Course Description

This course is designed specifically for entering graduate students in political science. As such, it has several main objectives:

- 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 various dimensions of professional development and with the responsibilities and expectations every professional academic must meet.

Over the course of the semester, 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 and power 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. Specifically, you will:

- Be able to describe and distinguish among subfields and methodological approaches;
- Have practiced developing your own research question and sketching out a research and writing project that engages with major debates in the subfields; and
- Understand what you can expect in grad school, your job search, and your career as a political scientist.

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 goals can be achieved in part in every class meeting, such that over the course of the entire semester, these goals as a whole will be largely realized.

The first eighty 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; during the final thirty minutes of
each class, graduate students and faculty will discuss a professional development theme. These themes will include: the history of the University at Albany and Rockefeller College; forming committees; comprehensive examinations; the dissertation prospectus; developing a CV and a webpage; conference papers; journal articles and reviews; publishing books in political science; the job market; the tenure process; adjunct teaching, syllabus and course development; developing a teaching philosophy and teaching style; grants; developing your ideas and a research agenda; and presenting talks and papers. While many of these themes will be of primary interest to those students planning academic careers specifically, those pursuing non-academic careers will find most or all germane, as well.

Requirements
The course will be conducted as a discussion seminar. You will be expected to complete all the reading, attend all class sessions, and participate in class discussions. Class participation and attendance will constitute 20 percent of your grade. No student can receive an A in this course without establishing a record of regular class participation. Constructive and informed participation that contributes directly to conversations about the course material will improve grades; lack of participation will result in lower grades. In order to participate you must keep up with the reading throughout the term.

In addition to regular weekly class participation, in each class one student will be responsible for preparing a brief presentation (highlighting key points in or questions raised in the reading) and facilitating the class session. A schedule of which student is responsible for each day’s presentation will be posted on Blackboard by September 17. Students may swap dates, but must inform the professor in advance.

Students will also be expected to complete four graded essay assignments. Essays must be submitted both in hard copy form at the start of class AND on Blackboard through the “Assignments” link before class on the dates indicated. Except in case of a pre-approved extension (see below), essays are due via Blackboard even for those not in class that day.

• **Assignment #1**: Locate and review a paper of interest presented at the 2010 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association. *(Oct. 1)*

• **Assignment #2**: Write a short essay comparing and contrasting different methodological approaches in political science, including the pros and cons of each. *(Oct. 15)*

• **Assignment #3**: 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. *(Nov. 19)*

• **Assignment #4**: Identify a research question in political science that you find interesting, discuss the epistemological and methodological assumptions and underpinnings of your question, explain how your question might contribute to the discipline overall, and describe how you would operationalize your question or put it to empirical test. *(Dec. 3)*

Lastly, students are required to attend several (at least two or three) department or Rockefeller College seminars (or job talks by candidates being interviewed this fall for positions in the department, if applicable).
Evaluation criteria
The allocation of weight for your assignments and obligations is as follows:

- First essay: 20%
- Second essay: 20%
- Third essay: 20%
- Fourth essay: 20%
- 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 within the first two weeks of the semester. Please request a letter from the Disabilities Resource Center verifying your disability.

Extensions for papers. Extensions for papers will only be permitted under compelling circumstances (i.e., medical emergency) 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. Although missing class is never advisable, each student is permitted to miss two days of class per term with no questions asked and no penalties or reductions in his or her class participation grade. Any classes missed beyond those two will be taken into account in determining your class participation grade, except in the case of a documented medical or family emergency. Papers must be submitted via Blackboard by the start of class on the date they are due for students who will not be present that day.

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. Plagiarism, even if unintentional, will result in a failing grade for the assignment at the very minimum, in addition to any mandatory university sanctions.

Classroom Etiquette. Students are to arrive on class on time. Students are welcome to bring beverages to classes, although no eating is permitted.

Readings and other course materials
The course readings will be available in PDF format on the course’s Blackboard page. You will need access to Blackboard to get copies of the syllabus, readings, and any additional materials. To ensure you receive any class communications, please make sure your email address on Blackboard is correct, and set your Blackboard email to forward to an external account if you do not regularly access Blackboard.

Please note that readings are subject to change (but you will be notified).
SCHEDULE

PART I  HISTORY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
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 3   No class (APSA)
Syllabus distributed by Barbara Wilkinson, Assistant to the Chair
See assignment on Blackboard (due September 8): introduce yourself online to the class.
Introduce yourself to the professor in person before September 24 (at office hours, by appointment, or drop by MH213A).

