Course Description and Objectives

This course introduces first year graduate students to political science and to the central conceptual, theoretical, and methodological issues in contemporary political science. As such, we are engaged introspectively in thinking about the practice of what we do as political scientists and how it does or doesn’t add up. We see both constancy and change in political science by examining its history in the United States and by assessing where the discipline has been, where it is presently, and where it may be going. There is a great diversity of approaches that fall under the rubric of political science. Does that mean that we should celebrate pluralism and proclaim all approaches equally worthy? Should we look for complementarities across approaches? Or, should we look instead for an efficient way to look to characterize human and, therefore, political behavior? Is there a core unity to political science or is fragmentation inherent? If the former, then what is the core? If the latter, then what, if anything, is the discipline?

To what extent can we (or should we) maintain distance from the objects of our study? Is problem-focused study (motivated by engineering or therapeutic concerns) capable of being compatible with a theory-driven enterprise? Is the scientific enterprise theory-driven or problem-driven or are these, in fact, compatible? Is explanation or prediction the gold standard of a science? And how do reconcile the hard-wired nature of human beings with complex systems or stimuli? To put this a bit differently, can theory and science guide us in practical situations or are practical situations too idiosyncratic to cumulate into good theory. The question is absolutely central to what we are about. Historians tend to be foxes (seeing complexity); economists tend to be hedgehogs (seeing simplicity). For further elaborations of how foxes and hedgehogs (as metaphors) see the world as either teeming with complexity or reducible to simplicity, see the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy and the British philosopher Sir Isaiah Berlin. What species of animal are political scientists?

There are many different ways to approach a course such as this. I do not claim that the outline that follows is uniquely appropriate. In a limited amount of time, however, my approach is to emphasize “first principles” as I see them, implying thereby that someone else might see them differently. I do not focus on subfields within the discipline, but rather on issues that cut across subfields within the discipline and which connect political science to other disciplines and traditions. I emphasize the history and sociology of political science and scientific communities, issues of scientific inference, observation and generalization, and assumptions about human and collective behavior. With this as a base, you will come to note that the debates within various sub-fields tend to replicate issues affecting the whole of political science.
Course Materials

Required Books

Extensive readings will be taken from all of the books listed below. I do think that collectively, you will find these books to be an invaluable reference tool and extremely useful for their bibliographies even though some may be a little dated but they provide a strong foundation for further work. A few books have to do with specific questions, outlooks, or research findings relevant to a thematic discussion. Do notice that some readings that are relevant to political science (though they may not immediately strike you as that) emanate from outside of it and some emanate from the world of natural science. The logic for this will be clearer (I hope) as we proceed.

Required Books


In addition to these books, a number of articles and selections from other books will be assigned. The journal articles are typically found in J-STOR which you can access through the Purdue site license.

A Bonus

For your first year and as a way of assimilating you into the profession, the Department will pay your membership to the American Political Science Association (APSA). As a member of APSA, students will receive three journals, the *American Political Science Review* (APSR), *Perspectives on Politics* (POP), and *PS: Political Science and Politics* (commonly known as PS). For future years, the APSA has a student rate for membership.
**Class Procedures**

Our classes will typically divide into two parts. During the first part, I will usually make a presentation in an interactive mode with students, seeking to elicit questions or comments. Student interaction and participation in these sessions is important.

Usually, we will then take a 10 minute break. At this point, a student previously arranged will lead class discussion by seeking to use the class readings of the week as a platform for discussion. (I will randomly appoint these student groups or individual students probably after the second seminar session.) The group or student should try especially to generate discussion and lead it rather than simply conduct a monologue. The students appointed for each class session to lead discussions will be evaluated on their preparation, discussion and class leadership. One or more students will be selected to respond to the group or individual chosen to prepare the class session. Each presenter should prepare a short paper of 4-6 pps. distributed to me and to all members of the class by Tuesday at 12:00 P.M. (I will send around the e-mail addresses of classmates and you have mine on the syllabus.) I will call upon students to respond in a random fashion. This means that participation and involvement in discussion is expected from all students during the seminar. Every student is expected to be familiar with the week’s readings before that week’s seminar and to be able to critically think about them and the presentation.

Each presenter’s paper and oral presentation (please do not read from the paper) should contain the following: (1) a succinct summary of the key arguments of each of the assigned readings; (2) an integration of the readings as a whole – what are their complementarities and their points of conflict? To what extent do the readings join perspectives or arguments or not? (In other words, to what extent do they address one another – the general argument, not the specific reading.); and (3) your own analysis, i.e., your evaluation of the key lines of argument. (This is different from opinion. You need to ground your evaluation in logic or inquiry. What distinguishes an assumption, for example, from a “fact”? In what ways might a particular perspective be useful or not?)

