Department of Political Science  
Spring 2015 Graduate Course Descriptions

RPOS 501   Field Seminar in Political Theory.   P. Breiner  
(9944)   M  5:45-8:35   Husted 015  
This seminar provides an overview of some fundamental questions and fundamental texts in political theory, both past and present. It also addresses some of the major debates about how political theory should be studied, including problems of methodology in interpreting political theory. I have structured the course so that it will alternate between three dimensions of political theory: in-depth textual examination of certain key thinkers in political theory (specifically, Plato, Machiavelli, Rousseau, Rawls, and Hannah Arendt); textual commentary on these thinkers; and contemporary work that uses these thinkers as a point of departure but presses the problems they raise in new directions. We will close the course with debates about how political theory should be studied. The course is not only directed to political theorists but any graduate student in political science who would like to engage with some of the core arguments in political theory that inform inquiry in political science. Indeed, one of the points of the course is to show how political theories often assume different kinds of political science as their background.

RPOS 513   Field Seminar in Public Policy   P. Strach  
(9945)   Th  2:45-5:35   Husted 015  
This course introduces students to public policy and the policy process in the United States and in comparative context. In it, we focus on important theories of how policymaking works from pressures on legislators to make policy, adapt policy, implement it, and the effect it has on citizens’ individual lives. We take a broad overview of the classics as well as look at new directions in contemporary policy research. This course is recommended for students who are interested American or comparative politics broadly or policy students looking for theoretical background.

RPOS 517   Empirical Data Analysis   J. Karreth  
(4868)   M  2:45-5:35   Husted 006  
Assuming little to no participant familiarity with quantitative methods--and even some trepidation toward statistics--this course provides an introduction to basic statistical methods for the social sciences. Upon successful completion, course participants will be better consumers of statistical methods, have acquired competence and understanding of introductory statistics and be able to apply these methods to social science problems of interest to them. The course also prepares participants for taking more advanced and specialized quantitative methods courses. Special emphasis is placed on applied data analysis. Participants will work with a variety of hands-on exercises to prepare them to conduct their own research projects, from data collection and management to presenting research findings. Excerpt of topics covered: overview of quantitative approaches to empirical social science and causal inference; univariate statistics; hypothesis testing; bivariate and multiple regression; assumptions underlying the linear regression model; and extensions of linear regression, including generalized linear models. No prior knowledge in statistics is required or expected.
The Field Seminar in the American Political System introduces graduate students to the basic methods, theories, and normative concerns of scholars in American politics. The seminar is organized in two parts. Part I explores theories of power applied to American politics, each encompassing a distinctive approach for studying power, unique assumptions about society, specific techniques for analyzing data, and normative implications for democratic theory and democracy. Part II consists of guest lectures by members of the Political Science department. This segment gives students a chance to sample the different styles, approaches, research interests, and normative concerns of professors in the department. The seminar requires weekly reaction papers, active class participation, and a major essay critically reviewing and synthesizing the literature in a chosen area pre-approved by the instructor.

Characteristics of political behavior that are peculiar to, or more strongly pronounced in, urban settings including factions and bossism, city-town-county tensions, politics of planning, zoning, and other decisions, ward and precinct organization activity, and voting behavior. Cities in the Capital District are used for laboratory work.

This seminar in American Political Development examines one of the fastest-growing approaches to the study of American Politics, the historical approach. Popularly known as APD, American Political Development as a field sweeps across the entire terrain of American politics rather than concentrating on only a single area. In the seminar, we will consider APD scholarship on American institutions, political culture, political economy, race and gender, and public policy. Readings will be substantial but writing assignments will be modest.

The objective of this seminar is to provide a critical survey of the field of comparative politics, exposing the student to different methodological approaches and to substantive areas of research. The first half of the course traces the intellectual history of the field with a focus on the bifurcation between theories that emphasize the “universal” (the homogenizing effects of specific processes or variables) and the “particular” (the persistence of distinctive historical legacies and trajectories). It then examines the recent debates between rational-choice, cultural, and structuralist scholars, and discusses the major methodological issues in comparative politics, considering the trade-offs between varieties of formal, quantitative, and qualitative methods. In the second half of the course, the focus shifts to substantive areas of research in the field of comparative politics, including the complex relations among nationalism, nation-states and societies; the origins, consolidation, and patterns of democratic governance; the dynamics behind revolutions and other forms of “contentious politics”; the political economy of development and the emergence of varieties of capitalism; and the relationship between international/global economy and domestic politics and policies. Overall, the course is designed to introduce
important issues and debates that comparativists have regularly engaged in, and to provide a broad intellectual map of an extremely heterogeneous field so that the relationships between different kinds of problematiques and approaches can be better understood.

