Political Science 543

SEMINAR ON POLITICAL REPRESENTATION
Autumn 2015
3:00-6:00 p.m. Wednesday

Prof. Marie Hojnacki
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Office hours: Monday 3:00-4:00
Tuesday 1:00-3:00
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Course Description

The purpose of this seminar is to investigate significant concepts, ideas, and research questions addressed in recent and classic studies of political representation. Questions pertaining to the representation of citizens’ interests and to the responsiveness of government to citizen preferences are central to our understanding of American politics. Indeed, assessments of the nature and quality of democratic governance hinge, at least to some extent, on the degree to which government officials are responsive to citizen concerns and attentive to their interests. With this in mind, we will begin the semester with an examination of different types of political representation, some of which are policy-related and others of which are not. We will also consider how normative considerations shape expectations about representation in practice. We will next take up assessments of the relationship between citizen preferences and public policy (policy responsiveness); biases and inequality in representation; and the role of political intermediaries, namely organized interests and political parties, in facilitating the representation of citizen interests. The seminar will end with our attending to the implications of a more or less representative political system. Note that these topics are not orthogonal. I expect (and hope) that we will draw on material from individual readings across multiple weeks. Throughout the seminar we will be mindful of how political scientists formulate and execute research on political representation, as well as how the design of this research affects what we know about representation. The seminar is designed to meet the needs of graduate students in political science who hope at some time to do original research on, master a doctoral field in, or teach American politics.

Representation is a very broad and heterogeneous topic of study. Consequently, the readings for the course are drawn from several subfields in political science. We will examine research about the behavior of political actors; the operation of different institutions of government at the state and national levels; electoral politics; the roles of political parties and organized interests; as well as how individual citizens form ideas about and respond to government activity and public policy.

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 report on a set of recommended reading for 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 typically required for the seminar discussion. I describe the one exception to this rule below.) 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 6:00 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 are expected to 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 give a brief presentation about a set of recommended readings associated with a single topic. Each seminar participant will select a set of recommended readings – generally, a book or two or three articles – in consultation with me from any week on or after the fourth week of the semester. The presentation should correspond with a week in which you prepare a reading response. Only one presentation will be scheduled each week. Your presentation should be designed to inform the group about the content of the reading and how it relates to the topic under which it is assigned (as well as to other topics, as relevant). Presentations should run about 20 to 30 minutes. You must meet with me in advance of your presentation to discuss it. The meeting should take place no later than the Monday of the week in which you present.

Finally, you will undertake some original research that addresses questions relevant to our understanding of representation. Research questions are due in class on 30 September; plan to submit them along with a brief description of why the questions you pose are important to the study of representation, 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. Seminar participants
will present their research in our final seminar session on 9 December. Plan your presentation with
the goal of educating seminar members about the research you completed, what you uncovered,
and what you learned. You will have about 10 to 15 minutes to make your presentation (I will tell
you a few weeks in advance about the format for this session). Final papers are due to me by 5:00
p.m. on Monday, 14 December. They 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 presentation of
recommended reading (20 percent), and your final research paper (35 percent). As is appropriate
in a graduate seminar, I expect you to attend and be well prepared for each and every session, and
to submit all assignments on time.

Required Books

New York: Cambridge University Press.


Minta, Michael. 2011. Oversight: Representing the Interests of Blacks and Latinos in

Schlozman, Kay Lehman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady. 2012. The Unheavenly Chorus:
University Press.
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. One exception is Lowery & Gray's article, entitled “On the Political Origins of Bias in the Heavenly Chorus” in Interest Groups and Advocacy. I will distribute a copy of the article.

**Week 1 (26 August): Introduction to the Course**

**Week 2, part 1 (2 September): Fundamental Issues in the Study of Political Representation**

What is political representation? What issues – in theory or in practice – complicate our understanding of representation? To what extent (and how) do normative considerations drive our expectations about representation?

*Required*


*Recommended*


**Week 2, part 2 (2 September) & Week 3 (9 September): Policy Congruence and the Representative-Constituency Linkage** To what extent do elected representatives reflect and act upon the policy preferences and interests of their constituents? How can (and do) representatives know the policy preferences of their constituents? Is it possible for elected officials to represent the interests of a diverse constituency, and if so, how? How can we assess accurately the representative-constituency linkage?

