Seminar in Comparative State Politics
POS 512
Fall 2010

Class meetings: Thursdays, 6-9:30pm
Classroom: PAC 4E

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Office hours: Fri 9-10:30am, and virtually any other time by appointment

Course Description
The American states are the single best venue in the world in which to test general propositions of political behavior and policymaking. This is a bold statement, but a true one. Of course, it isn’t that the states are an ideal research venue or that they allow us to test every hypothesis of political behavior and policymaking. It’s just that there is no other venue that allows us to test a broader range of hypotheses so well.

Indeed, a social scientist would be hard-pressed to design a better system of polities for testing hypotheses about politics. Here are 50 units of analysis with broadly similar political structures, cultures, and populations, but with significant variation on a variety of social, policy, and institutional characteristics that are directly relevant to many of our theories of politics. Unlike the examination of single units of government, such as the U.S. national government, there is enough variation in these characteristics for scholars to draw relatively valid conclusions about cause-and-effect relationships. Unlike the comparison of different countries or local governments, there is not so much of this variation as to overwhelm our ability to identify any relationships that might exist. In short, the states represent a natural laboratory for political scientists. The accessibility of state government officials also makes feasible many research strategies that would be unthinkable in the study of national-level officials and institutions.

Beyond these clear advantages to the empirical study of political phenomena, the states are also of central and increasing practical importance in the American political system. Certainly, the past 40 years have seen a great upswing in the political importance of the states, their policy responsibility, and their institutional capacity. But, in fact, the states have been critical to politics and policy in the United States since the beginning of the republic. Even our nation’s very name connotes the pivotal place of the states in its governance.

This seminar will introduce you to the various ways that political scientists have taken advantage of the research opportunities that the states offer, especially the use of comparative analysis. As such, this is not a seminar about Illinois politics or even about state politics per se, but rather it is about how to use the states to develop and assess general theories of political behavior and policymaking.
Given the limited time we have in a semester and the large literature in this field, we will not be able to examine the scholarship in every area of state politics or even to delve deeply into the scholarship in any one area. Instead, my strategy is to take the middle ground. We will sample cutting-edge scholarship on various topics where recent state politics research has been particularly fruitful. In particular, after a couple of weeks of background work, we will focus on the literature on the institutions of state government—legislatures, governors, and courts. These lines of scholarship use the ability to compare the states to its best advantage. Some weeks we will read papers that focus on the same question surrounding these institutions. We do this to get a feel for the details of how a single line of study develops. Other weeks, we will read papers on different, but related, questions. We do this to get a feel for something of the breadth of the literature on that subject. The required reading is not exhaustive in subject area or methodological approach, but it will allow you to get a good sense of the questions that are interesting to state politics scholars and the techniques they employ to address these questions.

As you are doing the reading each week, always be looking for a question(s) that really grabs your interest that you were like to delve into more deeply. You will need to identify such a question for:

- your major paper for this course, and perhaps
- your comprehensive exams or your thesis.

Course Objectives/Learning Outcomes
My two objectives for this course are:
1. To introduce you to the rich body of political science scholarship that uses the states as a research venue, and
2. To continue your training as political scientists. Throughout the course, I will emphasize systematic and theoretical thinking about political phenomena, backed up by the best available evidence to test this thinking.

Course Format
The course will be run with a traditional seminar format. Each week we will:
1. Read carefully a sample of the cutting-edge literature on a topic.
2. Then, in class, we will summarize, critique, and debate these articles.

Therefore, it is vital that all seminar participants read all the required material carefully each week before class.

To facilitate class discussion each week, we will also do the following:

- Each article on the syllabus will be assigned to a student to study especially thoroughly. This student will be prepared to present that article formally to the class, summarizing it and posing points of criticism and discussion. A student assigned a reading will not necessarily present in a given week, but he or she needs to be prepared if called upon to do so.
- You will turn in a set of six discussion questions on the readings each week. These questions will be useful in stimulating class discussion and your own thinking about the week’s readings. You email your questions to me (cmoon1@uis.edu) by 4:00pm the day of class (hopefully earlier). NO LATE QUESTIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED FOR CREDIT. Of these six questions, I suggest that:
  - Three should each focus on a particular article (i.e., write specific questions on three different articles), and
  - The other three should relate to the entire body of work we read for that week or a portion of those readings.

NOTE: You are responsible to turn in these questions even if you miss class for any reason.
Course Readings
Most/all required readings will be available on the Blackboard website for this course (http://bb.uis.edu). Get/be familiar with Blackboard and get used to visiting the site for this course. It is your responsibility to access the required articles far enough in advance of class to read them carefully. If you ever have any problem with Blackboard, e-mail me immediately so that I can fix it. Technical difficulties with Blackboard are no excuse for not being prepared for class. Of course, there are other ways to access these readings besides our Blackboard site, such as Brookens library and the Internet. You will learn how to find and access scholarship like this early in the semester in this class.

