Political Science 541

SEMINAR ON POLITICAL PARTIES & ORGANIZED INTERESTS IN AMERICAN POLITICS
Autumn 2013
3:00-6:00 p.m. Wednesday

Prof. Marie Hojnacki
Office: 213 Pond
Office hours: Monday 3:00-4:00
Tuesday 2:00-4:00
Office phone: 865.1912
Email: marieh@psu.edu

Course Description

Political parties appear in one form or another in virtually every aspect of American politics. In fact, some scholars believe that democracy could not exist without parties. Like political parties, interest groups play major roles in American politics and the policy making process. Indeed, a variety of organizations of interests -- business organizations, professional associations, public interest law firms, unions, corporations, governments at the national, state, and local levels, and citizen groups advocating on behalf of a multitude of issues and causes – contribute to the growth and diversity of the interest group universe. In the United States, both political parties and interest groups are the primary organizational intermediaries between citizens and government decision makers, providing both a mechanism for the representation of citizen interests, and citizen access to the political and policymaking processes.

The purpose of this seminar is to introduce you to the significant themes, research approaches and questions addressed in recent and classic studies of organized interests and political parties. Both interest groups and parties are significant topics in the literature on American politics and could serve as the basis for an individual seminar. Consequently, our focus here is necessarily selective. The topics we will survey include the formation of interest groups and the emergence of political parties; the impact of organizational advocacy in the Congress; mechanisms for and consequences of party change; and, the representativeness of and modes of bias apparent in political parties and the organizational community. Throughout the seminar we will be attentive to how political scientists formulate and execute research on parties and groups, as well as to how the design of this research affects what we know about these organizations and their roles in the political process. The seminar is designed to meet the needs of graduate students in political science who hope at some time in the future to do original research, master a doctoral field, or teach in one or more aspects of American politics.

Course Requirements

Seminar participants will be required to engage in extensive careful reading and to contribute to weekly discussion. To facilitate both participation in the weekly seminars and critical thinking about the work we cover, seminar participants will be required to prepare six short written critical responses to the readings. Each seminar participant also will be required to lead the seminar on a selected week, and to complete an original research project that takes up questions relevant to our understanding of representation. Each of these activities is described in greater detail below.
First, each week we will as a group work through a set of required readings on a scheduled topic. I expect you to read and analyze these selections with care. (You may also wish to review some of the recommended selections but these readings are not required for the seminar discussion.) The readings, especially the articles, are often dense, and require time and patience to assimilate. You should come to each seminar prepared to discuss and debate what you have read, to dissect the arguments and evidence presented in the readings, and to raise and respond to questions about how the readings inform the topics we address. Careful reading of the required material is essential to both the quality of our seminar discussions each week and your grade for participation.

Second, to help you think critically about the work we cover, you will be required to prepare six short (maximum of two pages) written responses to the readings (you will select the weeks when you will prepare these papers). The reading responses are to be posted to ANGEL by 8:00 p.m. on the Tuesday before class. These papers should help you to crystallize your thoughts on the readings and will serve as a basis for at least some of your contribution to the seminar discussion that week. Notice that I am not asking you to summarize the readings each week. Rather, I’m asking you to engage them, to take them up and consider why they are relevant. There is no single formula or approach to writing a response paper. You should always communicate what is important about the material but beyond that your response to the work is likely to vary. For example, in some weeks you may offer suggestions for addressing important empirical or theoretical limitations that you see in the work. In other weeks, the material may raise important unaddressed questions that you might consider how to take up. In addition, you might explore some interesting connections among the readings we cover in a week such as the way they define or treat differently an important concept. Relatedly, you might explain interesting linkages between the current and a previous week’s readings, or between the required and recommended material. I encourage you to draw into your paper any additional reading that you deem relevant. You should read the papers posted by all seminar participants as part of your preparation for the seminar meeting.

The third requirement for the course is that you lead one seminar meeting. This session will correspond with a week in which you prepare a reading response. As a seminar leader, you will be responsible for organizing our discussion of the assigned readings for that week. I am not asking you to prepare a lecture on a topic. Rather, I want you to initiate and facilitate the discussion, and to decide how we’ll approach and take up the material. You should plan to sample some of the recommended readings during the week that you lead the seminar. You may choose to present some material from the recommended readings, especially if the selections are relevant to the way you are planning to cut into the material. Each participant will pick a week to lead. I strongly recommend that you meet with me in advance of your seminar leadership to review your plans for the session.

Finally, you will undertake some original research that addresses questions relevant to our understanding of organized interests or political parties. Research questions are due in class on October 9; plan to submit them along with a brief description of why the questions you pose are important to the study of groups or parties, how your questions relate to existing scholarship (you need not conduct an extensive literature review by this date but you do need to have some sense of the work that is done on the topic you pose), and how you plan to address your questions (e.g., data you expect to gather, research techniques you plan to use). If you are starting from scratch, I encourage you to consider some type of smallish, pilot study that is doable in a semester rather than a large-scale research project that cannot be completed in that time. Also, I encourage you to speak with me about your paper as questions arise, as you encounter difficulties, and so on. You will
submit a first draft of your paper by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, December 6. I will provide brief comments on and assign a preliminary grade to the draft. You will submit a final version of the paper by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, December 13. Final papers should be roughly 25 pages in length (not including tables or references).

