

News and Views from the Political Science Department

FROM DEPARTMENT CHAIR

Bradley Hays

As I write this, the trees outside my office window are in bloom and the promise of spring is in the air. There is a sense of invigoration that comes to campus as we transition from the winter to the spring. It is also a time that is bittersweet as we say goodbye to our seniors and send them on to their next great adventure. As we start this goodbye to our seniors, we also say bid farewell to Prof. Ahmed as he prepares to leave Union. I will not attempt to express our gratitude to him in full here other than to write that our department has benefited significantly from his teaching, intellectualism, and collegiality. We have been very fortunate to have him as a member of the department for the past three years. We wish Prof. Ahmed the best of luck in his next endeavor.

But as we say goodbye to one colleague, we welcome another. Prof. Strom Thacker will start offering political science class this coming fall. Many of you will recall that Prof. Thacker previously served as the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty. Prior to that, Prof. Thacker was a

professor of political science and international relations at Boston University. He is a Latin Americanist by training and many of his course offerings focus on political economy. For example, in the fall term, he will offer an elective entitled International Political Economy. This is the first time that this course will be offered in the department so please take a look at the course description at the end of this newsletter.

In addition to International Political Economy, the department will offer two other new courses in the fall. First, Prof. Oxley will be co-teaching Math and Democracy with Prof. Gasparovic of the Math Department. This course is a QMR. The second course is a political theory elective that Prof. Seri will be offering entitled Politics and Wisdom: Making Good Political Decisions in 2022. Please check out the course descriptions for both courses at the end of the newsletter.

Enjoy the spring and this time of renewal.

PROFESSORS SOUND OFF

Interracial Cooperation in the Making of American Music

Professor Robert Hislope

In this time of racial reckoning and extremism and polarization in the American body politic, it is abundantly clear that our shared home, a home to so many distinct and distinguished cultures, needs a new *modus vivendi*, a new mode of interracial and interethnic understanding that enables all citizens to indeed feel at home, in other words, to feel secure, respected, and free.

Fortunately, we do not have to travel to distant lands to find this new *modus vivendi*, it is not hidden in some indecipherable obscure text, and I would wager not even the Oracle at Delphi would have the answer if we were to visit and ask for guidance. The answer, in fact, is not “out there” but rather “here,” in our own backyard, in our history and our collective culture. More directly, I propose that the history of American music-making provides a paradigm for a new understanding, for it demonstrates the promises and possibilities that proponents of diversity and multiculturalism have always declared – when people of different races, ethnicities, and cultures get together to create art, beautiful things happen.

The black contribution to the musical arts in America is deep and vast and is so widely acknowledged and self-evident that one hardly has to argue for it. Think of the

genre-creating impact of **Louis Armstrong** and **Charlie Parker** in jazz, **Robert Johnson** in the blues, and **Ike Turner** and **Chuck Berry** in rock & roll. Regarding the latter, Ike is credited with writing the first rock & roll song, Rocket 88, and Chuck Berry brought a level of sophistication and storytelling to rock & roll lyrics that subsequently defined the genre, a point acknowledged by countless white rockers (such as **Keith Richards** of the **Rolling Stones**) who regard Chuck as the undisputed “father” of rock & roll. **Elvis Presley** routinely referred to the old blues man **Arthur “Big Boy” Crudup** as the very model of a “music man” and his stated “ambition” was to be “as good as” him. **Muddy Waters**, the blues legend, is virtually revered by white artists across the rock spectrum, as are countless other blues men and women, such as **John Lee Hooker**, **Odetta**, **B.B. King** (the list is almost infinite). No less than the Bard of folk and rock music himself, **Bob Dylan**, purportedly called **Smokey Robinson** “the true poet of American music.” A constant motif in rock history, a point emphasized by white rocker after white rocker, in both song and interview, is the deep debt and appreciation and love felt towards black artists, especially blues artists.

