

News and Views from the Political Science Department

FROM DEPARTMENT CHAIR

Bradley Hays

I want to start by expressing my appreciation to students, faculty, and staff for navigating the Zoom to in-person experience (and, sometimes, back and forth multiple times) with fortitude and grace. I know that this experience has made me feel like we are one week behind where we actually are in the winter term. Some students have expressed to me a similar feeling so, with that in mind, you will find some thesis-related scheduling information herein. For seniors in their second term of the thesis, deadline and submission information can be found on page 6. Junior political science majors (including ID majors) will find an announcement on a mandatory thesis planning meeting on page 6. After reviewing this information, if you have questions, please reach out to either your thesis advisor (seniors) or to the department chair (juniors).

In the past several months, the department has received the exciting news that two political science alumni have received prestigious fellowships. Ty Gamble-Eddington ('21) received a Rhodes Scholarship for graduate study at

Oxford University. This is only the second Rhodes Scholarship received by a Union alumnus. Irving Cortes-Martinez ('19) was recently announced as a Charles B. Rangel Fellow, which will lead to a career in the US Foreign Service. Irving is the first Union alumnus to receive a Rangel Fellowship. I highlight these accomplishments because, first, they are a source of pride for the department and (2) to encourage you to pursue similar opportunities. Many different fellowships are available and they can open doors to experiences that would not otherwise be possible. I encourage you to visit the [National Fellowships and Scholarships](#) website and make an appointment to learn more about the many options. Last, as we move toward the pre-registration and advising period, you'll find the list and description of political science spring course offerings. I want to spotlight a new comparative politics class, PSC 344 *Exiles*, being offered by Prof. Ahmed. You'll find the course description toward the end of the newsletter.

I hope your winter term is safe, productive, and enriching.

PROFESSORS SOUND OFF

Tasks Ahead

Professor Guillermina Seri

"What do these trillions of dollars even matter if we're all gonna die from the impact of this comet?"—in the film *Don't Look Up!* Dr. Mindy interrupts the arch-corporate Peter Isherwell. Standing next to the President of the United States, Isherwell has just announced a change in plans, from destroying the comet directed to Earth into mining its riches. It sounds not that far from the Russian government welcoming the

melting of the Arctic for purposes of navigation and oil extraction. Nor from our own experts and politicians praising the

multi-trillion-dollar business opportunities that rising sea levels offer to rebuild coastal cities. As in the film, demands to focus on the bright side of the climate crisis may sound sensible. Crises create opportunities that create jobs that generate growth and prosperity, don't they?

What these voices portray as opportunities is more than the botched response to the crises of our times. "For the first time in human history, we face a planetary emergency," scientists tell us. Climate change defines the "gravest threat" to our survival.[i] It did not have to be this way. But after hiding reports alerting that fossil fuels would bring "dramatic environmental effects," US oil corporations are now embarked in

greenwashing disinformation campaigns and crushing criticism.[ii] Whether attacking activists in the Dakota pipeline or retaliating against Steven Donziger, the lawyer under house arrest after winning a historic lawsuit against Chevron, companies act with state support. And as the US oil industry is set to surpass production records in 2023,[iii] what has come to pass for normal politics exudes dysfunction and nihilism.

"Climate action failure," in the meantime, stands as the highest immediate world threat.[iv] Extreme weather, mounting natural disasters, species extinction, waning trust and social cohesion, crises of livelihood, new infectious diseases, shrinking natural resources, rising debt and mental health crises, youths' hopelessness, forced climate migration, conflicts between blocs and states, state collapse, mass rejection of science come next. With appropriate responses complicated by the urgencies of the pandemic and the crisis of democracy, as the world moves toward "autocratization,"[v] and with states like ours, prone to militarize their responses, the transition to the new conditions will likely not be smooth.

It would be tempting to accuse these reports of exaggerating, were it not for the thousands of global experts behind them. "Avoiding a climate catastrophe," they tell us, requires three "unprecedented" changes. In less than three decades, we must have transitioned into a net-zero emissions energy system, developed a sustainable relationship

with the biosphere and the planet, and made agriculture absorb greenhouse emissions again. These measures demand restoring trust and hope as the basis of "a coordinated global response."