**Grading**

I will base your final grade on the extent and quality of your participation in class (20 percent), the quality and coherence of your reading response papers (25 percent), your leadership of a class session (20 percent), and your final research paper (35 percent). The grade for the final research paper will be a weighted average of your preliminary (35 percent) and final (65 percent) paper grades. As is appropriate in a graduate seminar, I expect you to attend and be prepared for each and every session, and to submit all assignments on time.

**Required Books & Other Reading Material**


Seminar participants who have no prior acquaintance with the literature on interest groups or political parties may find it useful to consult some good introductions to these topics as a prelude to and in preparation for our discussions in this seminar. For interest groups, consider reading Jack Wright’s (1996) *Interest Groups and Congress: Lobbying, Contributions, and Influence*, Jeff Berry and Clyde Wilcox’s (2009) *Interest Group Society*, 5th edition, and/or David Lowery & Holly Brasher’s
(2004) Organized Interests and American Government. Each of these books has a distinctive style. Wright examines empirically many of the key themes and questions in the literature. Berry & Wilcox’s presentation is narrative and they give more emphasis than Wright does to the normative implications of changes in the group system. Lowery & Brasher use three distinct perspectives on organized interests to frame their presentation of how groups operate in the “influence production process.” But any one of these will provide a solid introduction to the topic. For political parties, a classic treatment can be found in Hershey’s (2012) Party Politics in America, 15th edition. Other useful introductions to the study of political parties include Hetherington and Larson’s (2009) Parties, Politics, and Public Policy in America, 11th edition, and Schaffner’s (2011) Politics, Parties and Elections in America, 7th edition.

### Course Schedule

Required books are available for purchase from the bookstore. Required journal articles are available electronically through JSTOR or through another link in e-journals on the library’s website. Other required reading is available through ANGEL as noted on the schedule.

**Week 1 (August 28): Introduction to the Course**

*How are scholars approaching the study of political parties and organized interests? What questions and themes dominate the research in these areas?*

**Required, Week 1**


**Weeks 2 & 3 (September 4 & 11): Defining & Explaining the Emergence of Political Parties in America**

*What constitutes a political party in America? Why do parties form? What purposes do they serve? Who are the actors that comprise the party? What are their goals? What are the main points of distinction between the different theories of parties? What are the implications of these differences both for our understanding of political parties, and for political outcomes?*

**Required, Week 2**


Required, Week 3


Cohen, et al., The Party Decides, chapter 3.

Also recommended


Weeks 4 & 5 (September 18 & 25): Party Development and Change
How have political parties evolved and changed over time? Have their functions changed? Do they serve different interests than they once did? What do the two major parties look like today, and why do they look the way they do? Have the groups comprising the parties changed? Have the parties’ issue
positions shifted? What forces underlie these changes?

**Required**


**Also recommended**


New York: Norton.


**Week 6 (October 2): Parties in Legislatures**

*How are legislative behavior and outcomes affected by political parties? What aspects of legislative behavior and outcomes are affected the most by party politics? How does partisan affiliation compare to legislators' preferences or legislative rules as an explanation for policy outcomes?*

**Required**


Also recommended


Week 7 (October 9): Political Parties as Representational Intermediaries

***Research Questions Due***

How effective are political parties in articulating and offering a voice for various interests? Are some interests privileged over others in the major parties?

Required

Frymer, Uneasy Alliances: Race and Party Competition in America.


Also recommended


**Week 8 (October 16): The Development and Maintenance of Organized Interests**

*Are common interests sufficient to form groups? Why is collective action difficult? How can collective action problems be overcome?*

**Required**


**Also recommended**


**Week 9 (October 23): Advocacy Communities, Mobilization, and Policymaking**

How is group behavior and activity shaped by other organizations with similar policy interests – both allies with similar goals and adversaries who have very different policy preferences? How much interaction occurs between organized interests? How, if at all, does interaction affect the choices groups make as advocates? How, if at all, does it affect public policy?

**Required**


**Note:** Available on ANGEL


**Also recommended**


**Weeks 10 & 11 (October 30 & November 6): Participation in the Policy Process and Representation by Organized Interests**

*Who participates in trying to affect public policy? Why are some types of interests more active as advocates than others? Whose interests and what types of interests are represented before government? Is the group system biased? If so, what are the implications of that bias?*

**Required**


Strolovitch, *Affirmative Advocacy: Race, Class, and Gender in Interest Group Politics*.

Also recommended


World of 'Good Ol' Boys.' "Journal of Politics. 60:1181-1201.


**Week 12 (November 13): Advocacy Targets, Tactics, and Objectives**

*What are organized interests trying to accomplish when they “lobby”? What types of activities will they engage in to protect and defend their interests? Under what conditions should organized interests seek to engage their supporters?*

**Required**


**Also recommended**


Weeks 13 & 14 (November 20 & December 4): The Influence of Organized Interests
What constraints do groups face as they pursue their policy goals? How do groups’ resources affect their chances for policy success? How does opposition affect groups’ abilities to achieve their goals? What about public opinion? To what extent, if at all, does business dominate public policy?

**Required**


**Also recommended**


**Week 15 (December 11): No Session**

We will not meet as a group on this date. I will meet with each of you individually during the early part of this week to discuss the first draft of your research paper. The final versions of these papers are due at 5:00 p.m. on Friday, December 13. Late submissions will be penalized. Incompletes will not be granted.