No less important, but too frequently overlooked or even sometimes outrightly denied in some corners, is the white contribution to America’s musical heritage. To make this point, let us consider the lived experiences, the musical partners, and voices of several black artists:

Jimi Hendrix, still rightfully heralded as the greatest guitarist in rock history (or maybe history period), learned how to play the guitar while listening to Elvis Presley songs, and was greatly inspired when he saw Elvis perform in his hometown of Seattle while still in high school.

Miles Davis, the source of so much modern jazz (and one of my favorite artists of all time), the firebrand who never shirked from calling out racism and white supremacy, worked closely with white artists in many of his bands and produced some of his most highly esteemed works (e.g., *Sketches of Spain*, *Porgy and Bess*) in collaboration with the white jazz artist, **Gil Evans**, about whom Miles speaks in his no-holds-barred autobiography as a kind of father figure.

Steve Cropper – white guitarist for one of the first racially integrated R&B groups, **Booker T. & the MGs**, who themselves were the house band for the R&B label Stax Records in Memphis. You might be astonished to realize that most all of the great R&B hits of the 1960s that came out of Stax had a white guitarist (and a white bass player, **Duck Dunn**, both featured in *The Blues Brothers* movie). Listen to the famous soul duo **Sam & Dave**, who shout “play it Steve!” when Cropper launches into his guitar solo on their greatest hit, *Soul Man*. Steve Cropper was also the songwriting partner of the too-soon-gone R&B phenom, **Otis Redding**.

Jerry Lieber & Mike Stoller – two Jewish guys, the first from Baltimore, the second from Long Island, had an unstoppable string of hits in the 1950s and early 1960s, scoring huge with black artists like **Ben E.**

King (*Stand By Me*, *Spanish Harlem*), **Big Mama Thornton** (*Hound Dog*) and the many hit singles of the black vocal group, **The Coasters** (my brother and I actually wore out the grooves of our parents’ Coasters record because we played it so much).

The Funk Brothers – the house band of Motown Records was multiracial with several white members throughout the history of the label. As with Stax, the guitarist you hear in virtually all of the Motown singles was white (**Joe Messina**, who actually just died on April 5th).

Rick Rubin – co-founder (along with **Russell Simmons**) of Def Jam records, Rubin is one of several key architects of hip hop. He produced artists like **LL Cool J** and the **Beastie Boys** and is credited by industry experts with molding rap into the classic song structure so it could fit radio formatting standards.

Black artists in the USA have made massive contributions to our musical heritage. This is generally known, well-established, and rightfully celebrated. What is less known today is the role that white artists have played in the music-making of all the genres. Despite slavery, Jim Crow, institutional racism, and cultural distance, white and black artists throughout our history have searched for one other, have found ways to come together, and have co-created, contributed to, and/or reproduced all the great genres of American music. This is why American music offers a glimpse into a new *modus vivendi* – it shows us that interracial cooperation and exchange and trust and friendship is a key part of our collective heritage. We forget this at our own peril.

ALUMNI INTERVIEW

What is your current professional title?

Marketing Manager at Gucci Beauty

What does the work involve?

I work with the Global Marketing and Fashion House teams to bring the brand to life in North America; I build the marketing financial plans to ensure the brand is poised for success. My favorite parts of the job include working with product development to help create innovative products and traveling to experience the brand in different parts of the world. The day to day is never dull, which makes the work fulfilling and exciting.

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

Union is a really special place. The small campus and classes made it easy to build meaningful relationships with my professors and my peers. The foundational success of most careers is relationship building. In addition, the Union curriculum inspires its students to think creatively, problem solve, and share their ideas in a range of forums; these skills and my passion for Beauty prepared me for my career.



Courtney Segal

Class of 2017

What is your fondest recollection of majoring in Political Science?

Presenting my Thesis! My Thesis was an examination of the aesthetics of partisan politics. I was challenged by my advisor to incorporate my interests into my major; without knowing it at the time, my work was a brand marketing playbook.

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

Don't allow your major to dictate your career path. Your time at Union will teach you invaluable life skills that will make it possible to work in an industry or for a company that might more closely align with your passions instead of what you studied.

