

# News and Views from the Political Science Department

Volume XII, Issue II

Winter 2015

## FROM DEPARTMENT CHAIR MICHELE ANGRIST

### From the Chair – “Thoughts on Theses”

Greetings from the Chair’s office! I hope this newsletter finds you enjoying your winter trimester courses while staying warm and keeping healthy. Students often tell me they work hardest during the winter months, as the dark and cold mean that outdoor pursuits are less numerous and less tempting.

For most seniors, winter term means *thesis term*, and not always with a positive connotation. The first term of the thesis brings its own challenges, as you work with your advisor to refine your topic, review the work of those who came before you, and create a shape for the overarching project. But the second term of the thesis project is crunch time, where the rubber hits the road. All of those chapters (or other components) actually have to be researched, written or produced, evaluated, and polished. So it is a lot of intense work, and yes, it is stressful.

I would like to offer a different perspective on the thesis, however. Think about, for example, how fortunate you are to be at a school where you get to dive into a topic of interest, in-depth, and develop your own ideas and arguments on the topic step-by-step with the one-on-one guidance of a professor over two terms. Use this as an opportunity to take an inventory of some key work and life skills that the thesis process can help you refine this year: for example -- time management skills, writing skills, perseverance and resilience of character, and the ability to receive and respond to constructive criticism with grace. Figure out which of these you struggle with, and try to improve. In this last year before you head out into the “real world,” use the comparative bubble that is your Union experience to work out the kinks – buy a planner, perfect your apostrophe use, and/or embrace the challenge of revising a chapter after getting feedback from your advisor (understanding that it is meant to hone your thinking and writing, taking the thesis – and hence your own abilities –

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to the next level).

All of us hope that your theses or projects, when complete, are capstone products that you will be enduringly proud of, and that you can feature on your resume and discuss in prospective employer interviews.

In the meantime, the time for thinking about spring trimester courses is fast approaching. Take a look at the set of interesting courses we are offering. Don’t see anything that catches your eye? You can also consider enrolling in PSC 277, our local internships course – see Professor Hislope about that.

## ATTENTION SENIORS

### Requirements for Graduating with Honors in Political Science

- GPA of 3.30 or better in PS as well as cumulatively
- Completion of a PS 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 PS GPA is 3.50 or higher]
- At least three PS 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\*\***

**SPRING POLITICAL SCIENCE  
COURSES**

**Report on Fall 2014  
West Point Conference  
By Karl Hetzke**

**Introductory**

- PSC111: Introduction to US Politics  
(Dell'Aera) MWF 3:05PM-4:10PM
- PSC 112: Introduction to Global Politics  
(Dallas) MWF 11:45AM-12:50PM
- PSC 113: Introduction to Political Thought  
(Cidam) TTH 10:55AM-12:40PM

**Political Theory**

- PSC 238: American Exceptionalism  
(Dell'Aera) MW 7:00PM-8:45PM

**Comparative Politics**

- PSC 249: Middle East Politics  
(Angrist) MWF 8:00AM-9:05AM
- PSC 342R: Challenges to Democratization in Latin America  
(Seri) TTH 10:55AM-12:40PM

**International Politics**

- PSC 252R: Global Value Chains  
(Dallas) MWF 1:50PM-2:55PM
- PSC 354: Human Rights and Immigration  
(Cidam) TTh7:00PM-8:45PM

**U.S. Politics**

- PSC 269: Media and Politics  
(Oxley) TTh 9:00AM-10:45AM
- PSC 285: Law, Society, and the Wire  
(Hays) MWF 9:15AM-10:20AM
- PSC 369: Seminar in US Politics: Gender, Sexual Orientation and Politics  
(Oxley) TTh 1:55PM-3:40PM

**Internships**

- PSC 277: Local Political Internships  
(Hislope) N/A

**Methods**

- PSC 223: Critical Comparisons  
(Hislope) MW 3:05PM-4:45PM

Last November I had the opportunity to serve as one of Union's student delegates at the Student Conference on US Affairs at the US Military Academy at West Point. The conference is the largest academic conference its kind, focusing mostly on the role of the US in foreign policy issues ranging from fears of nuclear proliferation, international business and finance, and global health policy.

The theme of the conference, SCUSA '66, was "worst-case scenario" response. Each student delegate participated in a round table discussion proposing policy initiatives for hypothetical worst-case scenarios. My roundtable was called "The Persian Bomb," and dealt with the possibility of a nuclear Iran. In our scenario (worst-case) US intelligence receives reports that Iran's nuclear capabilities are far beyond our previous understanding, and that the Iranians have successfully completed an underground test. Other groups dealt with disease outbreak, global financial crises, some even going so far as covering alien invasions or the zombie apocalypse (really).

Personally, I was somewhat bored by the "worst-case" theme. We spent a lot of time dancing around hypotheticals, which, though intellectually interesting, did not provide any room realistic policy initiatives to be discussed. The conference was full of big-wig guest speakers, like Retired Ambassador Thomas Pickering, and was a very cool experience in that regard. Despite the shortcomings I experienced, I would definitely recommend the conference to any student interested in pursuing a career in international relations. Almost every student I met was an exceptionally bright, driven, poli sci or IR major (mostly seniors about to graduate) and almost all of them aspire to work on big policy issues. There was a very strong vibe that you, as a participant, were becoming a member of the next generation of policy makers, which at the very least is an encouraging experience.