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<tr>
<td>RPOS 551</td>
<td>Democratization</td>
<td>M. Weiss</td>
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<td>(10524)</td>
<td>T 5:45-8:35 Husted 014</td>
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<td>The course is designed to provide both a conceptual understanding of democratic theories and empirical knowledge of experiences of democratic transition and consolidation. It will investigate different forms of democracy, focusing particularly on new- or late-democratizing countries of East and Southeast Asia. The course begins by looking at the various models of democracy, and the tension between institutional and societal-based theories of democratic change. The course will then apply these theories to specific cases, examining the role of formal democratic institutions, the processes of democratic consolidation, and the relationship between democracy and development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RPOS 554/R</td>
<td>Political Violence, Insurgency, and Terrorism</td>
<td>B. Nussbaum</td>
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<td>(8997, 8998)</td>
<td>Th 5:45-8:35 Draper 313B</td>
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<td>This course examines the relationships among, and differences between the following activities in the international political system: political violence, insurgency, and terrorism. The course will include a consideration of the causes of these activities, their effects on national and international politics, and an evaluation of governmental responses to them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RPOS 571/R</td>
<td>International Political Economy</td>
<td>G. Nowell</td>
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<td>(7197, 7253)</td>
<td>T 5:45-8:35 Husted 304</td>
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<td>This seminar will deal in international financial crises from the nineteenth century to the present. Attention will be given to banking, central bank behavior, trade and trade deficits, as well as economic recovery programs. This is a politics class, not an economics class, but some economic theory will be presented. There are no pre-requisites.</td>
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<td>RPOS 582/R</td>
<td>Global Security</td>
<td>R. Kuo</td>
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<td>(8734, 8735)</td>
<td>W 5:45-8:35 Husted 302</td>
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<td>This graduate seminar surveys the extensive literature on international security. We will explore theories on war initiation, alliances, international institutions and order, and nuclear weapons. We will also examine how variables like trade, democracy, and psychology affect these conditions and dynamics. In addition, students will evaluate these theories based on their logic and empirical validity, as well as apply them to major policy challenges from history and to those facing the world currently. This course is intended for graduate students in Political Science and designed for those who have completed POS 570: Field Seminar in International Relations (or are taking the course concurrently). Others are more than welcome; however, the course presupposes that students are familiar with international relations concepts and theories. In addition, much of the cutting edge work in political science uses quantitative methods in part or in whole. Familiarity with these methods, even at an introductory level, is extremely helpful for this course.</td>
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<td>RPOS 598</td>
<td>Methods in Spatial Analysis</td>
<td>M. Ingram</td>
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<td>(9636)</td>
<td>T 5:45-8:35 Husted 310</td>
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Spatial analysis is a method for examining phenomena of interest while explicitly accounting for the geographic interdependence of units of analysis. Why should you be interested in interdependence? Many research agendas treat units (people, locations, countries, states, counties, etc.) as independent or unrelated to each other. Sometimes this assumption is tenable, and sometimes it is untenable. Where this is assumption is less realistic, spatial analysis lends itself to examining the phenomenon of interest while explicitly accounting for the geographic relations among units. Further, notions of diffusion, spread, or contagion inhere in many existing theories, but are rarely examined empirically with appropriate methods. Again, spatial analysis lends itself to the study of diffusion and similar processes by explicitly accounting for dependence among units of analysis. Lastly, the methods of spatial analysis can be extended to examine broader notions of interdependence, including non-geographic, relational forms of connectivity among units, blending into network analysis.