Graded Assignments
I will evaluate you on the following work activities and products:
- Informed in-class participation and attendance (including assigned presentations and the demonstration of a careful reading of the course materials),
- Your weekly discussion questions on the readings,
- A review essay and preliminary memos (see handout), and
- A research design paper (see handout).

Your final course grade will be based on the following weighting of these components:
- Class participation 10%
- Weekly questions 10%
- Review essay:
  - Topic memo 5%
  - Bibliography memo 7.5%
  - Outline memo 7.5%
  - Final essay 35%
- Research design paper 25%

Social Justice Statement
UIS is committed to social justice. I heartily share this commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication and mutual respect. Any suggestions as to how to enhance such an environment will be appreciated and given serious consideration.

Returning Papers
My general practice is to mark your papers and return them to you in the class following the one at which you submitted it to me. NOTE: Given the increased class sizes at UIS this year (due to state budget cuts), I may not be able to return your papers as quickly as I would like to do. I will endeavor to return them in one week, but sometimes it may take two weeks, especially for longer assignments.
I will write fairly extensive comments on your papers to provide you suggestions for improving them. This is especially important because of the cumulative nature of some of these assignments (i.e., the review essay memos). I feel that a central part of my interaction with, and education of, you is through helping you develop your papers, both for later in-class assignments and for your comprehensive exams or thesis. But, again, the large number of students in the seminar this semester will likely reduce my ability to do this as much as I would prefer.

I will keep all the papers that you turn in at the end of the semester for three months, after which time I will discard them. I encourage you to pick them your end-of-semester papers from me or make other arrangements to retrieve them.

**Laptops in Class**
I allow the use of laptops in class, but I do not encourage it. I understand the temptation to check your email or the scores of the ballgame when you feel that class is a little slow. But attention to, and participation in, class discussion is very important, not just for this course, but for all graduate courses. I strongly suggest that you resist the urge to use your laptop and pay close attention to what is happening in class.

**Accommodating People with Disabilities**
Reasonable accommodations are available for students who have a documented disability. Please notify me during the first week of class (or as soon as possible) of any accommodation you might need for this course. Late notifications may cause your requested accommodation to be unavailable although each decision is made on a case by case basis. All accommodations must be approved through the Office of Disability Services (ODS) in the Human Resource Building (HRB), Room 80, 206-6666.

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1 (August 26): The Study of Comparative State Politics**

Required:

Also, you should:
1.) In the Brookens Library stacks, examine recent volumes of *State Politics and Policy Quarterly, American Journal of Political Science, American Political Science Review, Journal of Politics, Political Research Quarterly, Legislative Studies Quarterly, American Politics Research, and Publius*, for articles on state politics, and
2.) See what sorts of data are available on the states *The Book of the States, Almanac of Illinois Politics*, and *CQ’s State Fact Finder* in the Brookens Library Reference room, and on-line on the US Census Bureau’s website (http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/rankings.html).

Additional reading on this topic:

**Week 2 (September 2): NO CLASS—APSA MEETINGS**

**Week 3 (September 9): State-Level Political and Social Characteristics**

Required:

Additional reading on this topic:
**Week 4 (September 16): Library Searches, Review Essays, and Regression Analysis**

Required:


Additional reading on this topic:


***SEPTEMBER 23-- TOPIC MEMO DUE***

**Week 5 (September 23): Gubernatorial Responsibility, Popularity, and Elections**

Required:


Additional reading on this topic:


Week 6 (September 30): Gubernatorial Policymaking

Required:

Additional reading on this topic:

*** OCTOBER 7-- BIBLIOGRAPHY MEMO DUE

Week 7 (October 7): Legislative Redistricting

Required:

Additional reading on this topic:


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**Week 8 (October 14): Impacts of State Legislative Term Limits**

Required:


Additional reading on this topic:


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**Week 9 (October 21): State Legislative Decisionmaking**

Required:


Additional reading on this topic:

***OCTOBER 28-- REVIEW ESSAY OUTLINE MEMO DUE***

**Week 10 (October 28): State Legislative Leadership Power and Powers**

Required:

Additional reading on this topic:

**Week 11 (November 4): State Legislative Committees**

Required:


Additional reading on this topic:


***NOVEMBER 11—REVIEW ESSAY DUE***

***See Chris soon to discuss your idea for your research design paper, due at the end of the semester.***

**Week 12 (November 11): Women and Racial Minorities as State Legislators and Governors**

Required:


Additional reading on this topic:


**Week 13 (November 18): State Court Judicial Selection**

**Required:**


**Additional reading on this topic:**


**Week 14 (December 2): Judicial Decisionmaking in the States**

**Required:**


**Additional reading on this topic:**

**Week 15 (December 9): Using Data from Illinois to Make Theoretical Contributions**

**Required:**

**Additional reading on this topic:**

***DECEMBER 16—RESEARCH DESIGN PAPER DUE BY 6:00PM IN MY EMAIL (cmoon1@uis.edu) OR OFFICE (PAC 480)***