Field Seminar in the American Political System  
W 5:45-8:35 pm  
Draper 313B

Course Description
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. We will focus on elite theory, pluralism, nondecision-making theory, structuralism, and rational choice. We will also examine readings on American Political development. Part II consists of guest lectures by members of the American Politics sub-field in the Political Science department. Each guest chooses a set of readings that refers to his or her own research. This segment gives students a chance to sample the different styles, approaches, research interests, and normative concerns of professors in the department.

Required Readings
- Sally Friedman, *Dilemmas of Representation* (State University of New York Press, 2007)
- Blackboard course reader. Noted in **boldface** below. Some selections available on E-RES as noted.

Office Hours
MW 10:00-11:00 am HU B16; W 4:00-5:00 pm Milne 219. If this schedule does not work for you, please make an appointment with me for a mutually convenient time and day. Contact information: jcruz@albany.edu I answer e-mails only M-F during business hours.

Course Requirements
Participation - 15% Students will be expected to take the lead in our class discussions. I will
play three roles: learning facilitator, devil’s advocate, and provider of knowledge. As a facilitator I will help students understand the text and I will enforce the rules of the learning process. As a devil’s advocate I will raise questions, suggest counter-arguments, and generally press students to argue their point. As a provider of knowledge I will supplement the information and analysis provided by the required readings, offer my own perspective, and strive to present a balanced view of the issues.

**Reaction Papers** - 40% Every week students will write a short analytical paper (1-3 pages) on the assigned readings for that week. Conceptually, the critical focus of these papers should be “power.” Your analysis should consider the methodology, ancillary concepts, theoretical perspective, and argument each author makes. Questions that may guide your interrogation of the texts are: Is the research design adequate? Is the central thesis persuasively defended? Is/are the concept(s) properly defined? Does the research meet the tests of validity, reliability, and generalization? Below I provide instructions on how to proceed in cases where we review multiple readings. These papers will be graded as a portfolio at the end of the course. Feedback will be provided as needed but lack of feedback should not be automatically construed as “A” level work. If the reaction papers indicate difficulties on your part that could potentially result in a grade below the B level I will meet individually with you to discuss the work. Reaction papers are due the day of the seminar by e-mail. Make sure that your e-mail and paper clearly identify you by name. Follow this convention when naming the file: your last name_pos 521_Sp12_paper1

**Final Paper** - 45% This paper (15 pages) will be an essay on power in American society looking at a particular institution (e.g. Congress), policy arena (e.g. education), group(s) (e.g. Latinos), category (e.g. ethnicity), or process (e.g. presidential elections). The paper does not have to involve original research. A critical review and synthesis of the existing literature in the chosen area is acceptable. A short prospectus including the research question you intend to address based on a preliminary literature review is required. The date to submit your research prospectus is February 22. Papers will be presented to the class on May 2. The time allotted for presentations will depend on the number of students in the seminar. The evaluation of the presentation will be part of the paper grade. The final version of the paper is due May 16.

**Course Outline**

**Part I**

**January**

18 Introduction

25 Federalists versus Antifederalists: The Federalist Papers, #6, 9, 10, 11, 15, 23, 47, 48, 51, 63, 68, 70, 78; The Antifederalist Papers, Introduction, pp. 42-49, 86-89, 130-134, 145-156, 165-175, 189-216, 226-309, and the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution. Read these selections focusing on the ideas and propositions that can be gleaned about political power and write your reaction paper with that focus in mind.

**February**

1 Elite versus Pluralist analysis: C. Wright Mills, The Power Elite, chs. 1, 11, & 12; Robert Dahl, “Critique of the Ruling Elite Model American Political Science


(Research Prospectus Due) Rational Choice:


American Political Development: Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, The Search for American Political Development, Chapters 1, 3-4; Symposium: A Cultural Theory of Politics, PS 44:4 (October 2011): 703-748. Focus your reaction paper on what the APD approach suggests and/or misses concerning the idea of political power.

March

Inequality in American Politics: American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality, Report of the American Political Science Association Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy, 2004; Alfred Stepan and Juan J. Linz, “Comparative Perspectives on Inequality and the Quality of Democracy in the United States,” Perspectives on Politics 9:4 (December 2011): 841-856 Focus your reaction paper on the consequences of inequality for an understanding of political power.
Part II


28 Congress and Representation - Sally Friedman, Dilemmas of Representation; Susan J. Carroll, “Representing Women;” John W. Kingdon, “Models of Legislative Voting.” Focus your reaction paper on Prof. Friedman’s book, following the questions suggested in the section of reaction papers above.

April


April

11 Public Opinion - Anne Hildreth, Readings and instructions TBD


May
2 Presentation of research papers and early bird option for submission of paper. Class evaluation.
16 Final deadline for submission of research paper.