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FALL POLITICAL SCIENCE COURSES

Introductory

PSC 111: Introduction to United States
Politics
(Z. Oxley) MWF 9:15-10:20AM
PSC 112: Introduction to Global Politics
(S. Thacker) MWF 11:45-12:50PM
PSC 113: Introduction to Political
Thought
(C. Cidam) TTh 10:55-12:40PM

Political Thought

PSC 230R: Ancient Political Thought
(C. Cidam) TTh 1:55-3:40PM
PSC 336: Politics and Wisdom: Making
Good Political Decisions in 2022
(G. Seri) TTh 10:55-12:40PM

Comparative Politics

PSC 243: Latin American Politics
(G.Seri)TTh 1:55-3:40PM
PSC 347: Comparative Left Politics
(R. Hislope) MWF 9:15-10:20AM

International Politics

PSC 257: International Political
Economy
(S. Thacker) MW 3:05-4:45PM
PSC 357: Global Environmental
Politics
(S. Wiest) MWF 8:00-9:05AM

U.S. Politics

PSC 176/MTH 076: Math and Democracy
(Z. Oxley/E.Gasparov) MWF 1:50-2:55PM
PSC 276R: Housing Policy
(S. Wiest) MWF 10:30-11:35AM
PSC 369: Seminar: American Constitutional
Development from the New Deal to Today
(B. Hays) TTh 9:00-10:45AM

Internships

PSC 277: Capital Region Political Internship
(Z. Oxley) Fri. 3:15-4:15PM

Spring Term Senior Thesis Submissions

For those students completing their senior thesis in the Spring term, your submission is due Friday, June 3rd by Noon. Students will need to submit a completed thesis evaluation in order to receive a final grade. You will receive evaluation forms from Professor Hays around the 8th week of this term.

UPPER LEVEL COURSE DESCRIPTIONS FOR SPRING TERM

PSC 176 - MATH AND DEMOCRACY

In this course, we will assess democracy through multiple perspectives, most centrally through mathematics. In particular, we will ask ourselves essential questions such as: How can we measure and quantify democracy? How can quantitative methods enable us to analyze the concepts of fairness and bias, and also, what are their limitations? How can (and should) math play a vital role in upholding the essential democratic tenets of access, participation, and human rights? Throughout the course, we will use mathematical notation and terminology to represent real world issues.

PSC 230R - ANCIENT POLITICAL THOUGHT

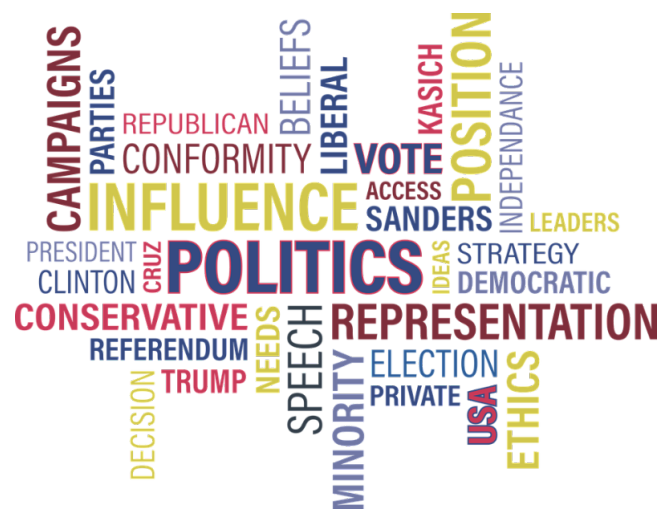
Examines the ideas of major political thinkers in ancient philosophy. Potential themes include the tension between philosophy and politics, the nature of democracy, the relationship between war and political life, debates concerning how to live a “good life,” the political significance of poetry and 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 243 - LATIN AMERICAN POLITICS

This course offers a working knowledge of Latin America’s current politics, trends, and challenges. Years after democratization, regular elections are in place, and support for democracy in the region seems widespread. Still, as local traditions infuse the principles of liberal democracy, politics in Latin America reveal unique traits. Exploring the political as an interpretive endeavor, the course’s readings, assignments, and class discussions will help to identify key political institutions, traditions, and cleavages, as well as forms of agency and leadership, both in specific countries and at the regional level.

