POL 290A: Framing
Winter 2016
Wednesdays 9:00-11:50am
593 Kerr Hall

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Office Hours: M 10:00am-12:00pm and by appointment

This is a graduate seminar on framing, or the process of defining an issue from one perspective at the necessary neglect of alternative perspectives. We will consider the phenomenon of framing within and between at least three bodies of existing research:

- Large-N observational studies have sought to trace the framing of policy issues over time, testing whether shifts in media framing have a significant influence on shifts in public opinion and or policy. For example, U.S. media and societal portrayals of homosexuality are radically different today compared to, say, the 1950s, and these shifts have been linked to subsequent shifts in public opinion and the widespread legalization of same-sex marriage.

- Experimental studies have sought to understand the conditions under which different frames, from different sources, are differentially influential on different audiences. For example, more educated people tend to be less susceptible to framing effects.

- Finally, a small number of studies have tackled what is arguably the question most relevant to modern politics: In a competitive framing environment, what is the best framing strategy for each side of an issue or political campaign to employ? Given the wide acknowledgment of the importance of framing, it is perhaps an unusual characteristic of the framing literatures that they are plural, and poorly integrated.

Political communication studies commonly focus on framing. Public opinion scholars do so as well, as do those in public policy, social movements, social psychology, cognitive psychology, and in other fields. The work also covers the gamut in terms of methodological approach, including formal theories, experimental work, time series dynamics, content analysis, case studies of particular issues, elite interviews, mass surveys, and interpretive / qualitative analysis. Many of these literatures are completely distinct from the others, but there is a lot of room for mutual improvement by cross-pollination. Thus, one of the goals of this course will be to see what we can learn by discussing a wide range of studies.

A syllabus is like a contract, so I have tried to specify lots of details in the document to follow, sometimes in relatively harsh language. Don’t be turned off. We will read and discuss a wide variety of very interesting ideas and you’ll learn a lot in this class. I am excited to teach it and am looking forward to each week of what follows. I certainly hope it will be one of the best courses you ever take.
**Grading**

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<td>Participation</td>
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<td>• Participate in class</td>
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<td>• Come prepared to discuss progress on your research paper</td>
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<td>• In the weeks you are not writing a short paper, upload two questions/thoughts by noon Tuesday</td>
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**Participation**

There is no need to know anything about framing before taking this course. What is necessary is that you read, think, and talk—preferably in that order. Each week you should read all the readings, critically, and come to class prepared to discuss them. It is fine to come to class not having understood something, as long as you pose your questions to me prior to class (see below) and come to class prepared to discuss them. Short of extenuating circumstances—which you should discuss with me on the first day of class if not before—**silence is not acceptable in a graduate seminar.**

Class participation (showing up, having done the readings, having sent me your two questions in advance, and participating in the discussion with well-reasoned questions and/or responses) is worth 20% of your grade for this class, and I will not necessarily assign participation grades only within a narrow B+ to A range. Since there are only 10 class sessions, that’s 2% of your final grade per class based just on participation. You can see this fact as a good thing or a bad thing, depending on your habits of preparation and procrastination. If you’re used to coming to your graduate classes fully prepared and excited to participate, great. If not, let this course be a wonderful opportunity for you to turn over a new proverbial leaf.

**Falling Behind**

Note that it’s all too easy to fall behind in a graduate seminar. My best advice to you is this: Don’t.

Reading is fundamental. If you ever come to class and for some extraordinary reason you have not done all the readings that were assigned, let me know before class indicating what readings you have not been able to do, and go ahead and participate in the seminar when discussion centers on the readings you did complete or on general topics. In other words, don’t skip class, ever. If something happens and you can’t do the bulk of the reading for some reason some week, give me your slip of paper and attend class anyway. If it is an isolated incident, I’ll understand. If it’s a pattern, I’ll be uncomprehending. And never, under any circumstances, BS about a reading
you haven’t done. If you don’t tell me what you did not read and class discussion reveals it, I’ll give you a zero for class participation that day.

**Weekly Questions/Thoughts**

Each week you are not writing a response paper, you will be responsible for uploading two (2) questions/thoughts you have about the readings to the SmartSite course page (under “Assignments”—inline submissions please) by **Tuesday at noon**.

