

PLS 494: Senior Seminar: Political Networks and Policy

Spring 2015

Professor Josh M. Ryan

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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 1-3 and by appointment. You are also welcome to stop by my office at other times and I'll make every attempt to meet with you.

Class Time: Monday and Wednesday, 2-3:15 pm.

Course Description

This is the capstone course for political science majors. It is meant to synthesize much of the information already learned in many of your courses, as well as provide detailed, theoretically-rich subject matter that has not been covered in one of the core classes. This class will focus on a burgeoning area of political science research that has also become prominent in other disciplines like economics, sociology, and psychology: social interactions and the effects of location, race, and income.

Our definition of social interactions will be broad. We will focus on the ways in which environmental and social contexts affect our behavior as translated through institutions. That is, our focus will be on the ways in which who we associate with, and the types of environments we exist in, result in different political and social outcomes. We will also pay special attention to the ways in which institutions act as a determinant on our environment and our social networks. Institutions have the powers to shape what we do and why, and these powers affect and are affected by social networks.

My hope is that the class will be interesting and rigorous. Much of the work in this area has been characterized by "pop" analyses and media accounts. We need to move beyond these journalistic accounts and provide a comprehensive, theoretical, and logical framework by which to understand social and psychological effects. The readings will range from easy to sophisticated, but each provides a slightly different context and theoretical story by which to understand the material. Because research in this area is so new, there is no standard paradigm. The class is organized around each of the books, but the readings are only weakly connected by over-arching themes. It is my hope that most readings will stand on their own while also speaking to the same theoretical and substantive questions.

Because this class is a senior seminar, it will be almost entirely student driven. Each group of students will be in charge of the readings for a particular week, and will generate discussion, explore the themes and insights from the readings, and offer their own perspectives on the work. The instructor will have a less formal role than in most classes. Instead, I will be similar to another participant in the classroom, and like all students in the class, I will push each of you to consider the importance and implications of the readings and our own theories. The course approximates a first year graduate-level course in a political science program. I want to emphasize that the onus for a successful class will largely be on the students.

This class, like many in political science, often deals with subjects that are controversial. Engaging with these issues is an important part of being an informed citizen and as such, we will not shy away from discussing controversial current events. This also means you should never feel embarrassed or afraid to share your opinion, even if it means disagreeing with other students in the class. However, each of us should remember that we have different experiences and different viewpoints. We must always be respectful of other students and other opinions. I take this policy very seriously and have **zero tolerance**

for inappropriate, crude, disrespectful, or demeaning comments. I reserve the right to use an appropriate punishment for any student who engages in disrespectful behavior. This may include removal from the class, receiving a zero on participation for the semester, or being reported to university officials. Please speak with me promptly if you feel there is a civility problem in the classroom. See the Bradley Standards of Conduct at <http://www.bradley.edu/campuslife/studenthandbook/policies/conduct/>

Reading

The course has five required books. All books are in the bookstore.

Lay. *A Midwestern Mosaic: Immigration and Political Socialization in Rural America*.

Putnam. *Bowling Alone*.

Hibbing and Theiss-Morse. *Stealth Democracy: Americans' Beliefs about How Government Should Work*.

Gilens. *Affluence and Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America*.

Christakis and Fowler. *Connected: The Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives*.

There will also be additional readings that will either be emailed or given out in class. Finally, you are required to read either the Washington Post or New York Times (both can be read online) as well as either politico.com, or thehill.com. All of these are free online, although for the Times and Post you have to register with an email address.

Course Requirements and Other Information

The course will be largely student led. Each week a group of students will be in charge of leading discussion. To facilitate discussion, each student doing a presentation must write a one page response to the reading and must be circulated to the class through Sakai. The response will be due two days prior to the start of the presentation so that the presenters will have time to read and incorporate the responses into their discussion. Response papers should be about one page long, single-spaced and should be completed every week. The response papers will be graded on a 0-5 scale. I view 5 papers as absolutely among the few best papers written all semester by a few students, or equivalent to an A/A+. Four papers are equal to an A-/B+ grade, 3 papers are equal to a B-/C+ grade, 2 papers are a C-/D+ grade and 1 and 0 are failing. There is a lot of reading, so it is absolutely critical that the reading is completed prior to the class session.

Students will be graded on how well they lead student discussion during their assigned week. Students should demonstrate preparedness, understanding of the material, and ability to ask questions and pose theoretical puzzles for the rest of the class. Students may prepare a handout, a powerpoint presentation, or other visual aides if they wish, however, the focus should be on generating discussion rather than lecturing.

Students will complete a research design paper. The paper will propose a unique theoretical question and describe how the question might be answered. Students will present their project the last day of class and on the day of the final. Two class periods are set aside to discuss the papers and student progress on them. The papers will be discussed in more detail throughout the semester. However, there will be periodic assignments related to the paper that students must complete.

I have a no cell phone or laptop policy. If I see or hear a cell phone the entire class will have a pop-quiz on the spot which will count toward the participation portion of your grade. For the sake of your classmates, please ensure your cell phone is on silent and please do not text in class. I do not

allow laptops because experience has shown me they create distractions for other students. Please go to the bookstore and buy a notebook to take notes in.

I will periodically send out emails to the class list. You are automatically subscribed to the list if you are enrolled in the class through your campus email account. The list will allow me to inform you of changes in assignments, the schedule or to attach additional reading. I cannot send emails out to a non Bradley email account. The Bradley email account is an official means of communication between myself and the students. If you have any questions, please see <http://www.bradley.edu/irt/policies/5.02.html> and/or talk to me.

Grading

There are five grades for this class: Participation (20%), Response Papers (25%), Discussion Leader(20%), Research Presentation (10%), Research Paper (25%)

Misc. Grading Information

I will be happy to regrade anything with the understanding that the grade could be higher or lower than the original grade. In order to have me regrade something, you need to give me a written explanation of your specific concerns within one week. Do not approach me at the end of class and ask about your specific grade. I do not like this.

Plagiarism and/or cheating will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Anyone caught plagiarizing or cheating will a grade of zero on the assignment and be reported to the Director of Residential Life and Student Judicial System. Please see the Student Handbook and Undergraduate Catalog for Bradley's policies on plagiarism.

You must complete all assignments to pass the class.

Schedule

Jan. 21: Syllabus and Introduction

Jan. 26-28: Evaluating Political Research

Feb. 2-Feb. 4: Introduction to Politics and Networks, Masket, "Where You Sit is Where You Stand," McClurg, "The Electoral Relevance of Political Talk" and Gerber et. al. "Social Pressures and Voting Turnout."

Feb. 9-11: Connected, Chapters 1-4

Feb. 16-18: Connected, Chapters 5-9

Feb.23-25: Bowling Alone, Chapters 1-4 and 7-8

March 2-4: Bowling Alone, Chapters 10-15

March 9-11: Stealth Democracy, Chapters 1-4

March 16-18: No School, Spring Break

March 23-25: Stealth Democracy, Chapters 5-9

March 30-April 1: Paper discussion and prospectus due

April 6-8: Midwestern Mosaic, Chapters Into-3

*April 13-15: Midwestern Mosaic, Chapters 4-Conclusion
Reading:*

April 20-22: Affluence and Influence, Chapters 1, 3-4

April 27-29: Affluence and Influence, Chapters 5-8

May 4: Presentations

Final on Tuesday, May 12th at 12 pm