PSC 257 - INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ECONOMY

This course introduces students to the study of international political economy (IPE). It addresses the reciprocal, interactive relationship between politics and economics in the international system. Increasingly integrated global markets present growing challenges and opportunities for political actors around the world. We will explore the effects of political factors on international economic relations as well as the impact of economic factors on domestic and international politics across a variety of issue areas in IPE.



PSC 276R - HOUSING POLICY

Housing is a critical part of the U.S. economy, and the primary means of generating wealth in this country. Where you live matters. It affects health outcomes, social and economic mobility, where you go to school, and every aspect of your quality of life. In this course, students will learn about the government-backed policies that institutionalized residential segregation and created the housing disparities we see today. We will discuss federal housing programs for homeownership, public housing, and rental vouchers, the housing market, and the subprime mortgage crisis.

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.

PSC 336 - POLITICS AND WISDOM - MAKING GOOD POLITICAL DECISIONS IN 2022

Political life is centrally about making decisions that may define the fate of entire communities. Where and how do we best prepare to judge, decide, and act wisely? When is it right to obey, and when to disobey the authorities and the law?

In the Crito, Socrates offers a bold defense of the laws, which compel him against escaping his death sentence considering the remarkable life they gave him as an Athenian citizen. His escape, they argue, would “nothing other than destroy us, the laws, and the civic community.” And yet, if Socrates deserves respect for choosing to obey the law at the cost of his own life, we honor people like Martin Luther King for courageously embarking in civil disobedience. In fact, segregation, slavery, South Africa’s Apartheid, even the Holocaust were all carried out through legal means. And if doing the right thing may seem obvious in retrospect, determining what to do is not always that simple, amidst conflicting potential outcomes, the lack of information, and confusing accounts. In his Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle defines *phronēsis*, commonly translated as practical wisdom or prudence, as the eminent political virtue of producing “right judgments about what is to be done” in concrete, unique, and unrepeatable circumstances with a view of the common good. Necessary to govern well and key in advancing the good life, prudence is contextual. It cannot be reduced to principles of simple transmission nor disciplined by science. Political wisdom seems most needed these days as scientists tell us that the window is rapidly closing to avoid climate catastrophe. Bringing tried and true insight to our unique, unprecedented challenges, drawing on different traditions of political thought with a contemporary edge, this class critically revisits and assesses the possibilities of prudence—both in its classical and contemporary versions—to inform our own political puzzles.

PSC 347 - COMPARATIVE LEFT POLITICS

A critical exploration of Marxian ideas and a comparative examination of how those ideas were, and are, translated into political practice. 7

PSC 357- GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS

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 369 – AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: FROM THE NEW DEAL TO TODAY

This seminar will interrogate constitutional development from 1937 through the present. The course will explore the constitutional dynamics behind the growth of the administrative state, progressive social movements, the rise of individual rights, the development of and contests over judicial supremacy, and the conservative counter movement. The seminar seeks to locate constitutional change both internal and external to the judiciary to better understand the fullness of constitutional change and what the constitution actually means and how it operates today.



Pi Sigma Alpha

Congratulations to our Pi Sigma Alpha
Political Science Honor Society
Members

Seniors (admitted in 2020)

Jonathan Carew
David Conners
Crystal Flax
Hannah Hoyt
Nathaniel Hutton
Maia Martinez
Rhys Moger
Anna Trancozo
Daniel Wilcox

New Inductees

Seniors (2021)

Sophia Anderson
Owen Foley
Paxton Ouellette
Kaitlyn Piechnik
Emma Schleimer

Juniors (2021)

Susie Andrews Saleem
Harrison Berger
Melanie Boyle
Hannah Crodelle
Julia Etkin
Jackson Giammattei
Lily Wainwright
Anna Zdunczyk

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)

REMEMBER!

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

<https://www.union.edu/academic/majors>

[-minors/political](https://www.union.edu/academic/majors)