

Department: Political Science

Course number: 3615/W

Course title: Electoral Realignment

Credits: 3

Contact Person: Oksan Bayulgen

Content Area: CA 2

Skill Code Course: W      Non-W Section: Yes

Instructional Pattern: Either 3 50-minute class periods per week, or 2 75-minute class periods per week.

Taught in a language other than English: No

Prerequisites: POLS 1602 (formerly 173)

Consent Required: No

Permissions and Exclusions: Open only to Juniors or higher

Regional Campus Availability: Course is not expected to be taught at the regional campuses in the near future, due to lack of instructor availability.

Proposed Title and Complete Catalog Copy:

POLS 3615. Electoral Realignment.

Either semester. Prerequisite: POLS 1602. Open to juniors or higher.

Theoretical and empirical examination of electoral realignment in the United States.

POLS 3615W. Electoral Realignment.

Either semester. Prerequisite: POLS 1602, ENGL 1010, ENGL 1011, or ENGL 3800. Open to juniors or higher.

Theoretical and empirical examination of electoral realignment in the United States.

Rationale:

Courses on political affiliation and electoral behavior are common components of political science curricula at American colleges and universities. The concept of electoral realignment represents an increasingly important area of study within this broad field and includes a literature that is best addressed within a course dedicated to the topic. Courses on parties (POLS 2607) and electoral behavior (POLS 3612) touch on the subject of realignment only in the context of a more general overview of their subject areas. The new course entails minimal overlap with these courses, primarily in the introductory material.

The Departments of Sociology and History have been consulted on this course and have no objection. There will be no effect on regional campuses and no specific costs.

How Course Meets Goals of Gen Ed. The course is designed to enable students to explore, master, and write about a detailed literature in an important subfield of American political science, tracing the

development of a significant theory from its early origins through the current era. Requirements, themes and topics are outlined in the attached syllabus.

W Criteria: The course enables students to explore, master and write about a detailed literature in a growing subfield (Goals 1 and 2); evaluate competing theories (Goal 3); examine current political trends (Goal 5); and explore American political development in the context of changing social and ethnic characteristics of American society (Goal 5). Readings embody a literature that dates back to British political theorists (e.g., Burke) and includes major contemporary American analysts. Writing assignments call upon students to integrate this literature with historical and current review and analysis.

#### CA2 Criteria

1. Literature introduces students to examination of a body of theoretical work, looking at concepts related to group behavior in the electoral context. Methodology of examination of a significant theory's origins and development will be generally useful in other social science contexts as well.
2. Methodological examination includes analysis of voting behavior, some examination of methods and issues pertaining to public opinion research, and, on a more basic level, examination of competing hypotheses about party alignment and voter affiliation.
3. Review of ways political leaders, ordinary citizens and parties interact with one another is fundamental to the course.
4. The overall literature includes extensive discussion and evaluation of ways in which academic analysts and others examine political behavior and public policy issues at the group and national level.

Resources: YES

Supplementary Information:

Syllabus:

Abbreviated Syllabus

POLS 3615/3615W—Electoral Realignment

## Overview

Analysts of American party development and voting behavior often focus on the concept of electoral realignments—significant, transforming events that create new eras of party dominance that last for a generation or more and, in turn, have major impacts on public policy.

This course examines electoral realignment from a theoretical and empirical perspective. We begin with a review of major conceptual work in this area, followed by an analysis of multiple cases conventionally cited in the literature and then turn to an examination of current trends. The course concludes with an evaluation of the concept's explanatory and predictive value in the current period.

## Sample Readings

- In the “W” variant of the course, students will be asked to purchase Scott and Garrison’s book, *The Political Science Student Writer’s Manual*, or a similar work.

- Theodore Rosenof, *Realignment: The Theory That Changed the Way We Think About American Politics*.

A. James Reichley, *The Life of the Parties*.

Donald Critchlow, *Conservative Ascendancy*

Ronald Brownstein, *Second Civil War*.

Selected scholarly articles and book chapters in political science

Writing Requirement for “W” variant

Students must pass the "W" component of the course in order to pass the course, and the “W” component constitutes a majority of the course grade.

15-page term paper

60% of final grade

Students are required to prepare a topic proposal, an outline, a bibliography, and first draft. Students will receive instructor and peer suggestions and criticism on this draft and will then rewrite and submit a

revised (final) paper based on those suggestions and criticisms. Students may also present their findings to the class at the end of the semester.

Other course requirements may include a midterm exam (20% of final grade), a final exam (15% of final grade), and class participation (5% of final grade).

### Sample Topics

Conventional views: political parties and typology of elections

Introduction to the concept of political realignment

Theoretical model of realignment

The concept of the “critical election” and cyclical theories

Contending theories

Development of Party Systems I-IV

The New Deal alignment and the post-New Deal party system

The Reagan-Gingrich era: Realignment, de-alignment, or what?

Case study in regional realignment: the movement of the South

Heightened divisions and new patterns of alignment

The 1990’s and 2000’s: Is realignment theory still valid?

### NOTE:

Students must pass the “W” component of the course in order to pass the course. Note that the “W” component constitutes a majority of the overall course grade.