**Required**


Recommended


Weeks 4 & 5 (16 & 23 September): Broader Perspectives on Political Representation

What does it mean to have one’s interests represented? Through what mechanism other than policy preferences can constituents be served by elected representatives? Do these mechanisms allow citizens to hold their representatives accountable? If so, what is the basis for this accountability? How should (and do) we define constituents’ interests? How should (and do) we define the interests of population subgroups, such as women or African Americans? How, if at all, is representation affected when elected representatives exert independence? Are interests and representation best evaluated at the individual level or at the group level? What are the implications of different levels of evaluation?
**Required**


**Recommended**


**Week 6 (30 September): Policy Responsiveness to Public Opinion**

*To what extent is public policy shaped by public opinion? What linkages exist between policy outputs and the priorities and preferences of the public? How do those linkages vary across issues? To what extent does responsiveness vary across groups?*

**Required**


**Recommended**


**Weeks 7 & 8 (7 & 14 October): Observing Representation**

How is representation manifest in the relationships between elected officials and constituents? What evidence exists to support our expectations about different forms of representation? How do elected officials perceive their representational role(s)? How do constituents evaluate their representation? How, if at all, is representation affected by the nature of elections and the electoral process?

**Required**


**Recommended**


Week 9 (21 October): Variation in the Quality and Nature of Representation

How well are individual citizens represented? How does the quality and level of representation vary across different subgroups? Are some better represented than others? What do we mean by “equal” or “unequal” representation? Should all citizens and all groups get everything they want from government? What are the implications of a system where certain interests are better represented than others?

Required


Recommended


**Week 10 (28 October) & Week 11, part 1 (4 November): Interest Groups as Representational Intermediaries**

How effective are groups in articulating and offering a voice for various interests? How, if at all, is representation affected by organization? Does organization enhance the representation of citizen interests? Does it distort it? Whose interests are represented before government? Is there bias in the organizational representation of interests? If so, where is the bias manifest – in participation, agenda setting, or policy making?

*Required*


Recommended


**Week 11, part 2 (4 November) & Week 12 (11 November): Political Parties as Representation Intermediaries**

How effective are political parties in articulating and offering a voice for various interests? Are some interests privileged over others in the major parties? Are there differences across the major parties in the interests that are represented? How does interest representation by the two major parties affect the candidates that run for office under their auspices, the platforms they espouse, and the issues they prioritize in government? Would representation be more effective without political parties (or with parties that differ from the ones we have in the U.S.)?

**Required**


**Recommended**


Week 13 (18 November): Implications of a More or Less Representative Political System

How does the representational character of political institutions affect the policy process and policy outputs? How do citizen attitudes about representation affect their support for candidates and government? Are there electoral implications for officials who do not reflect their constituents’ policy preferences? Are representatives who do reflect constituents’ preferences electorally safer? How does the presence of minority policymakers affect the actions of their colleagues? How does it affect outcomes? What have been the intended and unintended consequences of efforts to enhance the representation of different groups?

Required


Recommended


**Week 14 (25 November): Thanksgiving Break, no class**

**Week 15 (2 December): Individual Meetings to Discuss Research Papers, no class**

**Week 16 (9 December): Paper Presentations and Discussion**

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**Academic Integrity and Academic Dishonesty**

Along with the Department of Political Science, the College of the Liberal Arts and the University, I take violations of academic dishonesty seriously. Observing basic honesty in one's work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all members of the community are required to subscribe.

All course work by students is to be done on an individual basis unless an instructor clearly states that an alternative is acceptable. Any reference materials used in the preparation of any assignment must be explicitly cited. Students who are uncertain about proper citation are responsible for checking with their instructor.

Lying to the instructor or purposely misleading any Penn State administrator shall also constitute a violation of academic integrity.

In cases of any violation of academic integrity it is the policy of the Department of Political Science to follow procedures established by the College of the Liberal Arts. More information on academic integrity and procedures followed for violation can be found at: [http://www.la.psu.edu/CLA-Academic_Integrity/integrity.shtml](http://www.la.psu.edu/CLA-Academic_Integrity/integrity.shtml).

**Disabilities**

The Pennsylvania State University encourages qualified people with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities and is committed to the policy that all people shall have equal access to programs, facilities, and admissions without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by University policy or by state or federal authorities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell me as soon as possible. Reasonable accommodations will be made for all students with disabilities, but it is your responsibility to inform me early in the semester. Do not wait until just before an exam to decide you want to inform the instructor of a learning disability; any accommodations for disabilities must be arranged well in advance.