

FROM DEPARTMENT CHAIR ZOE OXLEY

Dear PSC Students,

Warm greetings during this cold winter week. Perhaps by the time you read this newsletter some warmer weather will have arrived in Schenectady.

This is the first of only two department chair newsletter messages you will receive from me. With Professor Michele Angrist's departure to the Dean of Studies office, I have stepped in to serve as chair for the rest of this academic year. Starting in the fall, Professor Brad Hays will begin a three-year term as chair. So, yes, the department is transitioning a bit. Fortunately, Professor Angrist left the department in very good shape and I hope to do the same for Professor Hays!

I have always thought of Winter Term as Thesis Term. Most political science seniors are finishing their theses, working diligently on their research while the faculty are looking forward to reading their completed projects. It is also the term that juniors begin the thesis process, by starting to think about possible topics and identifying which faculty they might want as their advisors. Toward that end, I will be holding a meeting for PSC juniors later this term; look for the relevant announcement in this newsletter.

Finally, I want to draw your attention to a new course that we will offer in the spring term, PSC 214: Democratization and De-democratization in Eastern Europe. Please see the course description near the end of the newsletter for more details. It will be taught by Prof. Erzsebet Fazekas from the University at Albany, perhaps only this one time. So, if the topic interests you, consider enrolling in the course for the spring.

ATTENTION JUNIOR PSC MAJORS

There will be a **must-attend meeting on Friday, February 22, at common lunch, in Lippman 017, regarding the senior thesis.** Professor Oxley will explain the requirements of the thesis and the process by which you will be matched with an advisor. In addition, several current seniors will be in attendance to share their projects with you to give you a sense of the range of types of theses that are possible. Pizza and cookies will be served. Mark your calendars and spread the word!

Senior Thesis Submission Information

Seniors: If you are working on a Fall-Winter thesis, your finished work is due near the end of the term, on Thursday March 14, in the Political Science office (Lippman 117) by 12:00 pm noon. Do not submit your thesis directly to your advisor – it must be submitted to the departmental office. You need to submit one hard copy, and it must be bound in some secure way (any type of binding is fine other than a staple or paper clip). If you are working on an ID thesis and have two advisors, you should submit one copy to each department. No special cover page is necessary, including if you hope to be a candidate for departmental honors. If you are on track for honors, you will be contacted in the spring and given thesis-related instructions at that time. When you turn in your thesis, Ms. Fortsch will ask you to fill out an evaluation of the senior thesis experience as a condition of your submission, so be sure to allow 10-15 minutes to complete this in the PSC office. The college administration requires that we collect these evaluations. **Have a workable printing plan (taking into account that many, many seniors will be submitting that week) and do not be late:** if your thesis comes in after 12:00 pm, the time will be noted and communicated to your adviser. More details regarding thesis submission can be found on the PSC department website's FAQ section.

PROFESSOR SOUND OFF

It's the End of the World as We Know It. Do You Feel Fine?

By Professor Robert Hislope

My wife and I got married at a small ceremony on the Ohio State campus in the summer of 1989. In preparation for the event, I wrote out the wedding invitations invoking the REM song "It's the End of the World as We Know It, and I Feel Fine," which was a radio hit at the time. In addition to my upcoming blissful nuptials, there was much to feel fine about at this time in the western world. Repressive communist regimes in eastern Europe were falling like dominoes, student demonstrators in Tiananmen Square were challenging communist party rule in China, and international pressure was forcing the apartheid regime in South Africa to prepare the release of Nelson Mandela from his long-term imprisonment. In general, liberal-democracy and capitalism appeared to be on a forward march around the globe, and Francis Fukuyama was there to assure us that this would all turn out so well history would actually come to an end.

What a difference 30 years makes! Now the world appears on the cusp of another profound transformation. Everything celebrated in 1989 – democracy, market economies, civil society, the rule of law, multiculturalism, globalization, and international multilateralism is now being severely challenged. The world of 2019 is in tumult as the forces of the radical right are attempting, with considerable success so far, to tear down the ramparts of the liberal world order. We see this clearly throughout Europe, in ruling regimes in Hungary and Poland and Italy and Russia, in the Brexit catastrophe that is overwhelming Britain, and in the pronounced upsurge of radical right parties virtually everywhere. The values dear to this movement – authoritarianism, racism, nationalism, xenophobia, patriarchy, strong man rule, economic protectionism, international isolationism – appear eerily similar to the adversaries of liberalism in the 1920s & 1930s. If the chimes of freedom in 1989 rang with the

ATTENTION SENIORS

Requirements for Graduating with Honors in Political Science

--GPA of 3.50 or better in PSC, and 3.3 cumulatively.

