

## Professors Sound Off

### **Do you believe that President Obama's State of the Union Address was successful in quelling the economic fears of the American people?**

I think that indicators such as unemployment numbers must improve before the public will express more optimism.

-Prof. Xydias

I think President Obama's State of the Union Address was somewhat successful in quelling the economic fears of the American people. He is a good speaker and suggested some specific action he would like Congress to take. Nevertheless, I do not believe the president is able to dominate the media airwaves after the address in a way that continues to reassure the American people. Just a week after the State of the Union there are indications that the US economy may not bounce back as quickly as hoped (unemployment news), and a debt crisis in a few European countries has also scared the investment community. Since President Obama cannot control bad economic news, I think his ability to quell fear related to the economy is limited. He needs to make additional statements that reassure the American people that recessions are temporary and our economy will improve.

-Prof. Nicholas

Unemployment presently stands at about 10%. Approximately 14% of all US homes were in foreclosure or one month overdue on the mortgage. And, as many of our students know well, the jobs that are available are not necessarily the most desirable. Most Americans measure the economy either through their own pocketbooks or sociotropically (which is

fancy poli sci jargon for assessing the state of the economy as a whole, often through proxies such as the economic situations of friends and family). Obama gave a considered and, ultimately, hopeful State of the Union but this will not allay the fears of those facing significant economic troubles. What will? Jobs and rising salaries. Obama unveiled a jobs plan that, if successful, will do much more to ease the American mind than one well delivered speech.

-Prof. Hays

I believe ultimately that it raised as many issues as it addressed. While it was important for him to begin laying out his plan for reduction of the national deficit, I believe his message was somewhat lost in his announcement of new spending programs. From my perspective, we won't be able to truly tackle the economic crisis until we directly address the nature of US security concerns and the unprecedented increases in military spending that have occurred over the last decade.

-Prof. Watson

### **Do you believe that the Democratic Party's recent electoral loss in Massachusetts will greatly affect healthcare reform?**

On the one hand, I think that this outcome will change Senate debates over healthcare reform, unless the Democratic Party is willing to employ the "nuclear option" to circumvent a filibuster. On the other hand, healthcare reform debates were not progressing smoothly even before the Massachusetts special election.

-Prof. Xydias

Well it seems clear from Obama's recent admission that he doubts the healthcare reform bill will be passed that in fact the loss has impacted healthcare reform. The greater tragedy here is that almost everyone

on both sides of the aisle agrees that some sort of change to the system must be made. However, the political maneuvering and posturing that the issue engenders may simply be too much to overcome.

Ultimately, considering that two of the most popular presidents of the modern era were unable to get any major changes enacted, one must wonder if it won't be a very long time before another president feels confident enough to try again.

-Prof. Watson

Of course! It already has. Comprehensive health care has passed the House and it has passed the Senate. But, contingency threw a bone to the Republican Party and a special election was held shortly after the Senate passed a different reform bill than the House, which then requires a conference committee composed of members of both legislative chambers and another round of votes. Absent the filibuster proof majority, the Democrats now need a Republican in the Senate to support reform and congressional Republicans only seem interested in passing expensive and comprehensive healthcare reform when they are the major party (see the Medicare Prescription Drug Act of 2003). Technically, the Democrats have legislative options that would avoid the threat of a filibuster in the Senate but they will need to find the political will to do so and, let's face it, this is not the Democrat's strong point. So, the effect of Scott Brown's victory is truly consequential for healthcare reform, if not, perhaps, its end.

-Prof. Hays

Yes. If the 41 Senate Republicans remain unified in opposition to the bill that passed in the Senate and if the House Democrats refuse to sign on to the Senate bill as is, it will be impossible to pass either the Senate bill or the House bill. Of course, other health care reform bills could be introduced, debated, and perhaps passed, but it is presently difficult to see how that would happen. For one, even members of the

Democratic leadership are publicly admitting that they do not have a strategy. Also, with President Obama shifting his focus to economic matters, the pressure to make progress on health care reform will be removed. For anyone who wants to see a health care reform bill passed this year, the situation looks bleak.

- Prof. Oxley

### **Student Accomplishments**

Student Accomplishments: Sarah Doucett had a paper accepted for publication in the Fall 2009 issue of *The Pi Sigma Alpha Undergraduate Journal of Politics*. Sarah's paper ("Predicting the Legacy of President Barack Obama") was one of six papers selected for publication out of nearly 80 submissions. Congratulations, Sarah!