September 10   No class (university closed: Rosh Hashanah)

September 17   No class (university closed: Yom Kippur)
Review schedule for class facilitation on Blackboard

September 24   From the theory of the state to post-behavioralism
Overall history of the discipline. (Professional development theme will be discussed first today.)

Required:
• “Introduction,” Katznelson and Milner, State of the Discipline

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

October 1   Post-behavioralism and the idea of political science as a policy science
A further examination of the basic tenets of behavioralism, the principal criticisms of the behavioral approach, and the discipline’s image in the post-behavioral era.

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

Professional development themes to be discussed:
• Forming dissertation committees; comprehensive examinations; the dissertation prospectus

October 8  
**Rational choice and the search for methodological unity**
The appropriation of economic theory as the basis of achieving a unified methodological identity in political science, and the epistemological weaknesses of that strategy.

Required:
• Donald Green and Ian Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science* (excerpts)
• Stephen Walt, “Rigor or Rigor Mortis?: Rational Choice and Security Studies” (for further reading: see responses in Autumn 1999 edition of the journal)
• Dexter Boniface and JC Sharman, “Review Article: An Analytic Revolution in Comparative Politics?”

Recommended:
• Jane Mansbridge, “Rational Choice Gains by Losing”

Professional development themes to be discussed:
• Developing a CV and a webpage

October 15  
**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.

Second writing assignment due

Required:
• Paul Pierson and Theda Skocpol, “Historical Institutionalism in Contemporary Political Science”
• Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, “The Study of American Political Development”

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

Professional development themes to be discussed:
• Journal articles, reviews, conference papers, and presenting talks and papers

PART II SUBSTANTIVE DEBATES IN THE SUBFIELDS
Each subfield will focus upon one significant substantive controversy relevant to the field of political science. The selected controversies largely align with the methodological debates from Part I of the course.

October 22 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:
• Morton Schoolman and David Campbell, “Pluralism ‘Old’ and ‘New’”
• Morton Schoolman, “A Pluralist Mind: Agonistic Respect and the Problem of Violence toward Difference”

Recommended:
• Brian Barry, “The Public Interest”
• Robert Dahl, “Procedural Democracy”
• Sheldon Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy” and “The Vocation of Political Theory”

Professional development theme to be discussed:
• Publishing books in political science

October 29 Comparative Politics: Identity and nationalism
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 two main approaches for thinking about how nationalism develops—that nations are essentially primordial, or that they are socially-constructed and modern—then begin to broach why that matters: how do we apply what we know about identity to politics in the world today? 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:
• Crawford Young, “The Dialectics of Cultural Pluralism: Concept and Reality”
• Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (excerpts)
• Victor Asal and Amy Pate, “The Decline of Ethnic Political Discrimination 1990-2003”

Recommended:
• Lowell Barrington, “‘Nation’ and ‘Nationalism’: The Misuse of Key Concepts in Political Science”
• Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (excerpts)
• Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (excerpts)

*Professional development theme to be discussed:*
• The job market

**November 5 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 the core schools of thought in the subfield, to understand what each perspective adds and how these lenses compare. We will then consider how the great debates in political science explored during the first weeks of this course influenced the interpretation and empirical testing of these theoretical lenses.

*Required:*
• Jack Snyder, “One World, Rival Theories”
• Stephen M. Walt, “International Relations: One World, Many Theories”

*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 12 American Politics: Power and pluralism**
Since the US’s 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:*
• Charles Lindblom, “The Market as Prison”
Professional development themes to be discussed:

- Adjunct teaching, syllabus and course development, developing a teaching philosophy and teaching style

November 19  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?

Third writing assignment due

Required:
- Howard Gillman, “The Court as an Idea, not a Building (or a Game): Interpretive Institutionalism and the Analysis of Supreme Court Decision-Making”
- Pamela Brandwein, “The Civil Rights Cases and the Lost Language of State Neglect”

Recommended:
- Saul Brenner and Marc Steir, “Retesting Segal and Spaeth’s Stare Decisis Model”
- Jeffrey Segal and Harold Spaeth, “The Influence of Stare Decisis on the Votes of United States Supreme Court Justices”

Professional development theme to be discussed:
- Grants

November 26  No class (university closed: Thanksgiving)

December 3  Public Policy: The relationship between policy and politics

Unlike many subfields in the discipline, public policy sits both 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.

Fourth writing assignment due

Required:
- Patricia Strach, All in the Family: The Private Roots of American Public Policy (excerpts)

• Peter Breiner, “Machiavelli’s ‘New Prince’ and the Primordial Moment of Acquisition” (for professional development theme)

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
Recommended additional field reading

AMERICAN POLITICS

COMPARATIVE POLITICS


INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS


POLITICAL THEORY

PUBLIC LAW


PUBLIC POLICY