--Completion of a PSC seminar with an A- or better [if you do not attain an A- in the seminar, you may still be eligible for honors if your PSC GPA is 3.70 or higher. Either way, you must complete a seminar.]

--At least three PSC course grades of A- or better [not including thesis courses].

--A grade of A- or higher on the senior project.

--Delivery of an oral (not poster) presentation on your senior project at the Steinmetz symposium.

****ID majors must meet the requirements for honors in both departments****



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names of the great liberal philosophers, like Hegel, Kant, Locke, Smith, and Madison and Jefferson, then the sirens of our time seduce us with darker melodies traceable to the likes of Carl Schmitt, Giovanni Gentile, Father Coughlin, Charles Maurras and Friedrich Nietzsche.

Attempting to make sense of how the planet moved from the light of 1989 to the darkness of

2019 is a demanding but indispensable intellectual chore. Facing the fascists of his time, the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci wrote, “educate yourselves because we’ll need our all intelligence.” Indeed, when intellectual questions become questions of life and death, as they did for Gramsci in the 1920s, then the personal struggle to learn is joined to a larger political struggle and progressive historical change becomes possible. The intellectual task to understand these past 30 years is what drove me to organize the seminar I’m teaching this winter term, which is built around the question what has become of the Left at this turbulent moment in history. At a time of rampant inequality, diminished economic opportunities, inadequate health care systems, failing public services, the opioid crisis, continued institutional racism, and mounting environmental and ecological problems, it is reasonable to frame this moment in history as offering perfect conditions for the political advancement of Left-wing parties, movements, and ideas. The seminar I’m teaching asks why this has not happened and what accounts for the Left’s dire straits.

While it is too early in the term to declare any definitive conclusions, I am encouraged by the strong and dedicated students I have in my seminar, who have already impressed me by their classroom contributions. Thus far we have documented the woeful electoral fortunes of Social Democratic, Socialist, Labour, and Radical Left parties in western Europe, and surveyed the communist experience in eastern Europe. We soon turn to topics like the consequences of the Social Democratic decision to seek the electoral road to power, the ideological struggles among the Bolsheviks on how to implement communism in the early years of the revolution, interpretations of fascism courtesy of Gramsci and Trotsky, both of whom saw it close up, the stories of radical women, like the Russian populist Vera Zasulich, who fought czars and fascists, the violent self-destruction of the New Left in America in the 1970s, and the continued relevance and significance of Marx’s economic critique of capitalism. Through it all, I hope that we develop a keen understanding of the politics of our age, that we learn the lessons that history reveals to us,

and that we assess accurately the constraints and opportunities, the problems and prospects, and the contributions and shortcomings of Left-oriented politics and thought.

Thirty years ago, I was ecstatic about my marriage and optimistic about the state of politics. The world was changing for the better, and as a graduate student in political science I felt like a surfer riding the wave of history. Today my partner and I remain united in love but the dark clouds on the political horizon are disconcerting. Large-scale political transformation always brings about uncertainties and dangers. As Gramsci observed: “the crisis consists in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born.” To paraphrase REM, we could be witnessing the end of the political world as we know it. Do you feel fine?

ALUMNI INTERVIEW

Alexander Brockwehl ‘11

What is your current professional title?

Professional Staff
Member, House Foreign
Affairs Subcommittee
on the Western Hemisphere



What does the work involve?

In this role I advise Democratic members of the House of Representatives on U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America. I work closely with the chairman of the House Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Congressman Albio Sires of New Jersey, to determine what issues the Subcommittee's hearings will focus on, identify priority countries for Congressional trips, and draft legislation for Congressman Sires to introduce. I also research U.S. foreign policy issues and write reports and guidance documents for Democratic members of Congress and their staff.

How did your time at Union prepare you for your current position?

At Union I developed a passion for foreign policy and U.S. politics, which have converged in my current role. I think the mix of Political Science courses I took—some of which were practical while others were more theoretical—led me to recognize the important link between policy and politics. I learned that developing good ideas and making persuasive arguments for putting those ideas into practice are both important if you want to effect change. In political theory courses I learned how to think creatively about what a democratic system of government should look like and practiced honing ethical arguments. In courses focused on specific policy issues, like democratization during the Arab Spring, I grappled with what role the U.S. can or should play in promoting democratic development abroad. Spending a term abroad in Mexico helped me further improve my Spanish, a skill which has enriched my life and opened many doors professionally.

What is your fondest recollection of majoring in Political Science?

