CLASSICS IN AMERICAN POLITICS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this seminar is to introduce the core questions, concepts, and theories of the field through the "classic" works. We developed this seminar in response to graduate students who believed that too many graduate courses in American politics had lost sight of the forest by examining the trees in too much detail (or in some cases, by putting parts of each branch and leaf under a microscope). Advanced seminars typically focus on cutting edge research that often assumes the reader is familiar with the foundational theoretical debates and underlying issues. However, most graduate students do not have time to go back and read the original works that motivate contemporary research. This seminar will provide that opportunity. A related issue concerns the methodology employed in classic and current research. Many first-year students (and other advanced students who have not had statistics) have difficulty plowing through the technical work that is assigned in many American politics seminars. The onslaught of numbers, equations, and formal models in the APSR or AJPS can be impenetrable. The classic works assigned here rarely employ any math more sophisticated than descriptive statistics or simple regression. While it is vital to master the more technical approaches, a prior requirement is to understand the important theories and issues in the field.

What defines a “classic?” In my view, it depends on whether a work identified an enduring insight, changed the direction of a subfield, asked a vital question nobody had thought to ask previously, and served as a foundation for subsequent developments and insights with an influence that may have lasted for decades (or yet remains). There is also the “wow” factor, as in how one (or, in this case, I) reacted in a first encounter with these works.

Most of them are from the 1970s and earlier, although there are a few from the 1980s.

While the primary aim of the seminar is to introduce you to the central questions and concepts in the field, we will spend some time each week developing your research skills. We will examine the methods employed by the authors, discuss whether the methods were appropriate for answering the question at hand, how the methodological choices may have helped shape the research, and how more recent work that you are familiar with has extended (or undercut) the insights of these classic works.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1) The quality of this seminar depends on participation from all of you. Everyone is expected to read the required readings by the day of the seminar and be willing and able to participate meaningfully in discussions. It is essential to have a good understanding of each reading, not only individually but also how they fit together. Before each seminar you may find it useful to write down an outline of the questions and issues that you see as central (and make sure to bring these up, even if discussion seems to be heading in a different direction).

2) You will write five short papers (three to four pages) that critically review the readings for a given week. You will not be required to do outside reading for these papers. The papers should be heavy on the critique and light on the review of the various articles and books.
3) You will be responsible for a presentation, during a week of your choice, of the research that was spawned by a given classic (or set of classics for that week). You also will be responsible for preparing an annotated bibliography for that week of the subsequent work on the topic and how the work has influenced contemporary research. Your presentation, which should be about 10-15 minutes, should outline the main directions of research, a critique of the body of work, and remaining important questions on the topic.

4) There will be a take home final examination. We will discuss the format of the exam in class.

COURSE EVALUATION

Seminar participation (including the bibliography and presentation) is 35% of your grade, the short papers are 40% (8% each), and the final exam is 25% of the final grade.

COURSE READINGS

The following books are required. I did not place an order at the bookstore, as I am certain you can get a better deal on used copies at any number of places:


The other readings will be available on Learn@UW.

COURSE OUTLINE

I. Introduction
January 21st – Studying American Politics (We will discuss the following readings in the first seminar meeting).
Brian Barry, *Sociologists, Economists, and Democracy,* chapter 1

II. Political Institutions
A. January 28th – Congress

**B. February 4th – The President (will reschedule)**

**C. February 11th – The Courts**

**D. February 18th – The Bureaucracy (will reschedule)**
Graham Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis, *APSR* 63:3 (September, 1969) 689-718.

**E. February 25th – Political Economy**

**III. Parties and Groups**
**A. March 3rd – Pluralism**
*Federalist* #10.
Barry, *Sociologists, Economists, and Democracy*, chapter 2

1. **March 10th – Pluralism and the Collective Action Problem**

2. **March 17th – Critics of Pluralism**
Barry, *Sociologists, Economists, and Democracy*, chapters 3-4

**March 24th – Spring Break**
B. March 31st – Political Parties
V.O. Key, Southern Politics, 1949, 298-311, 386-405.
Barry, Sociologists, Economists, and Democracy, chapters 5-6

C. April 7th – Partisan Realignments

IV. The Individual in Politics
A. April 14th – Voting
Barry, Sociologists, Economists, and Democracy, chapter 7

B. April 21st – Participation
Harold Lasswell, Power and Personality, 1948, 20-58.

C. April 28th – Public Opinion

V. May 5th – Who Governs?
Barry, Sociologists, Economists, and Democracy, chapter 8