We political scientists have much to offer in devising, designing, and implementing the needed new norms and institutions. But to do that, our discipline must first acknowledge the extent to which it has been part of the problem. As scholars and advisors, we have helped normalize narratives of people's "innate wickedness" and beliefs on "an innate disposition of competitive self-interest" dominant. The latter, a distortion of the Western tradition, the late Chicago Anthropology professor Marshall Sahlins observed, stands as a "perverse and mistaken" view of the human condition unique to our culture.

Undermining trust and cooperation, pivotal of the system that now threatens life on Earth, these narratives enjoy scholarly legitimacy within our discipline. We embraced them in the name of "realism," as we advised states how to fight even imaginary enemies while remaining blind to their own evils. We created lofty theories of emergency politics to support bypassing laws and constitutions. And we made it seem reasonable to dismiss people's life-and-death needs (ex. healthcare, housing, food) or preserving forests as items that "would be nice" but is not "realistic" to address "right now." Inspired by these ideas, as "the leading nations adopt an attitude that

assumes all other nations are enemies," this imagination materialized "a self-fulfilling prophecy," Jun Akuyawa explains.[vi]

In Plato's *Republic*, Thrasymachus strikes a chord when he contends that "the laws are made by the ruling party in its own interest." But so does Socrates' response that governing must address the needs of the governed. Manipulative, predatory uses of power can only go so far. If often succeeding in the short term, they ultimately lead to everybody's doom. Considering the speed and scope of the destruction of life on this planet, we're getting there, and fast.

Under conditions where survival requires genuine cooperation, politics calls for a creative, participatory, and ethical overhaul that prioritizes the organic timing and rights of actual living beings and the planet. We can do this. We humans "evolved biologically under cultural selection," Sahlins notes, in ways shaping the "thousand different lives" that we are equipped to live. But the self-referential reason of state and its dark fairytales, no less than those Isherwell-types, have to go. Treating each other as enemies will only accelerate a race to the bottom and our collective demise.

COVID-19 did not have to become a pandemic. We still have a little time left to avoid climate catastrophe. And we political scientists have a lot to do.

[i] World Economic Forum. *Global Risks Report 2022* (https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_The_Global_Risks_Report_2022.pdf)

[ii] McGreal, Chris, “Big oil and gas kept a dirty secret for decades. Now they may pay

the price,” *The Guardian*, June 30, 2021.

[iii] Bacher, Dan, “Forecasts indicate U.S. Oil Production will Surpass Records in 2023,” *Counterpunch*, January 14, 2022.

[iv] World Economic Forum. *Global Risks Report 2022* (https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_The_Global_Risks_Report_2022.pdf)

[v] “Autocratization Turns Viral. Democracy Report 2021,” *Varieties of Democracy* (https://www.v-dem.net/static/website/files/dr/dr_2021.pdf)

[vi] Akuyaw, Jun, “Constructivism,” *International Encyclopedia of Political Science* (Bertrand Badie ed.), SAGE/IPSA, vol. 1, pp. 421-425, 2011.

REMEMBER!

The political science website has lots of useful information for majors and prospective majors

<https://www.union.edu/academic/majors-minors/political>



ALUMNI INTERVIEW

**John Forbush
- Class of '03**

What is your current professional title?

Senior Counsel, Avangrid Networks, Inc. Avangrid Networks is the parent company of investor-owned gas and electric utility companies based in New York, Connecticut and Maine. Our sister company, Avangrid Renewables, develops and owns wind and solar projects throughout the country.

What does the work involve?

As part of the company’s legal department, I work on a broad array of issues, including litigation, regulatory matters, real estate and contracts. I spend a significant amount of time writing and editing internal memos, letters and filings. I also oversee the Company’s “e-discovery” program to ensure that the Company is fulfilling its obligations to preserve data and information that is relevant to disputes or investigations. Finally, I spend a lot of time on the phone or Microsoft TEAMS calls with colleagues, outside lawyers and internal clients. This is especially true in the last two years.

How did your time at Union prepare you for your current position and/or, more broadly, your career?

Being a political science major at Union taught me critical thinking and analytical skills. I learned to be a better “active listener” – particularly when discussing/debating issues with someone who held beliefs different from my own. Outside the classroom, I appreciated the opportunity to try new things; I had a WRUC radio show with my freshman year roommate (Show of the Term Winter 2002 – go see the plaque), an opinion column on current events in *The Concordiensis* and I was on the Student Forum my Senior Year. I don’t know that I would’ve had those same opportunities at a larger school.

