The Politics of Gender in the United States

Gender is one of the most recognizable and important identities in daily life. Yet it has been paid scant attention by political scientists in terms of its role on access to political power, opinion formation, group identity politics, election outcomes, and political representation. This class provides a survey of the literature on gender in American politics. We begin with the interdisciplinary research on the social construction of gender to understand what gender is and is not. Throughout the course we will use those theories to analyze and critique the approaches of quantitative research on gender politics.

Questions:

1. Is gender the same as sex? Is gender real? Has it been socially constructed, and does this construction affect our politics?
2. How does gender influence our understanding of social problems?
3. How does gender matter for politics? Does its relevance change across other categories of difference?
4. How does gender matter beyond the individual—in interactions, in institutions, and as structure?

Goals/Learning Objectives:

1. At the end of this course, students will be able to engage theories of the social construction of gender, and be able to discuss gender beyond “sex difference.”
2. Students will learn to apply theories to political problems and gain an analytic perspective of current debates regarding sex/gender.
3. Through leading a course discussion, students will master the readings for one week and learn how to ask questions and facilitate a thoughtful and respectful academic debate.
4. Students will improve their writing skills through two papers, in which they will be asked to use existing research to craft an interesting argument and then support it with relevant evidence.
5. Students will learn to question preexisting ideas about race as they relate academic writing to their own experiences and views of the world.

Grade/Assignments:

- Midterm paper (20%)
- Final project: research paper (35%) and presentation (10%)
- Reading response papers (10%)
- Reading report/discussion facilitation (10%)
- Participation (15%)

Midterm Paper:
Choose one of the prompts below and write a 6-8 page paper answering the question. Your paper should have a clearly stated argument and should provide evidence to support your claims. Remember, there are no right answers here but you must be able to clearly articulate and support an argument.

Prompts:
1. Scholars say that gender is socially constructed. Does this mean that gender is not real? How and why is it or isn’t it real? What does “real” mean?
2. Could a female candidate be a serious contender in 2016? What obstacles might threaten a female candidacy? What benefits might a female candidate garner?
3. What are the effects of gender stereotypes and prejudice on political behavior? (Please define political behavior in your paper)

**Final Project:**
Choose a political outcome that interests you (this could be anything from political representation to public goods provision to voter behavior) and research how gender affects this outcome. For example, you could ask how men and women’s interests were differently represented during the Civil Rights Movement. Or, how gender affects the framing of a public policy (such as health care). A successful paper will make use of the readings as well as outside sources to examine the social construction of gender on multiple levels to analyze the topic of interest. Your research should be question-driven and should use existing research and data to make an original argument. Your final paper will be 10-15 pages including references and any figures. Additionally, each student will give a presentation of his/her research to the class, which will count for 10% of the final course grade.

**Reading Response Papers:**
Students must write two 2-page double-spaced response papers during the quarter. A response paper selects one or more readings for the week and engages critically with the topic from the reading.

Response papers must include the following three components:
1. A few sentences summarizing the study’s approach, methods, and claims.
2. At least one paragraph addressing any unique findings or interesting aspects of the study.
3. At least one paragraph offering questions or concerns about the study.

An excellent response paper extends past (3) and explores how you might build on these findings if you were a researcher.

**Reading Report/ Discussion Facilitation:**
Each student will be in charge of one additional reading during the quarter, and will present it to the class during the relevant week, summarizing the author’s main argument and discussing the evidence. The presenting student will prepare several questions to pose to the class regarding how the additional reading fits with the assigned reading that week. To prepare for facilitating discussion on the additional reading, each student will schedule a time to meet with me to go over possible discussion questions.

**Participation:**
Participation is a key element of your grade. Good participation will not only challenge you, but will improve the learning experience of everyone else in class. Granted, “good participation” is a very amorphous concept. If you have any questions about how you could improve your contribution to our discussion, I would be happy to talk with you at any point. Below are the
types of questions/statements that can contribute to a productive learning environment. This list is in no way exhaustive, but may prove helpful to you:

1. Any question you ask in an effort to help yourself better understand the course material—if you’re confused, someone else probably is too!
2. Questions and comments about the validity and strength of an author’s argument or evidence.
3. Questions and comments that deal with how the course materials relate to one another.
4. Questions and comments that tie readings and lectures to current events and ideas from outside the course.

During the week, if you come across a news story relevant to our course content you can send it to me. I will send out the articles I receive from students. By contributing articles, you can earn extra participation points.

Reading Schedule:

Week 1: What is Gender?


Week 2: What is Gender? (continued)


Reading Reports:

--OR--
Week 3: Identity and Consciousness


*Reading Reports:*

Week 4: Stereotypes and Prejudice


*Reading Reports:*
*Dangerous Frames* (Chapter 6)

MIDTERM PAPER DUE AT THE END OF WEEK 4

Week 5: Gender and Mass Behavior: Voting and Participation


Han, Lori Cox. 2007. “Is the United States Really Ready for a Woman President?” in *Rethinking Madam President: Are We Ready for a Woman in the White House?*, eds. Lori Cox Han and Caroline Heldman. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers. (pages 1-16)

**Reading Reports:**
*Private Roots of Public Action* (Chapters 7, 8)

**Week 6: Gender and Communication**


**Reading Reports:**

**Week 7: Gender and Representation**


**Reading Reports:**

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Weeks 8: Gender and Intersectionality


Strolovitch, Dara Z. 2007. Affirmative Advocacy: Race, Class, and Gender in Interest Group Politics. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Chapters 1, 3)

Reading Reports:
Affirmative Advocacy (Chapter 4)

Week 9: “Critical Perspectives on Gender and Politics—Recent Developments in Intersectionality Research: Expanding Beyond Race and Gender” from Politics & Gender 8(3)

CHOOSE THREE OF THE SIX TO READ:


Week 10: Final Project Presentations

FINAL PAPERS DUE AT THE END OF FINALS WEEK