

The 6 Sections of POSC 492 for SPRING 2011

Dr. J. Byrne -- POSC 492, section 2 – MW 2:30-3:45pm

Topic: The Politics of Immigration Reform

In this seminar, we will examine the history, origins, current framework, and suggested reforms to US immigration policy. We will begin with a broad, global discussion of why people migrate, (including why the vast majority of people around the world do not migrate), immigration as a form of population movement, and some of the challenges posed by migration to nation states and their identities. Then we will turn our attention to the US more specifically, with an eye towards analyzing existing immigration policy and proposed reforms within the context of the unique challenges and discussions regarding American national identity that are inevitably intertwined with immigration. Topics of particular significance in this seminar will include the challenges of producing comprehensive immigration reform under both the Bush and Obama administrations, refugee populations in the US and around the world, and the tie between xenophobia, immigration, and immigration policy in the US and throughout the world. We will take particular care, through focused case studies, to highlight how controversies surrounding immigration or involving immigrants in the US are also found throughout the world. In the end, students should gain a deeper understanding of the complexities and breadth of immigration policy in the US, why there is an uphill battle to reform the status quo in the US, and contrast the issues linked with immigration in the US to that of countries around the world including (but not limited to) England, France, Japan, China, and Ghana.

Dr. M. Cohen -- POSC 492, section 5 – TuTh 2-3:15pm

Topic: The Christian Right and the Republican Party: Mutual Animosity, Mutual Gains

This senior seminar will focus on the political re-emergence of the Christian right. After avoiding the public sphere for decades, religious conservatives became active in the late 1970s. In the years since, they have fundamentally altered the electoral, legislative, and judicial landscapes of American politics. More specifically, we will examine the burgeoning relationship between religiously conservative activists and the Republican Party.

Dr. S. Hammond -- POSC 492, section 1 – MW 2:30-3:45pm

Topic: The Pivot of Modernity

This seminar will explore some of the conceptual changes in the development of Western political theory that occurred beginning with the High Middle Ages through the Renaissance and the vague beginnings of what for lack of a better term might be called modernism. We will explore those ideas and attitudes that emerged within this time frame that influenced the manner in which we think about the concept of the person, law, natural law and natural right, freedom, political order, the state, republicanism, etc. We will likely begin with St. Thomas Aquinas and his contemporaries and move through Machiavelli, exploring other primary sources along the way as well as consulting pertinent secondary literature.

Dr. T. LaPira -- POSC 492, section 3 – TuTh 9:30-10:45am

Topic: Information Processing and Elite Decision Making

This seminar will explore how elite political actors—lawmakers, regulators, prosecutors, policy advocates, social movement leaders—process political information to pursue their policy interests. Just like citizens use party labels instead of candidates' issue positions when making vote choices, so too do elites rely on cognitive shortcuts to efficiently inform their policy choices. Though these shortcuts are economical, they may lead to biased, faulty, or shortsighted outcomes. To understand how policies are produced, then, we must learn how elites search for, select, and use different kinds of political information. Through readings, discussion, and group work, students will develop an information-processing model of elite decision-making and apply it to a group of political actors of their own choosing.

Dr. J. Keller -- POSC 492, section 6 – TuTh 11am-12:15pm

Topic: American Power in the 21st Century

This seminar will explore two key questions related to American power in the 21st century. First, we will tackle the question of decline. Is America in decline relative to other great powers, such as China? If so, by what measures? Do recent cases in American foreign policy support or undermine the declinist thesis? And what (if anything) can be done to avoid this decline? Second, we will consider how America may most effectively use the power resources it still has in the early 21st century. What are the advantages and limitations of “hard power” versus “soft power,” and unilateralism vs. multilateralism? What have we learned from Iraq, Afghanistan, and the War on Terror? And what does all of this imply about America's grand strategy in the 21st century: should the U.S. pursue retrenchment, primacy, selective engagement, or some combination of these approaches?

Dr. V. Sulfaro -- POSC 492, section 4 – MW 4-5:15pm

Topic: Parties, Voting, and Political Change: Evidence from the 2008 and 2010 Elections

This seminar will analyze various potential influences on voters' choices (including social class, race, the economy, and cultural issues). We will also be examining regional patterns in presidential and midterm voting as well as comparing urban and rural variation within states. The objective of the course is to place the 2008 and 2010 elections within a broader framework of long-term changes in partisan coalitions and alignments.