Course Description:

This class examines the roles that a wide range of political institutions play in different parts of the world, in both theoretical and empirical terms.

The first part of the course covers a series of theoretical and conceptual approaches to the study of institutions in Political Science. In this section we will address questions like: What are institutions? What functions do they fulfill? How and why are they created? How do they relate to individual preferences and behaviors? Do institutions play different roles in democratic and non-democratic regimes? Do formal institutions differ from informal ones?

The second part of the class focuses on the empirical study of different institutions in a number of settings. We will examine electoral systems and elections, political parties and party systems, legislatures, executives, and federalism. Our goals for this part of the class are three-fold: first, to learn about particular institutional arrangements, how they function, and how they affect political processes and outcomes; second, to gain familiarity with some of the key pieces of literature on each subject; and finally, to tie the empirical observations in with the theoretical premises laid out in the first part of the class.

Assignments:

1. Completing your readings (all of which are available on our Learn@UW website), regular attendance, and active participation in class.
2. Weekly response/discussion papers (2-3 double-spaced pages max.) on the readings. In these papers, I am not looking for summaries of the readings, but for thoughtful engagement with the material. At the end, please include 2-3 discussion questions. The grade for these papers will be the average of the eleven best grades, meaning that you may turn in as many discussion papers as you want, but a minimum of eleven if you want full credit. Missing discussion papers will be graded as failed, and you may not skip any of the papers on the readings for
weeks 2-5. Discussion papers are due to me via email at 12pm on the day before our class meeting.

3. Short development paper (9-12 pages): by March 27 at 11:59pm, you will prepare a short paper that takes the required readings as a point of departure and develops a research agenda and/or a preliminary empirical investigation focusing on your area of interest. This assignment is a first step toward your final paper.

4. Final paper (25-30 pages): for your final paper, you will either write an original research paper or a carefully constructed research design. This paper is due at 11:59pm on May 11.
   a. *Original research paper*: ideally, I would like for you to write complete research papers that you could present at a professional conference or send out to a journal. Note that I am open to letting you further develop a work in progress, as long as it is explicitly concerned with political institutions and/or adopts an institutionalist perspective. If you want to take this route, please come see me as soon as possible to discuss your project.
   b. *Research design*: you may write a research design as your final paper, ideally with the intent to actually conduct the necessary research at a later point in time. Again, this research would have to be concerned with political institutions and/or adopt an institutionalist perspective.

Please think of this assignment as more than a mere “term paper” with little relevance for your careers and view it as a an opportunity for your professional development. You should aim for every paper you write in a Political Science Ph.D. program to become a conference paper or a published article. This class will be a good place to start, continue, or finalize such a project. Also, please note that I will only grant extensions or incompletes under extraordinary circumstances.

**Grading:**

- Participation: 20%
- Weekly response papers: 20%
- Short development paper: 20%
- Final paper: 40%
PART 1: GENERAL


January 30: Rational Choice Institutionalism.


February 6: Sociological and Normative Institutionalism.


February 13: Historical Institutionalism.


February 20: Crossing the Line (or trying to…)


February 27: Political Institutions in Non-Democratic Regimes.


March 6: Informal Institutions.


March 13: Institutions and Social Networks.


March 27: Veto Players.


**PART 2: APPLICATIONS**

**April 3: Electoral Systems and Elections.**


**April 10: Political Parties and Party Systems.**


**April 17: Legislatures.**


**April 24: Executives.**


**May 1: Federalism.**


**May 8: Paper presentations.**