” in congressional races.

5. The fifth and final section is a hodge-podge of “case studies” drawn from various sub-literatures in political behavior. The raison d’être for this section is to provide a general sense of recent scholarship in political behavior. We will cover these as time permits.

Philosophy: Though the course is nominally devoted to the study of U.S. behavior we will discuss other literatures when such detours are interesting and/or pedagogically justified. Throughout the term we will explore general theories of behavior, these are obviously applicable in any national context.
Many seminars like this require as much as 7 or 8 articles. My view is that this is too much material for a thoughtful reading of all the assignments. Instead we will we read no more than 4 articles and we will read them very carefully.

Course requirements:

- Attend each seminar session having read the texts to be discussed.

- A response paper (two to three pages double-spaced) each week that takes up the readings analytically. The point is not a summary, but for you to critically assess what you see as the key claims and arguments of the readings. The response papers should include three questions you want to discuss in that session. These are due at the beginning of each class. We will spend the first half hour of each session going around giving every student a chance to present her/his initial questions and comments. (50% of grade)

- Final paper on some aspect of US political behavior. You will need to meet with me by fourth week of the quarter to discuss your topic, question, and approach. One idea is to consult Niemi & Weisberg (2001) edited volume of essays on current controversies in the field (50% of grade)

Course outline: A tentative outline for the course is as follows. Readings from the U.S. politics comp reading list are italicized.

I. Intro: What is political behavior?
   A. An intellectual history
      Kernell, Jacobson, Kousser (2011), Ch. 10 “Pub. opinion primer.” (supplemental)

   B. Turnout behavior
      Wooldridge (2009), pp. 68-105 “Binary dependent variables” (supplemental)

   C. Vote choice and partisanship

   E. Psychological foundations of political behavior
II. Preference-based (and other models) of political behavior

A. Choice theory

B. Information theories (heuristics, cognitive short-cuts, etc.)
Popkin “The rational voter”
Zaller (1992) “The nature and origin of mass opinion”

III. The role of parties and political elites and the media

A. Political parties and political behavior
Duverger (1950). “Political Parties.”
Lee, Moretti, and Butler (2004). “Do Voters Affect or Elect Policies?”

B. Partisan mobilization
Rosenstone & Hansen (2003), Ch. 6. “Mobilization and participation”

C. Partisan persuasion
Mutz, Sniderman, Brody (1996) “Political persuasion and attitude change”

D. Policy and non-policy party competition
Cox (1997). “Mobilization versus persuasion”

E. Biased outcomes in the U.S. party system
Rosenstone & Hansen (2003), Ch. 8. “The scope and bias of pol. participation”

IV. Macro-political behavior theories

A. The “realignment” literature
Sundquist (1973) “Dynamics of the party system: Alignment and realignment”

B. The “critical elections” literature

C. The “vanishing marginals” literature

D. The “polarization” literature
McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal “Ideology, inequality and polarization.”

V. Some instructive sub-literatures:

A. Natural experiment methodologies

B. Psychological experiments

C. Genetic studies
Smith et al., (2012) “Are political traits hereditary? Should we care?”

E. Current debates