

POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY (SO322R)
TISCH 208
FALL 2015
MW 2:30 PM – 4:20 PM

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"The fundamental concept in social science is Power, in the same sense in which Energy is the fundamental concept in physics." –Bertrand Russell

"The business of America is business." –President Calvin Coolidge

Introduction

This course examines the organization of power and authority in contemporary societies with a particular emphasis on the United States. When most people hear the word politics, they imagine cable news pundits tiresomely raging back and forth over the latest petty controversy. Most sociologists define "politics" far more broadly, seeing it as any social action related to the acquisition or exercise of power, status, or authority. Thus, sociologists are able to see politics in all sorts of places including the workplace, the kitchen, and the basketball court. While political sociologists do tend to focus on the realms of public affairs and civic life, unlike other analysts, they are just as likely to conceptualize the power of corporations and social movement organizations as the well-coiffed politicians we hear so much about.

In this course, we will consider the primary three spheres of power and authority in our society: the market, the state, and civil society. We will ask timely questions about the relationship between powerful institutions and the individual. For example, how is power seized and exercised by various institutions and actors? What ends are achieved with this power? Are people powerless in the face of corporations and the government or are there occasions for resistance? In considering these and other questions, we will explore major theories of power and authority as well as the dominant methodologies researchers have used to begin to find answers.

Learning Outcomes

Students completing SO322R should be able to:

1. Describe and compare major theories related to power and authority.
2. Critically analyze the relative power exercised by the state, corporations and elites, and actors and organizations within civil society.
3. Describe and critique various current research methods used in political sociology.
4. Use current social scientific research to construct a persuasive argument designed for a public audience.
5. Design and conduct a study using secondary analysis of political attitudes survey data.

Required Texts

There are two required texts for this class, both available from the Skidmore Shop and online.

Hacker, Jacob S. and Paul Pierson. 2011. *Winner-Take-All Politics*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Walker, Edward T. 2014. *Grassroots for Hire*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Other readings for the course are available on the course's Blackboard site (<http://learn.skidmore.edu>).

Requirements

The following are the course assessments:

1. **Scholarly Attitude** (10%) – Most faculty members evaluate “participation” as a part of students’ course grades. But mere “participation” – how much you do or don’t talk, sit up or fall asleep – isn’t really what most of us want from our students. Instead, most of us hope to see students accept our invitation to “the life of mind” by adopting a “scholarly attitude.” Having a “scholarly attitude” involves developing intellectual curiosity and a genuine engagement with the ideas presented in the course. Students with a scholarly attitude take the student role seriously and demonstrate their commitment to academic pursuits by actively engaging in the material, reflecting deeply on the readings, raising thoughtful questions and comments in class, bringing unsolicited materials to share that are directly relevant to the topics being covered, come early and/or stay late to raise their own questions about the material, and generally go above and beyond the requirements of the course. Students who lack a scholarly attitude passively complete the readings and responses, occasionally engage in other activities during lecture (playing with phones, texting, daydreaming, and so on), and are primarily concerned with obtaining a particular grade in the course. I will send you a course grade report after each of the exams that includes a current scholarly attitude score.

2. **Exams** (40%) – There will be two non-cumulative examinations testing material covered both in the readings and in class. The first will be held on Oct. 28 and the second during the official exam period. Exams will incorporate definitions, short answer, and essay questions.

3. **Political Op-Ed Assignment** (20%) – In a few stages, students will produce a research-based Op-Ed, using both sources from class and from outside. To do well, students will have to make a clear, well-supported persuasive argument in only about 500-700 words. The intent of this assignment help students think about how the skills you have developed as a critical thinker during your time at Skidmore can be applied in your life as a citizen. While there are a number of intermediate deadlines (including an annotated bibliography and a first draft), the final assignment will be due on Nov. 16.

3. **Political Attitudes Study and White Paper** (30%) – Using data from the American National Election Studies (ANES) (<http://electionstudies.org/>), a collection of political surveys collected every two years since 1948, students will conduct their own studies on some feature of Americans’ political attitudes. I highly recommend that students choose a research question that builds on existing research examined for the Op-Ed assignment. While there are a number of intermediate deadlines (including drafts of your tables), each student will produce a white paper reporting on the results of your study (due on Dec. 14).

Summary:

10% Scholarly Attitude

40% Two Exams

20% Op-Ed

30% White Paper

100% Final Grade**Grades:**

94%-100%	A	90-93%	A-	87-89%	B+
84-86%	B	80-83%	B-	77-79%	C+
74-76%	C	70-73%	C-	67-69%	D+
64-66%	D	60-63	D-	<60	F

Course Policies

Disabilities: If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need academic accommodation, you must formally request accommodation from Meg Hegener, Coordinator for Student Access Services. You will also need to provide documentation which verifies the existence of a disability and supports your request. For further information, please call 580-8150 or stop by the office of Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center. I would also encourage you to communicate with me about any accommodations well in advance of exams and due dates.

Electronic Devices: Unless directed to do so, I expect that students will not use laptops or other electronic devices in class. Many studies have shown that people are extremely poor multi-taskers. Looking at Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, etc. or even doing Google searches that may seem relevant all distract from lecture and discussion. Moreover, most people retain information better when taking handwritten notes. If you feel that your learning will be hampered by not having access to your laptop for note-taking or other legitimate purposes, please speak to me privately. Otherwise, keep your laptop as well as your cell phone and any other devices will be turned off and stowed away during class.

Late Policy: On all assignments, your grade will be reduced by one unit for each day late (e.g., 1 day, from A to A-; 2 days, B+; 3 days, B, and so on). After two weeks from the due date, you will receive a zero for the assignment.

