NOTE reading assignment for first class, January 23, 2017

PURPOSES: The concept of “power” is central to the discipline of political science and the practice of governance, but its meaning, measurement, causes, and effects are all elusive. The goal of the seminar is to give students clearer ways of thinking about power, preparatory to doing research throughout your careers that will in one way or another revolve around making sense of the concept.

To this end, we will pursue three more specific purposes. One is empirical – to examine how and when power is exercised, by whom, to what effect. The works focus mainly although not exclusively on the United States, and consider the power inscribed in institutions and rules ranging from constitutional design to regulatory decisions, as well as the power of individual actors or groups, ideas or cultures, and emotions or preferences.

A second purpose is analytic – to compare definitions of power, ways to measure it, theories about its origins and effects, and methodological choices for studying it. The first half of the course will follow in roughly chronological order the ways in which political scientists have developed analyses of power; the second half will address a variety of contemporary research programs.

A third purpose is normative – to explore the virtues and flaws of particular theories of power, structures or modes of exercising power, and distributions of power resources. The goal here is to develop arguments about desirable and feasible changes in the creation, distribution, and use of power, and to consider how those changes might be studied and implemented.

TASKS: Seminar participants read and discuss the equivalent of one substantial book or five articles per week. The readings are listed below.
Defender of the Text: Each student has this role for one or two sessions (depending on the number of participants in the course). The Defender(s) reads the assigned material with extra care, perhaps reads other material by the same author(s) or other pertinent unassigned material, and throughout the class session makes the best case possible for the assigned readings. This role does not preclude criticism—authors are usually their own best critic—but it does imply that criticism should be "internal" rather than "external." The purpose of this role is to encourage you to escape the classic graduate student dilemma of honing critical skills to a razor-sharp edge while leaving constructive skills dull and unpolished. (I will assign the dates for each student’s Defender role, so you don’t get to defend the texts or arguments you like best.)

Discussion questions: For 9 of the 12 class weeks, each student submits two discussion questions to the Canvas website, with (only) one or two sentences about why you want to class to address those issues. That submission will be due by Sunday at 6 p.m., before each Monday class. The purpose here is to begin to make the transition from student to teacher.

Class summary: In the final few minutes of each class period, a subset of participants (chosen by me) gives a two-sentence statement of a research project that could grow out of the readings and discussion for that session. The purpose here is to begin to make the transition from consumer to producer of scholarship on power.

Paper or course outline: Each student also writes either a seminar paper (no more than 8000 words), or designs and explains a course outline, including a partial syllabus, for a course on Power. For the paper, once you have chosen a specific, well-bounded issue or condition, you should ask and answer questions such as: How does power work in this circumstance? Who or what exercises it? How do I know that? To what effect? Should the power exercised in this case be maintained, strengthened, resisted, abolished, or otherwise changed? What is this a case of? How does this case lead us to conceive of power more generally?

If you choose to write and explicate course outline, you will need to decide if it is for a graduate or undergraduate course, develop and justify the major themes and weekly topics, and choose key readings and assignments. You might also develop pedagogical and/or technological innovations. The course outline should explain the reasons for your overall structure of the course, particular topics, and crucial readings and assignments. It could be accompanied by a literature review, comparison with other courses, and theoretical development of how to study and deploy the concept of power.

GRADES in the seminar are roughly one-half for the paper or syllabus, and one-half for class participation. Class participation includes your discussion questions, role as Defender, and research ideas as well as general engagement. You must complete all the work to pass the course. I reserve the right not to grade in accord with the strictly arithmetic average, so that I can take into account such things as extra (but unsuccessful) effort, trajectory during the semester, unusual circumstances that affect performance,
and so on. Class participation probably weighs more heavily in my evaluation than the papers if there is a discrepancy between the two indicators.

**BOOKS and ARTICLES:** The following are available at the Coop. You can find used copies of many of these books on Amazon.com or other online book sellers.


Articles and other book sections will be available through links in the syllabus, on the Canvas website, on JSTOR, or directly online.

**TOPICS and READINGS:**

**January 23: The First and Second Faces of Power**
Robert Dahl, *Who Governs?* chaps. 1, 7, 8, [9, 10, or 11], 12, 15-19, 24, 27-28


**January 30: The Third and Fourth Faces of Power**
John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*, chaps. 1, 6, 7, 8, 10
Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*: chap. 1 of Part 1; chap. 1 of Part 2; Parts 3, 4

**February 6: The Power of Structures I**

February 13: The Power of Structures II

February 27: Post-structural and Post-modern Theories of Power
Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? (Harvard University Press, 1982), chaps. 13, 14, 16

March 6: The Power of Time
Stephen Skowronek, Presidential Leadership in Political Time (University Press of Kansas, 2011), chap. 1

March 20: The Power of Contingency and Personality
Robert Caro, Master of the Senate: The Years of Lyndon Johnson (Vintage Books, 2003), part IV or V


**March 27: Power and Gender**
Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (be sure to read notes as well as text)

**April 3: Power and Race**

**April 10: Power, Wealth, and Class**
Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*
Nolan McCarty, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. *Polarized America, 2nd ed.* (MIT Press, 2016), chaps. 4 and 6

**April 17: The Power of Identity, Connection, and Context**

**Paper or Course outline due on May 11, by 5 p.m. – submitted electronically to me.**