### **Faculty Accomplishments**

**Prof. Robert Hislope** recently accepted an invitation from President Gjorge Ivanov of Macedonia to serve on that country's Council of Foreign Relations, which has Cabinet status and is the highest advisory body to the president in the field of foreign affairs. The CFR mission is to assess current policies, develop strategic plans, and develop programs and initiatives to improve the international standing of the country. Its membership includes professors, experts, and former politicians. In addition, current and former foreign presidents, prime ministers, ministers of foreign affairs, as well as former and current heads of international organizations, will be invited to speak at sessions of the CFR. Meetings will take place twice a year, at which policy recommendations will be drafted and presented to president Ivanov. The first meeting will be held in Ohrid, Macedonia, February 26-28, 2010.

## Letter from the Department Chair

*Professor Zoe Oxley*

Welcome to the Winter 2010 issue of the PS department newsletter. We have a new look and some new sections, including one announcing student accomplishments. If you have any accomplishments you would like to share with us for future issues of the newsletter, please send them to me ([oxleyz@union.edu](mailto:oxleyz@union.edu)) or our newsletter editor, Nathalie Marte ([marten@union.edu](mailto:marten@union.edu)). Happy Reading!!



## Faculty Updates

*Prof. Phil Nicholas*

In December I performed archival research at National Archives II in College Park, Maryland. I also examined correspondence between officials at the Federal Bureau of Narcotics and state government officials, and found information that suggests the FBN actively lobbied the states to adopt long mandatory minimum drug sentencing in the 1950s. ([nicholap@union.edu](mailto:nicholap@union.edu))

*Prof. Michele Angrist*

I have just finished putting the final touches on a new textbook on Middle East Politics, to be published by Lynne Rienner Publishers this August for Fall 2010 classes nationwide. The book features chapters written by some eighteen plus highly regarded professors around the country, each writing on his/her specialty. The book will be used in upper level undergraduate courses and beginning level graduate courses on Middle East Politics. It begins with thematic chapters that talk generally about what is going on the region with respect to politics, economics, international affairs, civil society, religion, identity, and gender. It then contains case studies on eleven key countries in the region. I look forward to assigning it to Union students when I return from the sabbatical I am taking next year! ([angristm@union.edu](mailto:angristm@union.edu))

*Prof. Zoe Oxley*

Two projects have been occupying much of my research time lately. I recently completed a manuscript for a book that I co-authored with Rosalee Clawson of Purdue University. It is a workbook to accompany our public opinion textbook. In this book, students will learn how to analyze and interpret public opinion data, thus providing a hands-on experience to complement other class materials. The workbook will be published by CQ Press later this year. I have now turned my attention to writing an essay

### MANDATORY MEETING FOR POLITICAL SCIENCE JUNIORS ABOUT SENIOR THESIS!!!!

*The meeting will take place on Feb. 23, from 4-5PM, in SS 104.*

### PSC Major Foreign Experience Requirement

All PSC majors, including ID-PSC majors, need to fulfill a foreign experience requirement. There are two ways to fulfill this requirement:

1. Complete a three course language sequence (only two courses are required if the sequence is begun beyond the first introductory course in the language)
2. Participate on a full-length term abroad (mini terms do not qualify)

Please plan carefully to fulfill this requirement. For many languages, the introductory course is only offered in the Fall Term, so you cannot necessarily begin your language study any time in the year.

for an edited volume on new media and politics. My essay explores whether levels of political knowledge among the public have increased as the number and variety of news media outlets have increased. Have they? No. ([oxleyz@union.edu](mailto:oxleyz@union.edu))

**Prof. Christina Xydias**

I am happy to share several updates. First, I will be defending my dissertation in March. Second, I am looking ahead to two research conferences in the month of April: the Midwest Political Science Association and the Council on European Studies. At these conferences I will be presenting work related to my dissertation as well as a new project that I am co-authoring with a doctoral student at Notre Dame, Shannon Drysdale Walsh. Third, I am looking forward to my new course in the spring term (*Democracy in Theory and Practice*, PSC211). I have not yet determined the exact form of the assignments, and I would like your input. If you think you might wish to enroll in the course, please contact me, and we can talk about what kinds of assignments might be of particular interest to you, e.g., policy-oriented papers, United Nations or Freedom House documents, etc ([xydiasc@union.edu](mailto:xydiasc@union.edu)).