In this class, students are expected to gain a practical, working understanding of the concept of dependence, how to measure dependence using weights matrices, theoretical implications derived from the interdependence of units, how to collect data and organize data sets for spatial analysis, visualizing spatial data using GIS and mapping software, basic exploratory techniques (e.g., cluster analysis), as well as more advanced applications to test hypotheses using spatial econometrics. The main requirement is either (a) the replication of the analysis in a published paper using spatial analysis, or (b) an original research paper applying both exploratory and explanatory techniques of spatial analysis.
Preparing for the Professoriate

B. Franchini

(7498)  Th  1:15-3:15  Chemistry 151

Students will develop a working knowledge of the American system of higher education, an understanding of what it means to be a professional academic, and the processes common to tenure-track academic positions. This course will be taught in conjunction with the Institute for Teaching, Learning and Academic Leadership. Topics include: Transitioning from Student to Professional, Understanding Institution Types, The Academic Job Market, What Successful New Faculty Know, Understanding the Tenure Process, Balancing Faculty Commitments of Research, Teaching and Service, Movements in Institutional Change to Improve Learning, Department and Institutional Assessment. Prerequisites: Admission to a terminal degree program; CAS 601, PAD 590 or POS 611; and permission of instructor.

Qualitative Methods

J. Novkov

(9959)  T  2:45-5:35  Husted 006

This course examines qualitative research and how it fits in the broader discipline of political science. It covers the contributions and limitations of qualitative research; the nuts and bolts of conducting qualitative research; and how to analyze the results. Prerequisites: Pos 516, Pos 517 or equivalent.

Research & Writing Seminar II

M. Schoolman

(5302)  M  2:45-5:35  Husted 012

This course is the second half of a year-long research and writing seminar – POS 695 & POS 696 – in which students concentrate on further developing a paper that is eligible for submission to an academic journal and presentation at a professional conference. Students in POS 695 have been developing a paper for publication and presentation and will continue to refine their work in POS 696 with the supervision of a faculty mentor who has agreed to serve as their faculty mentor. The work that students will develop and revise for publication and presentation at the conclusion of POS 695 reached 25 or more pages and included substantial bibliographies. At the end of the spring semester all students in POS 696 are required to present their research papers to the faculty of the Department of Political Science as a whole.

SELECTED PROBLEMS - POS RESEARCH

All Faculty

Arranged (Permission of Instructor)

MASTERS ESSAY

All Faculty

Arranged (Permission of Instructor)

Seminar in Public Law

S. Stohler

(9963, 9964)  M  5:45-8:35  Husted 308

Judicial Power: Comparative Perspective on Normative & Empirical Issues

Over the past four decades, a wide variety of courts have exercised increasing powers over government officials in ways that appear to contrast sharply with historical trends. In this course, we will examine whether this shift represents an increase in judicial power and, if so, the causes of this shift. We will also examine whether a shift to judicial governance is normatively
desirable. The course will give substantial attention to courts in the United States as well as other world regions, including Europe, Latin America, South Asia, and Africa.

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<tr>
<td>RPOS 783</td>
<td>Selected Topics in Public Policy</td>
<td>Z. Barta</td>
<td>W 12:10-3:00</td>
<td>Draper 246</td>
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<td>(9965)</td>
<td>Public Spending and Fiscal Policy</td>
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This course focuses on the politics of public finances. It explores the social conflicts surrounding taxation, public spending, and public debt, the role played by different political actors and institutions in fiscal policy choices, and the influence of non-governmental and supra-national organizations (like rating agencies or the International Monetary Fund) on national public finance. It seeks to answer questions like ‘Why do different countries spend and tax so differently?’ ‘Why do some countries get dangerously indebted?’ ‘How do others keep their budgets in balance?’ The course relies primarily on lectures and class discussion. The last classes are set aside for projects analyzing the significant problems of several countries in the wake of the global economic and financial crisis.

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<tr>
<td>RPOS 798</td>
<td>READINGS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE</td>
<td>All Faculty</td>
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<td>RPOS 897</td>
<td>INDEPENDENT RESEARCH POS</td>
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<td>RPOS 899</td>
<td>DOCTORAL DISSERTATION</td>
<td>All Faculty</td>
<td>LOAD CREDIT ONLY, ABD STATUS ONLY</td>
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