Think of these questions/thoughts as the next step in your “conversation” with the readings after you have:

- done the readings
- grappled with the material
- written your one-page response paper (if you’re writing one that week)
- allowed everything percolate in your brain

Your questions/thoughts need to be compelling and well-reasoned, but they need not be deep or complicated. For example, “What does Figure 1 really tell us?” and “What are the far-reaching implications of this work for our understanding of democracy?” are both great questions—as long as you’ve spent some time mulling over these questions yourself and you articulate the relevant context of each question. In other words, I would never want to see either of these questions by themselves, but rather every question should be more like a paragraph, in which your prerequisite mulling is evidenced.

The questions/thoughts you and your colleagues submit each week—in combination with the one-page response papers—will help shape the agenda for our class session. When we discuss one of your questions/thoughts in class I certainly don’t expect you to have the answers (or else you wouldn’t have been wondering about that point in the first place), but I will expect you to contribute to the conversation by helping to articulate and motivate your idea.

**Leading Class**

Being in charge of a seminar requires a different kind of engagement with the readings than is usually accomplished alone by participation. So in order to coax you to fully engage the readings—and toward the aim of preparing you to teach your own graduate seminars one day—I will ask each of you to lead (or co-lead) two seminars over the course of the quarter. Leading a seminar is a nuanced skill (one I certainly have not mastered), requiring at least three elements:

- An intimate knowledge of the readings and of the questions/thoughts and response papers submitted by your colleagues.
- A general game plan of the key points you want your colleagues to walk away from the seminar with (think comps questions).
- A talent for fostering conversation, allowing the conversation to progress organically without getting derailed, and an awareness of equal participation around the table.

I am, of course, happy to talk with you in advance of the class you will lead to help you prepare.
**Response Papers**
You will be responsible for writing a total of three (3) response papers over the course of the quarter. During those weeks that you write a response paper, these response papers are due to me via SmartSite (under “Assignments”) by noon on Tuesday the day before class. They will be shared with the class leader(s) for that week but should not be distributed to other students.

Each paper should meet the following guidelines:
- name, date, and title listed at the top of the first page
- max 2 pages in length, not including bibliography
- single spaced
- 12pt Times New Roman font
- max 1 inch margins on all sides
- parenthetical citations
- bibliography on pg. 3 if needed

Like the questions/thoughts each of you will submit each week, these response papers will help provide structure for our in-class conversations. Response papers are your opportunity to further engage with the literature we are reading (as well as any additional literature you want to incorporate). You can write your response paper around a single article, or around two or more articles, depending on your interests. In any case, you should cover the descriptive material, summarizing the approach and findings of the article(s), in less than half a page, then use the remainder of the paper to pose questions, discuss implications, and suggest future directions. In composing your response paper, you should ground your discussion in the relevant readings for that week (as well as readings from previous weeks if you want). However, your paper should not be a lit review but rather a critical engagement of the literature, complete with your own well-reasoned and well-supported argument in response to the readings. You can agree with the readings, disagree with them, or suggest a different dimension of discussion altogether. What’s important is that you engage the readings and, in doing so, engage the larger questions under investigation.

**Research Project**
In addition to the material we discuss in class, the core focus of this course will be on your research project.

Given the brevity of the quarter system, your paper need not be a full-length manuscript. Papers should focus on the development of a research project for an article-length treatment or a dissertation / NSF grant proposal. You should not simply write a literature review; the term paper must lead to a proposal for original research.

Since students may be at different stages in their graduate programs (and come from many different fields), your interests may be quite diverse. Your papers therefore may be either very specific, more literature-based, and from a variety of theoretical perspectives. I encourage both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The syllabus below allows for many “taking off points” for term paper projects and I encourage you to think of how a framing approach can be useful for a variety of studies.
Whatever your substantive/methodological approach, you should focus on developing not just an idea but also a game plan for how you will examine it. The development of an idea and game plan will look quite different from one paper to the next. But to give a sense of the scope of what I’m expecting, for a standard quantitative study, I would expect the paper to include: 1) a compelling research puzzle, 2) research question, 3) significance, 4) a brief annotated lit review / theory, 5) hypotheses, and 6) proposed data and research design. For papers (And if you have existing data you can use to test your hypotheses, by all means do so. The more you give me, the more feedback I can give you.)

I will encourage discussion of your term papers in class discussion so that all students can get a feeling for the range of studies being done and the strengths and problems of each approach. That means I may call on you at any time to update the class on your thinking about your project.