## UPPER-LEVEL COURSE DESCRIPTIONS FOR SPRING TERM

### **PSC-223. Critical Comparisons** - Hislope

What does a convincing political science explanation look like? This course will focus on how to make good comparative explanations in political science. We will explore how to do this by studying and applying key concepts, such as culture, social movements, elites, institutions, hegemony, and the state. This course will help prepare students for writing the senior thesis.

### **PSC-238. American Exceptionalism** - Dell'Aera

One of the earliest iterations of American political thought was articulated by the Puritans on the cusp of their arrival in the New World. This idea, which would come to be known as American Exceptionalism, has been central to the development of the American identity--politically, philosophically, economically, and culturally. However, there have been competing visions about what is entailed by American Exceptionalism. These clashes over the meaning of American Exceptionalism have pervaded America's political history and continue to affect competing political ideologies and group struggles through the present day. This course investigates the roots of this conflict, helping both to explain the history of American political thought and to better understand the role of political ideology in contemporary politics. We will examine a broad range of sources which will speak to us from their own time, and in doing so will help inform us about the politics of our own time. We will also take an explicit look at applied political theory by studying the origins and meanings of the "liberal" and "conservative" labels in American politics.

### **PSC-249. Middle East Politics** - Angrist

This course is designed to introduce students to the essential political history and dynamics of the contemporary Middle East. Students will study the processes through which the states of the Middle East emerged, the types of political

regimes that have evolved in these states, the relationships between Islam and politics in the region, the Arab Spring and its aftermath, and, debates regarding U.S. foreign policy toward the region.

### **PSC-252R. Global Value Chains**

- Dallas

A cup of coffee or tea, your laptop computer or mobile phone, the clothes you are wearing today. In a globalizing world, we all vaguely know that these are often produced elsewhere. But exactly how and where are everyday products produced? What are the effects on the producing and consuming countries? How exactly is everything coordinated from there to here? Do the differences between products really matter, or is it just all undifferentiated 'trade'? This course considers a handful of everyday products like these (and some illicit ones) and examines the primary countries where they are produced and consumed, including the politics of their production, the labor regimes used in ensuring

### **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)

[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.

their production, the transnational corporations which coordinate the chain of production and consumption, international regimes and rules that govern how they are globally produced and trade, and the linkages this creates between developing and developed countries. The course will first introduce some basic conceptual building blocks which will help us organize the extraordinary variety of places, production processes, policies and populations engaged in global value chains. We will spend the remainder of the course examining one commodity or product at a time, using what we learned along the way to build an increasingly sophisticated understanding of global production and exchange. Finally, students will conduct research on their own product of choice for a final project.

#### **PSC-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 (such as internet blogs and news-only cable stations), and social media. The larger context is

#### **PSC Major Foreign Experience Requirement**

All PSC majors, including ID-PSC majors, need to fulfill the 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. 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.

the role of media in a democratic society.

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

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: Sophomore standing and permission of the instructor.

#### **PSC-285. Law, Society, and the Wire - Hays**

HBO's *The Wire* is often hailed as one of the greatest television series. During its run, critics compared it to a novel or epic poem. Along with its gritty portrayal of inner city decay and the lives lived in this environment, the crime drama convincingly portrays communities and their institutions. *The Wire's* depiction of law is among its most nuanced and provocative features. The show easily slips among the black letter law, the law on the street, and informal law-like systems that exist among communities that do not fully subscribe to the norms of the state. This course will use the portrayal of law in *The Wire* to address some of the following questions: What is law? Is law only the domain of the state? What is the relationship between law and power? Is violence inherent in law? Is law inherently oppressive? If so, how do we reconcile oppression with democratic practice and human rights?

#### **PSC-342R. 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. 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 and political alternatives.

**PSC-354. Human Rights and Immigration - Cidam**

We are living in an age of human rights: There are innumerable international treaties, covenants, and nongovernmental organizations specifically devoted to the protection of human rights. Yet, human rights abuses rage on all over the world, especially when it comes to migrants who are particularly vulnerable to human rights abuses. As of today, 200 million people are estimated to be living outside their country of birth. What renders non-citizens so vulnerable to various forms of violence, discrimination, and abuse? To what extent can these problems be addressed and remedied by an appeal to human rights? In what ways does the contemporary condition of non-citizens reveal the limits, paradoxes, and promises of human rights? We will explore the historical and philosophical origins of human rights, examine the tense relationship between the two most significant international norms, namely sovereignty and human rights, and analyze contemporary criticisms of the human rights discourse by focusing on issues such as the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, humanitarianism, and the problems associated with them.

**PSC 369 Seminar in American Politics – Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Politics - Oxley**

In this writing- and discussion-intensive seminar, we will examine gender, sexual orientation, power, and politics. Specific course topics will include masculinity and the U.S. political system; gender, political deliberation, and power; gender stereotyping and heteronormativity on the campaign trail; transgender politics; LGBT rights, activism, and

politics; and the intersections of gender and sexual orientation with categories such as race, ethnicity, and class. Much of the course will be organized around recently published books in the field. Writing will consist of a daily intellectual journal and essays tied to the course readings.

**Attention Junior PS Majors**

There will be a mandatory meeting on Tuesday, February 17, at 5 pm in Lippman 016 regarding the senior thesis. Professor Angrist 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. 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 on the last day of classes, **Friday March 13**, in the Political Science office (Lippman 117) by 4:00 pm. 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. When you turn in your thesis, Ms. Fortsch will require 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 PS office. The college administration requires that we collect these evaluations. There will be some yummy treats in the office that day to celebrate your achievements! Finally, check with your advisor as to whether or not you will be able to have the copy you submit returned to you in the spring.