About two weeks before the end of class, I will give you a take-home examination which typically will consist of responding fully to two questions of several – one from each section. Think of this as two medium sized papers each in the 10-12 double spaced page range. There will be no right or wrong answers to the questions I will ask. But responding to them will require very hard thinking and a command of the literature from the course and the issues we discuss in class. It will require you to be highly organized and analytically acute as you fashion your responses.

In addition, a thematic literature review paper will be due shortly after our last official class session. You should use the literature to build upon and expand your bibliography. Organize the literature around key questions and critically assess it for the questions that the literature has resolved, not resolved, and where the future focus of research in the particular area might be. This paper should be no more than 25 pps double-spaced. You should focus on what are regarded as the key works in the field that you are examining not everything that has ever been written!
All papers are to be turned in when due except under the most extenuating circumstances for which there should be prior warning when possible and some form of documentation. Late papers will be deducted in their grade. The final class paper (take home exam) will be handed out in the week of the Thanksgiving holiday (Nov. 25) and will be due back on Friday, Dec. 12 by 5:00 P.M. The literature review and analysis paper will be due back on Monday, Dec. 8 also by 5:00 P.M. You may send these to me electronically, but it is a good idea to provide a hard copy back-up in the event things go awry as they sometimes do.

It will be highly advantageous for you to look at this course not as a series of discrete weekly sessions but rather as an integrated whole in which we are trying to understand the possibilities and prospects of various ways of studying politics, the extent to which these various ways are complementary or exclusive, the possible payoffs from them, the extent to which any given pathway has advantages and disadvantages, and whether or not there is a “better” or even “best” way.

**Procedures of Evaluation**

The final take-home paper will count for 40% of your grade as will the literature review paper. Your class presentation and overall quality and regularity of participation in seminar will together account for the remaining 20%.

**Academic Honesty and Ethics**

The expectation of university life is that people do not claim the works of others – in whole or in part -- as their own. Doing so is plagiarism. Egregious incidents of plagiarism will be dealt with harshly and can lead to expulsion from the program.

**Professionalism**

The department holds colloquia, has outside speakers, and brings in job candidates. You are expected to attend a significant number of these events. They are as much a part of your education and socialization in the profession as what happens inside the classroom.

**Apologies**

Travel abroad requires me, unfortunately, to miss one of our class sessions on Oct. 7. Please take the opportunity to get ahead in your readings and your thinking.

**Course Outline and Readings**

**Aug. 26 – Getting Started: Course Overview**
**Sept. 2 – The World of American Political Science: Part 2**

Readings:
Sept. 9 – Knowledge and Scientific Communities: Science as Cumulation or Disequilibration? – Positivism and Post-Modernism
Readings:
--Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago).
--Mattei Dogan, “Political Science and the Other Social Sciences” in Goodin & Klingemann, pp. 97-130.

Sept. 16 – The Various Meanings of Theory: A Field? Grounded Conditions for Behavior (Moral or Normative Theory)? Explanatory/Predictive Generalizations (Positive Theory)? Occam’s Razor and the Stubborn Stubble
Readings:
--Rogers M. Smith, “Reconnecting Political Theory to Empirical Inquiry, or, A Return to the Cave” and Commentaries by W. Galston, J. Knight, and A. Saxonhouse in Mansfield & Sisson, The Evolution of Political Knowledge, pp. 60-103.

Sept. 23 – Causality and Complexity – Deterministic & Non-Deterministic Systems; Levels of Observation, Analysis, and Inference
Readings:

**Sept. 30 – The Comparative Method**

Readings:

---*Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune, The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry, Introduction + Chapters 1-3 (pp. 3-87).

**Oct. 7 – No Class**

**Oct. 14 – Fall Break**

**October 21 – Models of Human Behavior and Politics: The Rational Choice Paradigm**

Readings:


**Oct. 28 – Cognitive Approaches**

Readings:
Nov. 4 – Cultural and Sociological Approaches

Readings:
-- Lucius J. Barker and Katherine Tate, “The Dynamics of Race and Governance in American Politics: Problems in Search of Theory, Leadership, and Resolution” in Mansfield and Sisson, pp. 257-283; also Commentaries by R. Hero, M. Jones, and D. Sears, pp. 284-299.

November 11 – Structural and Institutional Approaches: Stability and Change

Readings:
November 18 – Contributions from Evolutionary Biology and Genetics
Readings:
--John R. Hibbing, Kevin B. Smith, and John A. Alford, Liberals, Conservatives and the Biology of Political Differences.

November 25 – So, What’s It All About, and What Do We Know?
Readings:

(All PS articles may be accessed on line via <apsanet.org> or via JSTOR. Most journal articles, including all APSR articles 3 years or older can be accessed on line through J-STOR).

LITERATURE REVIEW PAPER DUE DECEMBER 8th.

FINAL EXAM PAPER DUE DECEMBER 12th.