History and Scope of Political Science

Seminar Overview

This introductory graduate seminar, as part of our methods sequence, is intended to give you a sense of the epistemological origins, intellectual history and scope of political science as an academic discipline. Accordingly, we will examine the philosophy of social science and the emergence, development, and practice of political science as a distinct focus within the social sciences.

The seminar is divided into four parts, beginning with a brief overview of the intellectual history of political science. The second part consists of an historical and philosophical overview of the core identity and episteme of social science in general, and political science in particular. The third part covers some of the dominant paradigms and scholarly research approaches within our discipline, which rely on different assumptions about human behavior, modes of observation and data-gathering, tools of analysis, methods of inference, and ways of conferring meaning and creating knowledge. The fourth part probes some diverse questions that naturally arise from the preceding parts. This seminar should give you a sense of some of the vital debates that have constituted and continue to influence political science.

Seminar, Participation, and Other Requirements

The required readings are listed for each week in the seminar schedule below. There is one required book that we will read in full:


The following books are highly recommended (but assigned excerpts will be posted on Blackboard):


In addition, a number of articles and book chapters are assigned. You should retrieve all articles from JSTOR, other library databases, or online. The book chapters and articles not available from these sources will be made available on Blackboard.

As you know, in graduate seminars learning is advanced by critically reflecting upon our readings and sharing your thoughts with seminar colleagues. In this seminar, we will do this in two ways. First, you will be expected to read assigned materials and to write short papers (2-3 pages) discussing the readings (for 25% of seminar grade). Second, you will be asked to take turns leading discussion of the week’s readings, and when you’re not leading discussion to participate in it (for 20% of seminar grade). *Almost half (45%) of your seminar grade will be determined by actively participating in the seminar in these ways.*

I will email you some questions every week to guide writing of discussion papers and reflection on readings. *Discussion papers are due Tuesday by noon before the Wednesday meeting at which the week’s readings will be discussed.* This is to allow time for your colleagues to read and me to grade your papers. Please paste them into the discussion board dialogue box I will create for that purpose. *Because discussion papers are designed to support discussion of the week’s readings, late discussion papers will receive F grades.*

An analytical paper and an exam, their due dates, and their contributions to your seminar grade:

1. **Analytical Paper.** The proponents of cultural theory approaches in Week 14 seek to show how these can advance or improve upon rational choice, new institutional, historical institutional, psychological, and interpretive approaches to politics covered in previous weeks. Choose one cultural theory approach and its engagement with one of the other approaches. Explain the cultural theory approach you have chosen and how it is similar to or different from the others in Week 14. Explain how the cultural theory approach that you have chosen seeks to advance or improve upon ONE of the other approaches covered. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of your chosen cultural theory approach with respect to its claims to advance or improve on the other approach that you have chosen to analyze. Make your assessment on theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and empirical grounds, using what you have learned in this seminar. All the cultural approaches have relevant empirical applications (see survey in Swedlow 2011; see also the bibliography of applications found in Wildavsky 2006). Please talk with me about your planned paper; I may be able to point you to relevant work. Your 12-15 page analysis is due April 27th posted to the Blackboard discussion board forum for this paper. *(30% of your seminar grade)*

2. **Take-Home Exam.** Complete a take-home exam on either Monday or Tuesday (your choice) of finals week. The exam is designed to help PhD students practice for their comprehensive exam but all students are required to take it. Email me your exam answer (12-15 pages) 24 hours after I send the exam question(s) to you. *(25% of your seminar grade)*

*More than half (55%) of your seminar grade will be determined by this analytical paper and your take home exam.*
Please do not…

- ask for extensions on turning in your analytical paper or exam. **Analytical papers will be graded down one third of a grade per day that they are late. Late discussion papers and late exams will receive F grades.**
- ask for an incomplete in the seminar unless you have a very, very compelling reason to do so.

Definitely do not…

- engage in “academic misconduct,” defined by the NIU **Student Judicial Code** as the “receipt or transmission of unauthorized aid on assignments or examinations, plagiarism, unauthorized use of examination materials, or other forms of dishonesty in academic matters.”

**Department of Political Science Announcements**

**Statement Concerning Students with Disabilities**

Northern Illinois University is committed to providing an accessible educational environment in collaboration with the Disability Resource Center. Any student requiring an academic accommodation due to a disability should let his or her faculty member know as soon as possible. Students who need academic accommodations based on the impact of a disability will be encouraged to contact the Disability Resource Center if they have not done so already. The Disability Resource Center is located in the 4th floor of the Health Services Building, and can be reached at 815-753-1303 [v], 815-753-3000 [TTY] or email at [drc@niu.edu](mailto:drc@niu.edu)

**Reading Assignments and Discussion Topics**

**PART I.**

**WEEK 1 Introduction to the Seminar and Political Science as a Discipline**


**PART II. The Foundations and Evolution of the Discipline**

**WEEK 2 Epistemology, Explanation and Meaning in the Social Sciences**


**WEEK 3 The Development and Evolution of Political Science as a Social Science**


**WEEK 4 The Role of Causation and Inference in Political Science**


WEEK 5 The “Perestroika Movement” in Political Science


WEEK 6 The Quantitative versus Qualitative Debate: What is this Debate and is it Worthwhile?


PART III. Approaches to the Study of Politics

WEEK 7 Behavioralism


David Papineau. 1978. *For Science in the Social Sciences*, Chapter 7

WEEK 8 The Rise of Rational Choice Theory and “New Institutionalism”


WEEK 9 NO CLASS MARCH 11-18TH, SPRING BREAK

WEEK 10 Limitations and Critiques of Rational Choice Theory


WEEK 11 Political Psychology


WEEK 12 Historical Institutionalism
Theda Skocpol. 1995. "Why I am an Historical-Institutionalist," Polity 28(Fall): 103-6


**WEEK 13 Interpretivism and Phronesis**


**WEEK 14 Grid-Group Cultural Theory, Cultural Cognition Theory, and Neo-Durkheimian Theory**


**IV. Goals and Applications of Political Science**

**WEEK 15 Can Political Theory Be Relevant in the Modern Discipline (and does it want to be)?**

Analytical paper (12-15 pages) described above is due Friday, April 27, posted to discussion board forum for this paper.


**WEEK 16 Does Political Science have a Normative Commitment to Democracy? Should it?**


**WEEK 17 Finals Week – 24 Hour Take-Home Examination May 7 or 8.**