What is your fondest recollection of majoring in Political Science?

I declared political science day 1 at Union and I enjoyed all of my on-campus PS classes, however, the Washington DC term stands out as a highlight. I was fortunate to form a mentor relationship with the legislative director in the congressional office to which I was assigned, and I was able to connect with a professor and other political science majors that I did not know before the term. It was my first real “office job” and first time living in a large city for an extended period. That semester gave me the confidence to move back after graduation and that set the course for the rest of my life and career; it’s where I met my

spouse as well as many other friends and decided to pursue a legal career focusing on energy and critical infrastructure.

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

A piece of advice that’s always stuck with me is “you will regret your errors of omission, more than your errors of commission.” In other words, you should try “new stuff” and resist the temptation to be complacent about your career/life track or get caught up in living your routine. It also means showing up at moments and events for those who have had an impact on you. Find the time to attend a mentor’s retirement party, send someone a note expressing thanks or appreciation or simply reach out to someone you know who is in need.

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SENIOR THESIS SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Seniors: If you are working on a Fall-Winter thesis, your finished work is due at the end of the term, on **Friday, March 11, by noon**. Students will submit their final thesis via email to their PSC thesis advisor. Please ask your thesis advisor if they have a preferred electronic format (e.g. Word, PDF, Docs). If you are working on an ID thesis or a combined double major thesis and have two advisors, you should check with your second, non-PSC advisor for their submission requirements. 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, students also need to submit a completed senior thesis evaluation and email that completed form to Laurie McGill mcgilll@union.edu. **Your final grade will not be submitted until Ms. McGill receives your evaluation.** The evaluation and instructions will be sent to you via email several weeks before the thesis deadline.

ATTENTION JUNIOR PSC MAJORS

There will be a **must-attend** meeting on February 17th at 4:30 PM regarding the senior thesis. Professor Hays 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. A separate email will be sent with the format (in-person/Zoom) and room (if relevant) information. Mark your calendars and spread the word!

Political Internship Meeting

Tuesday, February 8

1:00

Lippman 101

**Cora Schroeter (District Manager, US
Rep. Paul Tonko's office)**

and

Prof. Zoe Oxley

Topics to be covered: local political internships, including how to apply and how to prepare to get the best experience out of your internship.

Prof. Oxley will also discuss internships for PSC 277 during spring term.

Requirements for Graduating with Honors in Political Science

--GPA of 3.50 or better in PSC, as well as a 3.30 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****

SPRING POLITICAL SCIENCE COURSES

Introductory

- PSC 111: Introduction to United States Politics
(Z. Oxley) MWF 10:30-11:35AM
- PSC 112: Introduction to Global Politics
(R. Hislope) MWF 8:00-9:05AM
- PSC 113: Introduction to Political Theory
(C. Cidam) TTh 9:00-10:45 AM

Political Thought

- PSC 330: Enlightenment and Its Discontents
(C. Brown) MW 3:05-4:45PM
- PSC 339: Seminar: Political Theory
(C. Cidam) TTh 1:55-3:40PM

Comparative Politics

- PSC 240R: Comparative Ethnic and Racial Politics
(R. Hislope)MWF
9:15-10:20AM
- PSC 344: Exiles
(S. Ahmed) TTh 7:00-8:45PM

International Politics

- PSC 254: Politics of the Arab-Israeli Conflict
(T. Lobe) TTh 9:00-10:45AM
- PSC 355: Defense Policy
(C. Brown) MW 7:00-8:45PM
- PSC 357: Global Environmental Policies
(S. Wiest) MWF 3:05-4:10PM

Internships

- PSC 277: Capital Region Political Internship
(Z. Oxley) F 3:00-4:00PM

U.S. Politics

- PSC 261: Public Opinion
(Z. Oxley) MWF 1:50-2:55PM
- PSC 291R: Urban Politics and Policy
(S. Wiest) MWF 11:45-12:50PM

**UPPER LEVEL COURSE
DESCRIPTIONS FOR SPRING TERM**

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 261: Public Opinion

An overview of public opinion in the United States. Topics include the content of citizens' opinions toward a wide range of political topics, the sources of people's opinions, and an evaluation of whether the opinions of the public matter (for policy, for governance, and for democracy). The course material is structured around important normative questions, such as: What is the role of citizens in a democratic society? Are citizens pliable? Do citizens organize their

political thinking? Do citizens demonstrate and endorse democratic basics?

