

Department of Political Science
Rockefeller College
University at Albany, SUNY

RPOS 514
THE DISCIPLINE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
Fall 2011

Prof. Meredith Weiss

Class: T 2:45-5:00, HS 012

Office hours: Th 4:30-5:30 or by appointment, Downtown Campus, MH 213A
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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 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.

Over the course of the semester, 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 ninety 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 forty-five minutes of each class, graduate students and faculty will discuss a professional development theme, relating to life as a grad student, publishing, teaching, and applying for grants and jobs. 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. We will divvy up weeks in the first class session. Students may then swap dates, but must inform the professor in advance.

Students will also be expected to complete four graded essay assignments. These essays should be short (3-4 pages, or slightly longer for the final essay), but thoughtful and carefully composed. 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 *in your preferred subfield* presented at the 2011 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association. (*Sept. 27*)
 - For the review: briefly sum up the article's primary aim(s), approach, and argument, then critique how well the piece accomplishes its objectives. As well as possible given what you know thus far, reflect on how this piece contributes to the relevant literature.
- **Assignment #2:** Locate and review a paper of interest *NOT in your preferred subfield(s)* presented at the 2011 annual meeting of the APSA. (*Oct. 11*)
- **Assignment #3:** Write a short essay on what you see as the strengths and weaknesses of your preferred subfield in political science as an area of scholarly inquiry, comparing/relating that subfield to others and to the discipline as a whole. How would you change or reinforce the subfield's development? (*Nov. 15*)
- **Assignment #4:** Identify a research question in political science that you find interesting, discuss its epistemological and methodological assumptions and underpinnings, explain how your question might contribute to the discipline overall, and describe how you would operationalize your question or put it to empirical or theoretical test. You will present this proposal to the class at the end of the semester. (*Dec. 6*)

Lastly, students are *required* to attend several (at least two or three) department or Rockefeller College seminars or job talks by candidates being interviewed for positions in the department.

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 (including presentation)	20%
Class attendance and participation	20%

Policies

Students with disabilities. If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please request a letter from the Disabilities Resource Center verifying your disability, then make arrangements to meet with the professor within the first two weeks of the semester to discuss necessary accommodations.

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 one day of class per term with no questions asked and no penalties or reductions in his or her class participation grade. Any classes missed beyond that one will reduce your class participation grade by 10 percent, 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 applicable university sanctions.

Classroom Etiquette. Students are to arrive on class on time. Students are welcome to bring beverages to classes.

Readings and other course materials

Except for those from one book (see below), all course readings are available 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.

One book (from which only selected chapters are assigned) is recommended for purchase. It is available at both the UAlbany bookstore and Mary Jane Books, as well as on three-hour reserve at Dewey Library.

- Kristen Renwick Monroe, *Perestroika: The Raucous Rebellion in Political Science* (Yale, 2005), ISBN 0-300-09981-9

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

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.

August 30 Introduction

Select weeks for leading class discussion

No office hours this week.

September 6 *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*
- Rogers M. Smith, “Still Blowing in the Wind: The American Quest for A Democratic Scientific Political Science”
- Sheldon Wolin, “The Vocation of Political Theory”

Recommended:

- John Dryzek, “Revolutions Without Enemies: Key Transformations in Political Science”
- Israel Waisman-Manor and Theodore J Lowi, “Politics in Motion: A Personal History of Political Science,” *New Political Science* 33:1 (March 2011), 59-78

Professional development theme to be discussed:

- The history of the University at Albany and Rockefeller College

September 13 *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-behaviorial era.

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

September 20 *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)
- Amartya Sen, “Rational Fools”
- Stephen Walt, “Rigor or Rigor Mortis?: Rational Choice and Security Studies” (for further reading: see responses in Autumn 1999 edition of the journal)
- Stephen E. Hanson, “The Contribution of Area Studies”

Recommended:

- Jon Elster, *Analytic Narratives* review; & Robert Bates, et al., response to Elster
- Jane Mansbridge, “Rational Choice Gains by Losing”

Professional development themes to be discussed:

- Developing a CV and a webpage

September 27 *No class meeting*

First writing assignment due (submit on Blackboard)

October 4 *Perestroika: Methodological and professional pluralism*

The most recent opposition to trends toward the dominance of singular methodological and professional identities.

