POS514 - The Discipline of Political Science

Syllabus, Fall 2009

Class meets Tuesdays 2:45-5:35, Milne 118

Instructor: Professor Udi Sommer
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Office Hours: T 10:45-11:45 (Humanities B16); T 5:35-7:35 (Milne 111) and by appointment

Course Description
This course is designed specifically for entering graduate students in political science. As such, it has several main aims: to provide students with some history and background about the discipline of political science and its development, to introduce students to the major fields in the discipline and their main concerns, and to acquaint students with the various dimensions of professional development and with the responsibilities and expectations every professional academic must meet. You will also have the opportunity to meet many political science faculty, who will participate in our class on a weekly basis.

While this course is demanding, we will encounter some of the major issues that have concerned scholars of politics over the years. By the end of the term, you should know a lot more about what political science is about and what political scientists do. You should also be ready to think about developing your own research and writing projects that engage with the major debates in the various subfields.

Course Format
“The Discipline of Political Science” was created by faculty in the Department of Political Science to provide an overview of the discipline of political science, to provide professional training, to introduce the faculty to new graduate students (and vice versa), and to develop a sense of cohort among faculty and graduate students. Our hope is that each of these in part can be achieved in every class meeting so that over the course of the entire semester these goals as a whole largely will be realized. To facilitate these expectations the first 90 minutes of each class will be devoted to joint discussion of the day’s reading and/or writing assignments by graduate students and participating faculty and during the final thirty minutes of each class graduate students and faculty will discuss a professional development theme. The following professional development themes are to be discussed during the semester:
1) the history of the University of Albany and Rockefeller College  2) forming committees 
3) comprehensive examinations  4) The dissertation prospectus  5) developing a C.V. and a webpage  6) Conference papers  7) journal articles and reviews  8) publishing books in political science  9) the job market 10) the tenure process  11) adjunct teaching, syllabus and course development 12) developing a teaching philosophy and teaching style 13) grants 14) developing your ideas and a research agenda  15) presenting talks & papers.
Requirements
The course will be conducted as a discussion seminar. You will be expected to complete all of the reading, attend all of the class sessions, and participate in class discussions. Constructive and informed participation that contributes directly to conversations about the course material will improve grades; lack of participation will result in lower grades. Class participation and attendance will constitute 20% of your grade. No student can receive an ‘A’ in this course without establishing a record of regular class participation. In order to participate you must keep up with the reading throughout the term. In addition to regular weekly class participation, each class one student will be responsible for preparing a brief presentation and facilitating the class session.

Students will also be expected to complete four graded essay assignments. The first assignment is to locate and review a paper of interest presented at the 2009 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association; the second assignment is to write an essay discussing different methodological approaches in political science and their upsides and downsides; the third assignment is to write a short essay on what you see as the strengths and weaknesses of political science as a discipline of scholarly inquiry, and how you would change or reinforce its development, particularly in your area of special intellectual concern; the fourth is to identify a research question in political science that you find interesting, explain the epistemological and methodological assumptions and underpinnings of your question, explain how your question might contribute to the discipline overall, and finally, how you would put your question to empirical test.

For the final class, students will prepare a presentation of their proposed research projects. The presentation should summarize the importance of the project given the extant literature and its expected contribution to the subfield and (where applicable) to the discipline. The presentation should be 7-10 minutes long.

Finally, students are required to attend several (two or three) of the job talks (if those take place) to be given by job candidates being interviewed this fall for positions in the department.

The allocation of weight for your assignments and obligations is as follows:

- First essay 17%
- Second essay 17%
- Third essay 17%
- Fourth essay 17%
- Final Presentation 12%
- Class attendance and participation 20%

Policies

Students with disabilities. If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with the professor soon. Please request that Disabilities Resource Center send a letter verifying your disability.

Extensions for papers. Extensions for papers will only be permitted under compelling circumstances and if the extension is requested in advance. No late papers will be accepted without an extension granted in advance.

Class attendance. You are expected to attend class. Each student is permitted to miss two days of class per term with no questions asked and no penalties or reductions in class participation grade. Any classes missed beyond those two will be taken into account in
determining your class participation grade, unless a medical or family emergency has been documented.