PSC 277: Capital Region Political Internship

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.

PSC 291R: Urban Politics and Policy

This course is designed to introduce students to the study of urban politics. Governing ethnically, racially, and economically diverse regions under conditions of limited authority and with significant economic constraints (including global ones) is the story of US urban politics in contemporary times. But the tension is not a new one. Consequently, the first part of the course will trace the history of urban America from the nation's founding through the Great Depression. We will examine the rise of political machines and look at how economic changes and population changes affect the social, political, and economic dimensions of a city. The second part of the

course will study the effects of progressive reforms and the reorganization of city politics. We will look at how deindustrialization and the shift towards a service economy changed city dynamics and created new problems. We will also evaluate the checkered past of federal urban policies and examine the enduring consequences these policies have had on the urban landscape. The last section of the course will explore the fragmentation within metropolitan regions and the resulting competition over economic growth. Throughout the course, special attention will be given to the role that race and ethnicity has played in shaping urban politics and policies. The concentration of vulnerable populations in central cities has given rise to a host of public policies designed to ameliorate the conditions of America's urban centers. We will evaluate the effectiveness of these policies and explore their role in the urban politics narrative.

PSC 330: Enlightenment and Its Discontents

Is there a politics to the "age of reason?" This course focuses on enlightenment thought and its critics, in the modern as well as the contemporary era. We will inquire about the role of reason in setting the terms of citizenship, including how the citizen should behave. Is reason a male attribute? Does passion and/or religion play a role in reasonable thinking? The historical span of this course will generally cover the 17th to

the 19th centuries and show how we have come to think about politics the way we do today.

PSC 339: Seminar: Political Theory - Working Through the Past: Memory, Remembrance, and Politics

What do we do when our collective histories are mired with atrocities, genocides, and acts of violence that many would rather forget? What kind of remembrance do we owe to those who were on the receiving end of violence? Is an apology enough? How about monuments, museums? What would it take to fight against the erasures of official history? What is politically at stake in such struggles over collective memory? In this seminar, we are going to address these very difficult questions from the perspective of political theory. While we will read the works of a diverse set of thinkers, including but not limited to, Fredrich Nietzsche, W.E.B. Du Bois, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Karl Jaspers, Jürgen Habermas, Toni Morrison, Christa Wolf, and Saidiya Hartman, our focus will be on the debates surrounding collective memory in Germany and the United States. Many contemporary scholars, thinkers, and activists turn to present Germany as an example of what it means to reckon with the evils of a society's past. In this seminar, we will complicate this account and explore the political consequences of failing to come to terms with the past.

PSC 344: Exiles

For over two millennia exiles have been more influential in shaping political thoughts and realities than we are typically prepared to admit. Thus, exile deserves more scholarly attention in the social sciences and the humanities. This course adopts an interdisciplinary approach to the subject matter aiming to invoke political questions and motivate further inquiry about exile, as a space, and exiles, as political actors.

PSC 355: Defense Policy

A deeper understanding of US Defense Policy in relation to current trends in the international threat environment. Examines the historical roots of US defense policy with a focus on the impact of isolationism, exceptionalism, and the Cold War on those policies. The policy-making process itself will be examined highlighting the influence of the realist paradigm, as well as the various organizational inputs, which help to shape the policy outcomes. A look at the post-Cold War period with emphasis on the impact of 9/11 and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction on changes in US policy.

PSC 357: Global Environmental Policies

This is a course on global environmental governance. Environmental regulation has expanded from a domestic phenomenon to one that has both global participants and global impacts. Much effort has been invested in formulating international environmental policies. However, these

efforts have been rife with complications and disagreements, as many environmental indicators show worsening ecological conditions at unprecedented levels. The scientific uncertainty that shrouds many environmental questions is compounded by the fact that environmental issues often lie at the conjunction of contentious political concerns such as economic development, international trade, ecological justice, and global influence.

This course provides an overview of the key concepts, actors, concerns, and issues related to global environmental policy and negotiations. The goal is to understand the larger picture of intertwining relationships between natural, political, economic, and social systems that shape environmental policy.

PSC Major Research Requirement

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 a 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.