**Pizza & Politics**

Thursday, February 11<sup>th</sup>  
12:50pm-1:55pm RCC 301  
Torrey Shanks –SUNY Albany

Thursday, February 18<sup>th</sup>  
12:50pm-1:55pm SSCI 104  
Dr. Larry Wittner-SUNY/Albany History  
Professor

Monday, February 22<sup>nd</sup>  
7:00pm-9:00pm Nott Auditorium  
Dr. Daniel Levy-Director of Middle East  
Initiative, New American Foundation

**Pizza and Politics (continued)**

Wednesday, February 24<sup>th</sup>  
12:50pm-1:55pm RCC 301  
Rickie Solinger-Independent curator  
and historian  
Show Interrupted Lives (on incarcerated women),  
is up at the Nott currently; her gallery talk is  
Thursday 25 Feb, 4 pm, in the Nott.

Friday, March 5<sup>th</sup>  
12:50pm-1:45pm SSCI 104  
Matthew Southworth-Staff for FCNL

**PSC Major Research Requirement**

All PSC majors are required to take two research-focused courses:

- An R course (the R indicates that the course is research-intensive)
- Either a 2<sup>nd</sup> R course, a seminar or a research methods course (PSC 220, 222 or 223)

PSC Interdepartmental (ID) majors must take one R course to fulfill the research requirement.

Finally, students are strongly recommended to complete this requirement before the end of the junior year, as preparation for the senior thesis.

The courses that satisfy this requirement and will be offered in Spring Term are:

- PSC 223 – Critical Comparisons (Hislope)
- PSC 242R – Challenges to Democratization in Latin America (Seri)
- PSC 288R – Constitutional Theory (Hays)
- PSC 349 – Comparative Pol. Seminar (Angrist)

## **UPPER-LEVEL COURSE DESCRIPTIONS FOR SPRING TERM**

### **211. Democracy in Theory and Practice- Xydias**

This is a course comparing democracy in theory and practice. It begins by addressing democratic theory: principles of democracy, variations of democracy, and arguments about social or institutional prerequisites for democracy. The course then turns to empirical measures of democratic quality, closely examining the methodology and goals of a prominent index of democracy, Freedom House. The final section of the course introduces case studies of tension between democratic principles and other considerations, e.g., tension between democratic principles and public opinion.

### **223. Critical Comparisons in Politics- Hislope**

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the theories and methods of comparative politics. We will examine the “nuts and bolts” of comparative methodology, and explore such issues as concept stretching, constructing good comparative explanations, and assessing progress in political science. In addition, key issues and dilemmas that divide the field will be explored, such as culture vs. institutions as explanatory factors, elites vs. masses in democratic transitions, the role of social movements in political change, whether the USA is best framed as an empire or a hegemon, and whether liberalism promotes inclusion or exclusion.

### **242R. Challenges to Democratization in Latin America-Seri**

Democracies in Latin America confront a number of challenges, obstacles, and dilemmas that frequently put their continuity at risk. With the format of a research seminar, this course will explore five thematic clusters: Social indicators on rights

and inequality, political identities and citizenship, political and legal institutions, life and economic growth after Neoliberalism, and public safety, crime, and state violence. A preoccupation with some of the most urgent challenges faced by democratization in the region will also lead us to assess actual and potential responses.

### **262. Damnation, Revolution and the American Experiment: Politics from Colony to Independence-Scherer**

Examines a series of key issues in American politics from the establishment of the Massachusetts Bay Colony through the Revolutionary War. Topics include: globalization of trade and financial crises. Eruption of radical, fundamentalist evangelical religiosities. Invention and explosion of new means of communication. Social dislocation and the toppling of governments. Working with primary source documents, we will study the Puritan underpinnings of early colonial politics, the emergence of print publics, the influence of market capitalism, and the importance of America’s global context.

### **269. Media and Politics-Oxley**

Major trends in U.S. media, politics, and political communication. The focus is on media treatment of politics, including both the traditional news media, newer media outlets (e.g., the Internet, blogs) and popular culture (movies, television shows, etc.). The larger context is the role of media in a democratic society.

### **277. Local Political Internships-Hislope**

Places students in internships in local political organizations and in offices in local and state government. Students draw on their internship experience and related academic work to reach a better understanding of the complexities and dynamics of politics and the state or local level. Prerequisite: Sophomore standing and permission of the instructor.

### **288R. Constitutional Theory-Hays**

This course is concerned with the theoretical foundations of American constitutionalism. American constitutional theory is a very broad topic, inclusive of the nature of constitutions, interpretive methodologies, and institutional capacity. While this course will touch upon each of these topics, the primary focus will be on the following question: *Who shall interpret the Constitution?* Twenty-first century constitutionalism has been marked by interpretive pluralism and the interpretations offered by different departments of government vary widely. As such, the question of who ought to interpret the Constitution is among the most important political questions of our time.