PSC Major Foreign Experience Requirement

All PSC majors, including ID-PSC majors, need to fulfill the foreign experience requirement. There are two primary 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. Complete a full-length term abroad (miniterms 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. In addition, there is now a third, student-proposed option for fulfilling this requirement. See the PSC website for details.

I have two. The first was Professor Oxley's presidential simulation class. I was the independent candidate and really enjoyed working with my classmates to develop policy platforms, prepare for simulated presidential debates, and think through difficult issues like how to address climate change or make health care more affordable. The second was working on my thesis with Professor Marso, who really pushed me and challenged my thinking in ways that I still benefit from today.

What advice would you have for current majors for life after Union?

Pursue your passion, wherever it leads. It sounds cliché, but you will feel all kinds of pressure during your senior year to take the first job that comes along or to pursue a path that leads to a specific career outcome that seems tangible and clear. For some of you, that well-trodden path or that first opportunity may be exactly what you hope for in a career. But for others it won't be. For the latter group, my advice would be to accept some short-term sacrifices like low pay and tough working hours if it means doing something you care about. This approach may also require accepting some degree of ambiguity about where your career is headed longer-term. But those relative sacrifices will be worth it. I've found from my experience and that of former classmates that it's fairly easy to make many minor career shifts, but much harder to make one big career transition. In other words, that first step does start you on a career trajectory and you want to think seriously about whether that's the general direction you want to be heading in. I graduated over seven years ago and my friends who are the happiest are doing the things they love.

SPRING 2019 POLITICAL SCIENCE COURSES

Introductory

PSC 111: Introduction to American Politics
(Plencner) MWF 8:00-9:05AM

PSC 112: Introduction to Global Politics (Siegel)
MWF 11:45AM-12:50PM

PSC 113: Introduction to Political Theory
(Marso) TTh 9:00-10:45AM

Political Theory

PSC 230R: Ancient Political Thought
(Cidam) MWF 10:30-11:35AM

PSC 236: Police Security BioPower
(Seri) TTh 10:55AM-12:40PM

PSC 339: Seminar in Political Theory
(Seri) TTh 1:55-3:40PM

Comparative Politics

PSC 214: Democratization and De-
Democratization in Eastern Europe
(Fazekas) TTh 7:00-8:45PM

PSC 240R: Comparative Ethnic and Racial
Politics (Hislope) TTh 10:55AM-
12:40PM

International Politics

PSC 254: Politics of the Arab-Israeli
Conflict (Lobe) TTh 9:00-10:45AM

PSC 356: International Law
(Siegel) MW 3:05-4:45

U.S. Politics

PSC 262: Race and U.S. Politics
(Plencner) MW 3:05-4:45PM

PSC 281: Issues in American Education
(Weiner) MWF 9:15-10:20AM

PSC 282: Health Politics and Policy
(Weiner) TTh 1:55-3:40PM

Internships

PSC 277: Capital Region Political Internships
(Oxley)

UPPER-LEVEL COURSE DESCRIPTIONS FOR SPRING TERM 2019

PSC 214: Democratization and De- Democratization in Eastern Europe

The course tracks the contemporary political history of Eastern Europe from state socialism and the democratic revolutions of 1989 to the current rise of illiberal democracy and right-wing populism. After an introduction into regime types and definitions of democracy, in the second section, we will explore the challenges unique to post-communist transitions, the trajectories from seemingly similar points of departure in state socialism to early success stories of consolidated

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 2nd R course, a seminar, or a research methods course (PSC 220 or 223)

[Note: Normally, students must have a GPA of at least 3.0 to gain entrance into a seminar.]

PSC Interdepartmental (ID) majors must take one R course to fulfill the research requirement. Students are strongly recommended to complete this requirement before the end of their junior year, as preparation for their senior thesis.

successful democratization. The last section of the course will explore the possibilities of backsliding into authoritarian rule in Eastern Europe and the rise of illiberal democracy (Hungary).

PSC 230R: Ancient Political Thought

Examines the ideas of major political thinkers in ancient philosophy. Potential themes include the tension between philosophy and politics, the nature of democracy, the relationship between war and political life, debates concerning how to live a “good life,” the political significance of poetry and art, and the body/mind duality. Thinkers and texts that may be covered include Homer, Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, the Greek poets, Saint Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and the Bible.

PSC 236: Police Security BioPower

While the development of a political community presupposes a certain level of security, the second half of the 20th 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.

PSC 240R: Comparative Ethnic and Racial Politics

An introduction to the trends and patterns of ethnic conflicts in the contemporary world. Issues pertaining to the rise of nations; theories of ethnic mobilization; the attempt to build general, cross-national explanations; and current efforts to solve ethnic conflict.

