GOV 2305: American Politics Field Seminar
Fall 2018
Thursdays, 9-11am
Location: Knafel 108
9.06.18 – to Canvas

Instructors:
Jennifer Hochschild
Office hours are Monday, 2-4pm, CGIS K156
hochschild@gov.harvard.edu

Jon Rogowski
Office hours are Thursdays, 2-4pm, CGIS K420
rogowski@fas.harvard.edu

The purpose of this course is to introduce doctoral students to the major themes and some of the best scholarship in the political science literature on American Politics. The readings for 2305 typically form the core of students’ subsequent reading lists for major or minor general exams in American politics. The most important requirement of the course, therefore, is to read the publications for each week carefully and critically. They will be the focus of our discussions. Keep in mind that your reading of some items will affect your reading of others, whether in the current or some other week; we will make a point of discussing those links. More generally, the readings will provide us, as a group, with common terms of reference upon which good discussions will depend.

One initial caveat, however: much in the study of American politics is not represented here, and there are many issues that political scientists have not yet taken up – so along the way, we will want to identify important but neglected questions. What issues should motivate the next generation of research in this field? What theoretical and methodological approaches might be appropriate to studying them? What do we now know that will enable us to engage with new issues, evidence, or methods?

To fulfill the goals of this course, it is important that you write as well as read and discuss. In particular, we aspire for this course to help you to make the transition from being mostly a consumer of scholarship to also being a producer, as well as a good disciplinary citizen. We have three ways to encourage you to achieve those goals:

Weekly memos: For five of the substantive weeks, you will write a brief (no more than 400 words) historiographic note about the readings for that session (you may include readings from earlier sessions if appropriate). The focus will be on the intellectual trajectory from the earliest publication(s) to later ones – where did this literature start? How did it develop, and why in that direction(s)? What continues to be important in the earlier work, and what has been superceded? What do political scientists now know that we didn’t know XX years ago? (the answer might be “not much”). Conversely, where has the more recent literature gone wrong?
What ideas do the most recent publications for that session open up for our discussions, further research, etc.?

Of course, you can’t address all of these issues in one brief memo; the idea is to get you thinking about them so our class discussion can be well informed and thoughtful. You may also find that some readings in a given week don’t fit into a nice historiographical time line – that is sometimes intentional, and it will be equally interesting to analyze what does not fit into a given intellectual trajectory as what does. Read each other’s notes, and come prepared to discuss their ideas and insights.

AND

On five of the weeks (we suggest roughly every other session), you will write a brief (no more than 400 words) memo on how you would develop new research growing out of the material in that session. Put differently, if the previous set of memos starts in the past and moves to the present, this set of memos starts in the present and moves toward the future of research.

As you develop these memos, think about what project you would be interested in exploring, growing out of this set of readings. What is the big analytic or normative question, and why is it worth answering?1 What kinds of evidence would you use to study it? What kinds of methods? What would be the biggest difficulty in developing this research agenda? Of what do you hope to persuade your readers?

*Each weekly submission will be due by Wednesday at 6 p.m, before each Thursday class.* There will be folders for each week on the Canvas website for your upload. Please be sure to read and think about all of the memos submitted for each class session; you are invited to offer online comments on each other’s memos before the session meets, and we will certainly discuss your ideas and proposals during the session itself.

AND

*Journal submission reviews:* Peer review is central to the academic enterprise and the accumulation of knowledge. Our course is as good a time as any to gain familiarity with this process, from the perspective of both a reviewer and an author. Several working papers from (anonymized) authors outside of Harvard will be distributed via Canvas. Students should choose two papers; for one, you will act as a reviewer and provide critical but helpful and honest feedback as if you were reviewing for a top journal in the discipline. (We suggest no more than two pages, single-spaced.) For the second, students should respond to the reviews provided as if you were the paper’s author. Engage with the review and outline the revisions you have undertaken in response--and those that you are not undertaking, explaining in that case why. (We recommend no more than four pages, single-spaced.)

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1 If your response is “to fill a gap in the literature,” you will immediately fail the course.
The manuscript review is due on October 18, 2018, and the response to a manuscript review is due on November 29, 2018. Please email each to the instructors in Word format.

AND

Development of research proposal: for a capstone activity, you will develop one of your five brief research memos into a more sustained research proposal (no more than 8 single-spaced pp.). It is likely to follow along the same lines – explaining your research question, persuading the reader of its importance, pointing toward the most important literature or evidentiary base (selectively, not exhaustively), and laying out your work agenda. The latter should include some reason to believe that the evidence you need actually exists or can be gathered, a description of the methods you will use, and something as close to testable hypotheses as you can get. (For those of you doing more qualitative, archival, or normative proposals, you may want to substitute “demonstrable propositions” for “testable hypotheses.”). The final paper will be due on the last day of reading period, December 14.

A general note about writing: having smart ideas and good methods is no excuse for poor writing – in fact, nothing is. Our evaluations will include attention to the quality of your prose (we can discuss what that means if you wish). Here are three resources to help you develop clear and interesting writing:

- GSAS Center for Writing and Communicating Ideas
  https://gsas.harvard.edu/center-writing-and-communicating-ideas
- William Zinsser, On Writing Well, Harper, 2016 (or earlier edition)

Course grades will depend on participation in the seminars, weekly memos, quality of the paper reviews, and quality of the final research proposal, with each of the four components weighted equally.

Required readings are available on the Canvas website for the course. The following books are also available at the Coop for purchase or rental (and most can be found at Amazon.com or elsewhere in used copies). Our decision rule was to include on this list any book with three or more chapters assigned, if it is not available online at Hollis:

Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy*, University of Oklahoma Press, 2004

**Reading Assignments**

**September 6: Institutional and Normative Foundations of the American Order**

any unabridged edition; one easy place to find them is:
http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1786-1800/the-federalist-papers/
Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (any unabridged edition)
Vol. I, part 2, Ch. 5, “The People’s Choice…”, “Elements Which May Provide…”,
Vol. I, part 2, Ch. 7, “Tyranny of the Majority,” “The Power Exercised by the Majority…”,
“The Greatest Danger to…”
Vol. 1, part2, Ch. 9, “How the Enlightenment, Habits…”
Vol II, part 2, Chs. 1, 2, 8
Vol. II, part 4, Chs. 2, 6

**September 13: Information, Ideology, and Opinion Formation**

September 20: Political Parties and Partisanship


September 27: Groups, Identities, and Politics


October 4: Congressional Institutions

October 11: Presidency and the Executive Branch


October 18: Democratic Accountability, Representation, and Responsiveness

Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels, 2016. *Democracy for Realists*, Chs. 8, 9, 10, 11
October 25: Policymaking and the Politics of Military and Social Policy


November 1: Legal Process and the Courts


November 8: Subnational Politics: States, Regions, and Federalism


November 15: Subnational Politics: Local Governance and Participation

Katherine Cramer, 2016. The Politics of Resentment, University of Chicago Press, Chs. 5 and 6

November 22: University holiday; no class

November 29: Social Movements and Political Participation

Andrea Campbell, How Policies Make Citizens, Chs 1-2, 4-6.
Mancur Olson, The Logic of Collective Action, selections TBA.
Theda Skocpol, Diminished Democracy, Chs. 2-4, 7.

December 6: Political Communication and the Media