Required:

- Kristin R. Monroe, *Perestroika! The Raucous Rebellion in Political Science*, chapters 1 (Perestroika), 6 (Ian Shapiro), 9 (Laitin), 30 (Schwartz-Shea), and any others that catch your eye

Recommended:

- Henry E. Brady and David Collier, *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, chap. 1 (Brady, Collier, and Jason Seawright)

Professional development themes to be discussed:

- Conference papers; presenting talks and papers

October 11 ***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”
- 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:

- Publishing books, journal articles, and reviews

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 18 ***Political Theory: Democracy and citizenship***

A current debate in political theory concerns whether scholars should focus on ideal theory (analytical theories of justice, equality, etc.) or on a new kind of realism, which aims to subject political arguments to “the realities” of politics.

Required:

- Gerald A. Cohen, “Facts and Principles”
- Marc Stears, “The Vocation of Political Theory: Principles of Political Theory, Empirical Inquiry, and the Politics of Opportunity”
- Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Part I)

Recommended:

- Robert Dahl, “Procedural Democracy”
- Sheldon Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy”
- Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*
- Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*

Professional development theme to be discussed:

- Professional collaboration and co-authoring; coping with workload and stress

October 25 ***Comparative Politics: Identity and nationalism***

Issues of identity, its sources, and its political impacts are central to political science, and especially comparative politics. Of especial concern to the latter has been analysis of the sources of national identity and nationalism's impact on politics. The selections for this week engage with key approaches for thinking about how nationalism develops—that nations are essentially either primordial or socially-constructed and modern—then begin to broach why these distinctions matter: how do we apply what we know about identity to contemporary politics?

Required:

- Lowell Barrington, “‘Nation’ and ‘Nationalism’: The Misuse of Key Concepts in Political Science”
- Cheng Chen and Ji-Yong Lee, “Making Sense of North Korea: ‘National Stalinism’ in Comparative-Historical Perspective”
- Mark Baskin, “National in Form, Nationalist in Content: Some Consequences of Consociationalism in Yugoslavia”
- Mark Baskin, “Why should I be a minority in your state when you can be a minority in mine?” (internal UN Mission in Kosovo memo)

Recommended:

- Crawford Young, “The Dialectics of Cultural Pluralism: Concept and Reality”
- Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (excerpts)
- Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (excerpts)
- Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (excerpts)

Professional development theme to be discussed:

- The job market

November 1 ***International Relations: Debating theories 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 8 ***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, and yet the narrowness of the lens through which these and other debates have been refracted remains a core concern.

(Professional development theme will be discussed first today.)

Required:

- Jose Cruz, “Pluralism and Ethnicity in New York City Politics: The Case of Puerto Ricans”
- Hanes Walton, Jr. and Robert C. Smith, “The Race Variable and the APSA’s *State of the Discipline* Reports and Books, 1907-2002”
- Ernest J. Wilson, III and Lorrie A. Frasure, “Still at the Margins: The Persistence of Neglect of African American Issues in Political Science, 1986-2003”

Recommended:

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

Professional development themes to be discussed:

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

November 15 ***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:

- Julie Novkov, “Legal Archaeology”
- David M. Engel, “The Oven Bird’s Song: Insiders, Outsiders, and Personal Injuries in an American Community”
- Pamela Brandwein, “The *Civil Rights Cases* and the Lost Language of State Neglect”

Recommended:

- Howard Gillman, “The Court as an Idea, not a Building (or a Game): Interpretive Institutionalism and the Analysis of Supreme Court Decision-Making”
- Robert Clinton, “Game Theory, Legal History, and the Origins of Judicial Review”

Professional development theme to be discussed:

- Grants

November 22 ***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.

Third writing assignment due

Required:

- Patricia Strach, *Consuming Politics: Citizens, Consumers, and Public Policy* (excerpts)
- Joe Soss, “Lessons of Welfare: Policy Design, Political Learning, and Political Action”

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

November 29 ***Student presentations***

December 6 ***Student presentations***
Fourth writing assignment due