PSC 254: Politics of the Arab-Israeli Conflict

In this class students will develop an understanding of the origins, development, and essence of the Arab-Israeli conflict as well as the challenges involved in resolving the conflict. The conflict will be examined in its historical, political, and human dimensions.

PSC 262: Race and U. S. Politics

This course is designed as a broad introduction to the role of race in US politics, from the founding of the American republic through the present day. Though fundamentally concerned with political ideas, processes, and governing institutions, the course examines questions regarding race, ethnicity, and power that routinely cross disciplinary boundaries. By drawing on readings from political science, history, policy and legal studies, as well as popular culture, mainstream media, and documentary films, students will situate and account for race within what mid-20th century American writer James Baldwin once described as "the story of America"-which he cautioned "is not a very pretty story." By engaging with the politics of race expansively, and wrestling with ideas that represent a variety of political commitments and perspectives, the goal of the course is for students to develop a nuanced picture of how Americans have understood race in the past, how racial meaning has shifted through law and policy discourses over time, and how the defense of, accommodation for, and struggle against racial and ethnic oppression is fundamentally constitutive of the American political experience.

PSC 277: Capital Region Political Internships

This class enables students to become politically active and/or gain political experience by working for elected officials, government agencies, election campaigns, interest groups, non-profit organizations, lobby firms, etc. Students draw on their internship experience and related academic work to reach a better understanding of the complexities and dynamics of politics at the state or local level. Students are permitted to enroll in this course twice, although the course will count toward the Political Science major only once. Prerequisite(s): Sophomore standing and permission of the instructor. Note: This course does not count towards the PSC portion of an ID major.

PSC 281: Issues in American Education

The analysis of current conflicts over education policy at all levels of government including the funding of education, increased testing for accountability, the impact of charter schools and choice, bilingual education, religion and prayer, tenure laws and the role of teacher unions. Most of the focus will be on K-12 education but we will also address higher education and the recent concerns about tuition costs, financial aid, and the mission of colleges and universities.

PSC 282: Health Politics and Policy

This course will examine the subject of health care policy in the American political system. Students will learn about the roles and functions of key actors, institutions, concepts, and principles as part of a broad overview of American health politics. From this foundation, we will develop a theoretical and practical framework to ground our analysis of current health policy issues and debates. Topics will include finance, insurance, Medicare/Medicaid, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (aka "Obamacare"), prescription drug regulation, private markets, the public interest, ethics, and the role of government.

PSC 339: Seminar in Political Theory

Between 1978 and 1979, Michel Foucault devoted his lectures at the Collège de France to the neoliberal art of government. Neoliberal ideas and policies, drawing on the belief that markets are best to generate and distribute wealth as to promote freedom, including political freedom, gained ground around the world since the 1970s. Leaders such as

Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, and international financial organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank helped diffuse support for massive deregulation and privatizations to free market forces that, it was argued, would eventually benefit everyone.

Four decades later, still dominant, neoliberalism has been blamed for unprecedented levels of income inequality, social exclusion, and violence, as for catastrophic environmental crises that put at risk life on Earth. Set to explore the ways in which Neoliberalism has transformed lives and shaped views and the experience of politics, in this seminar we will revisit the work of pioneer thinkers such as Friedrich Von Hayek and Milton Friedman, as well as philosophical and fictional pieces that nurtured the neoliberal political imagination. As we embark in this exploration, the work of Foucault, Wendy Brown, and other contemporary political theorists will challenge us to think of neoliberalism in political terms.

PSC 356: International Law

If murder is illegal, how is it possible that the leaders of states can kill thousands of innocent people with impunity? Can and should torture and war be legally banned? If so, how? What happens to those who violate the rules? Can states cooperate through institutions like the UN to address climate change, prevent genocide, and promote peace? These are just some of the questions that international law grapples with and that we will address in this class. At the most general level, international law is a collection of binding rules that are designed to regulate and govern the behavior of states. Although the “law of nations” has existed for centuries, most international law has been created during the past 70 years. Indeed, since the end of World War II, the breadth and depth of international law has expanded rapidly, extending into nearly every issue area of international politics. Still, the international arena remains fundamentally different from national politics because there is no world government to make or enforce rules. As a result, power and politics remain central. While many argue that the development of international law has shaped world politics, few would

suggest that it has transformed it completely. The governance of states, for all of its development, remains partial and incomplete. In this course we focus on the role of power and politics in international law, the basic mechanics of how international law is made and enforced, and, finally, the rules of international law in specific issue areas, including the laws governing the use of force, international humanitarian law, international criminal law, international environmental law, and human rights law.