**Plagiarism.** Plagiarism is the use of someone else’s words or ideas without giving the original author credit by citing him or her. If you use someone else’s language directly, you must use quotation marks. If you rely on another person’s ideas in creating your argument, you must provide a citation even if you are not using that person’s words. If you have any questions about plagiarism, please contact me before you submit the assignment for grading. If you plagiarize the best outcome you can hope to achieve is a failing grade, in addition to any mandatory university sanctions. Plagiarism, even if unintentional, will result in a failing grade for the assignment at the very minimum.

**Materials**
The course materials will be available in PDF format on the course’s Blackboard webpage. You will need access to Blackboard to get copies of the syllabus and course assignments.

**Syllabus**

**I. History of Political Science: From the Theory of the State to Post-Behavioralism**
This part of the course will examine the major stages in the evolution of the discipline of political science in the United States, with special emphasis on transformations in both modes of research and conceptions of democracy as well as on perceptions of the practical relationship between political science and politics.

**September 1. Syllabus distribution, introduction and assignments**

**September 8. From the Theory of the State to Behaviorism**
Overall history of the discipline.

**Required:**
“Introduction,” Katznelson and Milner, State of the Discipline (ADDED to Blackboard)

**Recommended:**
Rogers M. Smith, “Still Blowing in the Wind: The American Quest for A Democratic Scientific Political Science”
John Dryzek, “Revolutions Without Enemies: Key Transformations in Political Science.”

**Professional Development Theme to be discussed:**
“The History of the University at Albany and Rockefeller College”
A further examination of the basic tenets of behavioralism, the principal criticisms of the behavioral approach, and the discipline’s image of the post-behavioral era.

Required:
David Easton, “The New Revolution in Political Science”
Gabriel Almond, “Separate Tables: Schools and Sects in Political Science”

Professional Development Theme to be discussed:
“Forming dissertation committees; Comprehensive examinations; The dissertation prospectus”

September 22. No class

September 29. Rational Choice and Quantitative Analysis (examples from Public Law)

Required:

Recommended:

Professional Development Theme to be discussed:
“Developing a C.V. and a Webpage”

First Writing Assignment Due

October 6. Critics of Rational Choice and the Search for Methodological Unity
The appropriation of economic theory as the basis of achieving methodological identity in political science.

Required:
Donald Green and Ian Shapiro, Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science (excerpts)
The Rational Choice Controversy, Jeffrey Friedman, ed. (excerpts)

Recommended:
Jon Elster, Sour Grapes (excerpts)

Professional Development Theme to be discussed:
“Conference Papers, Presenting Talks and Papers”
October 13. The New Institutionalism: Back to the Future
The return to history and institutional studies as a reaction to the growing hegemony of rational choice analysis.

Required:
Paul Pierson and Theda Skocpol, “Historical Institutionalism in Contemporary Political Science”

Recommended:
James March and Johan P. Olsen, “The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life”

Professional Development Theme to be discussed:
“Journal Articles and Reviews”

II. Substantive debates in the subfields.
Each subfield will focus upon one significant substantive controversy relevant to the field of political science.

October 20. Public Policy: The Relationship between Policy and Politics
Unlike many subfields in the discipline, public policy occupies both a place within political science and beside it as a field of study in its own right (as we see in public policy schools). Public policy scholars often look at questions about the nuts and bolts of public policy. Political scientists who are policy scholars generally look at public policy to ask questions more broadly about politics. This week, we will discuss how politics and political participation affect public policy outcomes as well as how public policy, in turn, affects politics and political participation.