Note that it will be impossible to do well in this project by starting at the last minute, so I have built in two deadlines designed to keep you on track throughout the semester: a paper “memo” and an “outline/draft”. These assignments also allow me to give you feedback along the way to push your project to a higher level. The grades associated with these interim assignments are not huge, but they do add up, so make sure to hand them in on time and to take them seriously. You will be pleasantly surprised what a good term paper you can do if you work on it regularly rather than all in a rush at the last second. (It may become a habit, who knows!)

Finally, you will be able to showcase your research project at the end of the quarter—we will have a presentation session on the last day of class (just for our class, but feel free to invite friends and colleagues).

Late Work
Response papers, as well as questions/thoughts are due by Tuesday at noon the day before class. Response papers submitted after that, but before class, will be accepted but marked down a full letter grade. Response papers are not accepted after the respective class begins—even if you don’t attend class. It’s simply not fair to write a paper on a topic that has already been discussed.

The final research paper will not be accepted after the deadline, period. You are responsible for staying in touch with me throughout the quarter about your progress on your project, especially if you experience any difficulties.

Classroom Items
Disabilities
Please let me know in the first two weeks of class if you need any accommodation for a disability. No problem. But don’t delay in letting me know.

Academic Honesty
Study together but make sure the work you hand in is your own. I will not tolerate plagiarism or deception in any form.

Effort
Don’t come to class unprepared to participate.
Diversity of Approach
Students in this class may be coming from American politics, comparative politics, political theory, or international relations within our department, from other departments at UC Davis, or from universities overseas. Therefore you may see a diversity of approaches and backgrounds. Take advantage of that fact and take seriously what you can learn from engaging with unfamiliar approaches. After all, if any one approach could answer every question in this literature, we would be in a very different world.

Computers, Tablets, and Cell Phones
Turn them off, period. Pay attention to the discussion. Bring paper copies of the readings, and a pad and pen to take notes.

Required Books
The following books are available at the UC Davis campus bookstore, although for the sake of your bank account I encourage you to consider buying used copies (in a bookstore or online). I’m also happy to loan an extra copy if I have it.


ONE of the following:
Weekly Topics and Assignments
You should do the assigned readings before the seminar. All journal articles are available as links on the SmartSite course page. Everything is required unless noted as optional. Each week, readings are listed in the suggested order in which to read them.

Week 1
January 6: Introductions and Overview
  • syllabus (read in full)

Week 2  Leader: Ross  Papers: Kendra, Shannon, Daniel
January 13: Cognitive Basics

Optional, in case you’re interested:

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Due Tuesday, January 19 by 9am (under my door): One-page memo describing your term paper topic in conceptual terms and a general idea of the empirical / theoretical approach, relevant literature, and your goals in it (article project, MA thesis idea, PhD idea, etc.)
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Week 3  
**Leader: Kendra**  
**Papers: Maria, Sam, Daniel**

**January 20: Agenda-Setting, Priming and Framing, Oh My!**


Week 4  
**Leader: Maria**  
**Papers: Shannon, Kendra, Gento**

**January 27: Motivated Reasoning**


Also, in case you're interested:

Week 5  **Leader: Isaac  Papers: Sam, Daniel, Ross**  
**February 3: From Internal Cognitive Processes to Framing Effects**


Week 6  **Leader: Sam  Papers: Isaac, Maria, Ross**  
**February 10: Media Framing Effects**


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Due Tuesday, February 15 by 9am: Outline/draft of paper. This should include a full structure, planned cites, methods, etc. The text need not be written but the structure should be complete, in outline form if not in full prose. You’ll be surprised how easy it is to complete the paper if you have a complete outline in the proper order.

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Week 7  Leader: Daniel  Papers: Sam, Shannon

February 17: Source Credibility and Competitive (Re)Framing


Optional, in case you’re interested:


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5 points extra credit if you turn in your research paper by 4pm on Monday, February 22

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Week 8  
**Leader: Shannon  **Papers: Kendra, Isaac

**February 24:** The Policy Effects of Framing


Optional, in case you're interested:


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**Due Monday, February 29 by 4pm: Research paper (5 extra points if turned in by Feb. 22)**

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Week 9

**March 2:** Framing: A Hinge Between Good vs. Bad Ideas?  
**Papers: Ross, Maria, Isaac**

***Read ONE (or more!) of the following:***


Optional, in case you’re interested:


Week 10

**March 9:** Research Project Presentations

- 10 minutes for presentation
- 2-3 minutes for Q&A
- 2-3 minutes for general feedback
- 3-5 minutes for lotus or pigeon pose