### **290. Strategy, Diplomacy, and Politics During World War II-Brown**

This course will analyze the Second World War in terms of its causes, its military strategies, and its political configurations. We will examine such geo-political events as the rise of Hitler and his decision for war, the factors that led to his early victories, the decision of the British to continue the fight in the war, Roosevelt's actions to aid the British, Hitler's decision to invade Russia, the Russian resistance, and the various strategic military decisions, including Torch and the Allied operations in Sicily and Italy, and Normandy. We will also examine the major events in the Pacific war. The diplomacy before and during the war will receive special attention.

### **335. Police, Security and Biopower-Seri**

While the development of a political community presupposes a certain level of *security*, the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century shows how unfortunately frequent it has become for people to turn into victims of the devices they set to secure themselves. How can the tensions between the political and security be addressed to enhance, not to destroy, the freedom and creativity that characterize a political community?

Organized as a seminar, and heavy in contemporary political theory, this course will explore both practical and theoretical relations between political communities and the pre-political preconditions for their preservation.

### **349. Comparative Politics Seminar: Islam and Politics-Angrist**

In this seminar, students will consider the wide variety of ways in which Islam and politics have intersected, both historically and in the contemporary era, in the Middle East. After a historical overview, students will examine the degree to which *states* in the Middle East are "Islamic". Then, the seminar turns to an investigation of the Islamist oppositional movements that emerge in a large number of countries beginning in the 1970s. These movements have challenged governments, cared for and mobilized the dispossessed, and, in some cases, committed acts of substantial violence – all in the name of pursuing their vision of the "right" mix of religion and politics. After an in-depth look into al-Qaeda and other forms of *transnational* Islamist activism, the seminar concludes by assessing what many call a "post-Islamist" trend in Middle East politics, one that is de-radicalizing, and potentially even democratic. In addition to typical course requirements and activities, students will produce a substantial independent research paper over the course of term.

### **350. Theories of International Politics-Watson**

The course will examine theories of international politics from a broad and inclusive perspective. The first section of the course will focus on the cognitive foundations of theory development and appreciation with the central theme of understanding how individual perception informs theory development and application. The second component of the course will critically compare both mainstream (e.g. realism, liberalism, globalism) theories with

alternative and critical (e.g. constructivism, dependency theory, feminism) theories of international politics. The course will rely heavily on structured debate and seminar methods in order to incorporate student perspectives into the class structure. Course work will include written work, reading quizzes, and standard exams.

#### **434. Feminist Film-Marso**

Using 10 films as our “texts” we will examine the role of women in society, the diversity of women’s lives, the impact of gender roles in various cultural contexts, the possibility of alternative sexualities and ways of living, and whether we can say what constitutes a “feminist film.” The course is focused on discussion of, and writing about, the films but includes analysis of feminist political theory and feminist film theory to provide tools for better interpretation.

### **POLITICAL SCIENCE COURSES: SPRING 2010**

PSC 050- PSA Journal Practicum (Oxley)  
TBA

PSC 111- Introduction to US Politics  
(Nicholas) MWF 01:50-02:55

PSC 112 – Introduction Global Politics  
(Brown) MW 03:05-4:45

PSC 113 – Introduction to Political Thought  
(Scherer) MWF 08:00-09:05

#### Research Methods Course

PSC 223- Critical Comparisons (Hislope)  
TTH 10:55-12:40

#### Political Theory

PSC 335- Police, Security & Biopower  
(Seri) MWF 01:50-02:55

PSC 434- Feminist Film (Marso) MWF  
11:45-12:50

#### Comparative Politics

PSC 211- Democracy in Theory and  
Practice (Xydias) TTH 09:00-10:45

PSC 242R– Challenges to Democratization  
in Latin America (Seri) TTH 10:55-12:40

PSC 349- Comparative Politics Seminar:  
Islam and Politics (Angrist) TTH 01:55-  
03:40

#### International Relations

PSC 290- Strategy, Diplomacy, and Politics  
During WWII (Brown) MW 07:00-08:45

PSC 350- Theories of International Politics  
(Watson) MWF 09:15-10:20

#### US Politics

PSC 262– Damnation, Revolution and the  
American Experiment (Scherer) MWF  
10:30-11:35

PSC 269– Media and Politics (Oxley) MW  
03:05-4:45

PSC 277- Internship (Hislope) TBA

PSC 288R- Constitutional Theory (Hays)  
TTH 1:55-3:40