Required
Patricia Strach, All in the Family: The private Roots of American Public Policy (excerpts) (TO BE ADDED to Blackboard)

Recommended
Frank Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, Agendas and Instability in American Politics (excerpts)
John Kingdon, Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies (excerpts)
Suzanne Mettler, “Bringing the State Back in to Civic Engagement: Policy Feedback Effects of the GI Bill for World War II Veterans”
Paul Pierson, Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis (excerpts)

Professional Development Theme to be discussed:
“Developing your Ideas and a Research Agenda”

Second Writing Assignment Due
(Reading: King et al. (1994). Designing Social Inquiry, pp. 3-34; 75-115)
October 27. Comparative Politics: Identity and Politics
In political science the issue of identity, its sources, and political impacts have been a primary concern. A primary area of focus in comparative politics has been the analysis of the sources of nationalist identity and the impact nationalism has had on politics. The selections for this week present the three main approaches for thinking about how nationalism develops. In class we will discuss how the different suggested approaches imply different conclusions about the causes and solutions for a variety of processes from ethnic conflict to democratization.

**Required:**
Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (excerpts)
Crawford Young, “The Dialectics of Cultural Pluralism: Concept and Reality”

**Recommended:**
Anthony Smith, National Identity (excerpts)
Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism (excerpts)

**Professional Development Theme to be discussed:**
“The Job Market”

November 3. International Relations: Debating Realism across the Decades
This week addresses the evolution of the sub-field of international relations. We will examine the assumptions and predictions of one of the most important schools of thought in the subfield: realism. Realism assumes international relations is a struggle for power and survival. Realists tend to advocate policies such as military spending and alliances to preserve security in a dangerous anarchic world. We will examine how the great debates in political science explored during the first weeks of this course influenced the interpretation and empirical testing of realism.

**Required**
David Baldwin, “Power and International Relations”
Brian Schmidt, The Political Discourse of Anarchy: a Disciplinary History of International Relations (excerpts)

**Recommended**
John Vasquez, “Coloring it Morgenthau: New Evidence for an Old Thesis on Quantitative International Politics”
Steve Smith, “The Discipline of International Relations: Still an American Social Science”
Stanley Hoffmann, “An American Social Science: International Relations”

**Professional Development Theme to be discussed:**
“The Tenure Process”
November 10. American Politics: Power and Pluralism in American Politics
Since the founding, when Madison emphasized the dispersion of power in the new constitutional system and the anti-federalists responded that a national elite would emerge instead, American politics has featured a debate over power and pluralism. In contemporary political science, the nature of power and the arguments between pluralists and their critics have been central. The issues range from decision-making to state-society relations to the shaping of political values and consciousness.

**Required**
Robert Dahl, Who Governs? (excerpts)
John Gaventa, Power and Powerlessness (excerpts)

**Recommended**
Theodore Lowi, The End of Liberalism (excerpts)
Charles Lindblom, “The Market as Prison”

**Professional Development Theme to be discussed:**
“Adjunct teaching, Syllabus and Course development”

**Third writing assignment due**

November 17. Public Law: Attitudinalism versus New Historical Institutionalism
Since the emergence of legal realism in the early twentieth century, scholars have debated the relationship between law and politics. What factors drive and constrain the process of judicial decision making? Should we look more closely at outcomes or process to understand legal change? Can we usefully distinguish between law and politics? And what kinds of evidence are the most useful in answering these questions?

**Required**
Howard Gillman, “The Court as an Idea, not a Building (or a Game): Interpretive Institutionalism and the Analysis of Supreme Court Decision-Making”
Jeffrey Segal and Harold Spaeth, “The Influence of Stare Decisis on the Votes of United States Supreme Court Justices”
Saul Brenner and Marc Steir, “Retesting Segal and Spaeth’s Stare Decisis Model”

**Professional Development Theme to be discussed:**
“Developing a Teaching Philosophy and Teaching Style”
November 24. Political Theory: Democracy and Citizenship
A recurrent issue in political theory has been the debate over whether we should promote universality, the common good, and political equality in political communities or plurality, differences, and resistances to common citizenship.

Required
Will Kymlicka, “The Politics of Multiculturalism” and “Justice and Minority Rights”
Iris Young, “Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of Universal Citizenship”

Recommended
Brian Barry, “The Public Interest”
Robert Dahl, “Procedural Democracy”
Sheldon Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy”

Professional Development Theme to be discussed:
“Grants”

December 1. Class presentations of proposed research project
Fourth Writing Assignment Due
Recommended Additional Field Reading

American Politics

International Relations

Comparative Politics

Public Law

Public Policy

Political Theory