Missed Exam: Students who will miss an exam date due to an official school absence must schedule an alternative exam date and time *in advance*. As a general rule, I do not allow students with unscheduled exam absences to reschedule. In extreme circumstances, a make-up exam will be given at my discretion and I reserve the right to change the format.

Cheating and Plagiarism: By enrolling at the college, all students have agreed to abide by the *Skidmore Honor Code*, which says, "I hereby accept membership in the Skidmore College community and, with full realization of the responsibilities inherent in membership, do agree to adhere to honesty and integrity in all relationships, to be considerate of the rights of others, and to abide by the College regulations." Part of that code means not to misrepresenting others' work as your own. Please review the detailed description of the rules and regulations surrounding cheating and plagiarism as described in the *Skidmore College Student Handbook* (http://www.skidmore.edu/student_handbook/honor-code.php). If you are unclear on what constitutes plagiarism and/or cheating, please discuss it with me in advance of due dates or

exams. In the case of a violation, the offending student will receive a zero (“F”) for the assignment and I am required to report all offenses to the Dean of Academic Studies, which may result in disciplinary action. Please don’t let this happen!

Civility and Respect: The *Skidmore Honor Code* also has important implications for how students ought to treat each other. This course will include discussions of class, nationality, religion, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. I expect students to show respect toward all the subjects of our study. More importantly, I expect you to treat your classmates and your instructor with respect and dignity at all times – especially when you disagree with them.

Course Outline

All listed readings are required. Please let me know immediately, if you have difficulty accessing the electronic files. (B) = reading available on Blackboard; (H) = Hacker & Pierson; (W) = Walker; (E) = Electronic files available on Blackboard.

Week 1: Introductions

Sept. 9 Introduction and Overview

Week 2: Power and Authority

Sept. 14 What is Power?
(E) Roscigno, “Power, Sociologically Speaking”
(E) Weber, “The Types of Legitimate Domination”

Sept. 16 Democracy and Political Authority
(E) Orum and Dale, “Basic Forms of Political Authority”

Week 3: The Market and the State

Sept. 21 Marx and the Market
(E) Marx, “The German Ideology”
(E) Orum and Dale, pgs. 9-18

Sept. 23 Weber and the Iron Cage of the State
(E) Weber, “Bureaucracy”
(E) Orum and Dale, pgs. 37-45

Week 4: Civil Society and Pluralism

Sept. 28 Durkheim and Tocqueville
(E) Orum and Dale, pgs. 63-76
(E) Lipset, “American Exceptionalism – A Doubled-Edged Sword”

Sept. 30 Pluralism and Elitism
(E) Dahl, “Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City”
(E) Mills, Excerpt from *The Power Elite*
Due: List of three articles for Op-Ed

Week 5: Civic (Dis)engagement

- Oct. 5 American Citizenship in 2015
(E) Perrin, "Voting, Civil Society, and Citizenship"
- Oct. 7 Apathy in a Movement Society
(E) Buechler, "Movements + Elections = Democracy"
(E) Eliasoph, Excerpt from *Avoiding Politics*

Week 6: *Grassroots for Hire*

- Oct. 12 What is the grassroots industry?
(W) Part I (pgs. 3-76)
- Oct. 14 What does the grassroots industry do?
(W) Part II (pgs. 79-151)
Due: Annotated bibliography for Op-Ed

Week 7: *Grassroots for Hire, Cont'd*

- Oct. 19 Skype Guest: Prof. Edward Walker, author of *Grassroots for Hire*
(W) Part III (pgs. 155-206)
- Oct. 21 *GRH* Wrap-up

Week 8: Exam Week

- Oct. 26 Intro to ANES Data
Due: First draft of Op-Ed
- Oct. 28 Mid-term Examination

Week 9: *Winner-Take-All Politics*

- Nov. 2 The Winner-Take-All Economy
(H) Introduction and Ch. 1-2 (pgs. 1-72)
- Nov. 4 American Democratic Capitalism, 1789-1989
(H) Ch. 3-5 (pgs. 73-136)

Week 10: *Winner-Take-All Politics, Cont'd*

- Nov. 9 The Republican Revolution
(H) Ch. 6-8 (pgs. 137-222)
- Nov. 11 What of the Democrats?
(H) Ch. 9-Conclusion (pgs. 223-306)

Week 11: The Functions of the State

- Nov. 16 What is the State?
(E) Draper, "The State as Superstructure"
(E) Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime"
Due: Final draft of Op-Ed

Nov. 18 The Welfare State
 (E) Mettler, Excerpt from *The Submerged State*

Week 12: Political Attitudes

Nov. 23 ANES Studies Work Day
 Due: First draft of tables for study

Nov. 25-29 Thanksgiving

Week 13: The Culture of American Politics

Nov. 30 Sports & Religion in Political Life
 (E) Gerteis, "The Social Functions of Religion in American Political Culture."
 (E) Green and Hartmann, "Sports and Politics: Strange, Secret Bedfellows."

Dec. 2 Political Media
 (E) Berry and Sobieraj, "Are Americans Addicted to Outrage?"
 Due: Final tables for study

Week 14: After the Nation-State

Dec. 7 Challenges Abound
 (E) Khanna, "The End of the Nation-State"
 (E) Packer, "No Death, No Taxes"

Dec. 9 Revolution!
 (E) Skocpol, "State and Revolution"

Dec. 12-14 Study Days

Dec. 15-18 Final Examinations

White papers due by 5pm on Dec. 14