Course Description & Goals

Political sociology is the study of power, politics, and the state. In this class we will examine three of the main questions in the field. To start, we will ask what power is, what the state is, and how they affect society. This discussion will serve as an anchor for the rest of the semester as we explore how political power is wielded in different contexts. The second question we will ask is how society shapes the state. By exploring the media, social movements, and civil society we will assess how the media, civic organizations, and activists alter the course of elite political action. The third question we will explore is how college shapes political behavior. Along the way, you will also put your knowledge into action through a focused group project on food policy and inequality.

Although political sociology is a very international sub-field of sociology, this course will focus heavily on the United States. You’ll be expected not just to do the readings but to follow newsworthy events in American politics. By the end of the class you will have a sense of the major debates within the field of political sociology, a grasp on the tools scholars use in these debates, and experience applying a sociological skill set to analyze current political events. Through a class blog and individual op-ed assignment, you will also learn how to write about political issues in a way that is effective and reaches wide audiences.

Assessment

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<tr>
<th>Participation &amp; Attendance</th>
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<tr>
<td>Food Policy Assignment</td>
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<td>Presentation (10%)</td>
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<td>Reflection (10%)</td>
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<td>Blog Posts</td>
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<td>Full Participation (25%)</td>
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<td>First Review (5%)</td>
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<td>Op-Ed Assignment</td>
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<td>Topic (2.5%)</td>
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<td>Bibliography (2.5%)</td>
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<td>Draft (10%)</td>
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Important Dates

Friday, Feb. 15 – Blog Review Assignment Due by 9am via Sakai
Wednesday, Mar. 6 - Op-Ed Topic Due at 9am via Sakai
Wednesday, Mar. 20 – Op-Ed Bibliography Due at 9am via Sakai
Monday, April 1 – Op-Ed Draft Due at 9am via Sakai
Wednesday, April 17 – Food Policy Group Assignments Due at 9am via Sakai
Thursday, May 9 – Final Op-Ed Due at 9am on Course Blog

**Course Requirements**

**Participation:** Class participation includes both attendance in class (35%) and active engagement in the class and during office hours (65%). If you must miss class, email me in advance. You should come to class on time having completed the week’s reading and be prepared to engage in group discussions.

Being an active participant means you regularly share your thoughts, observations, and questions about the readings as you interact with each other and the material. If speaking in class is sincerely difficult for you, please come see me in office hours at the beginning of the semester and we will strategize ways to boost your class participation. General guidelines for good participation include:

- Come to class on time
- Come to class having done the readings and brought them with you
- Pay attention to current political events and be prepared to relate them to the readings
- Bring your reading notes and your answers to the guiding questions listed below
- Be engaged (NO texting, email, Facebook, sleeping, etc)
- Ask thoughtful questions during discussions
- Volunteer answers to others’ questions
- Be respectful of others
- Question your own assumptions

**Course Readings:** You are expected to keep up with the reading, *regardless of whether or not we get a chance to discuss the material in class*. To guide you in the readings, I have provided reading questions for each day. You should come to class each day prepared to discuss these questions.

**On-Going Blogging Assignments:** Active participation in our class blog is a central component of the course. The class blog is located here: [http://cloud.lib.wfu.edu/blog/poliscosp13/](http://cloud.lib.wfu.edu/blog/poliscosp13/). You can log in to your account here: [https://cloud.lib.wfu.edu:4430/blog/tech/wp-login.php](https://cloud.lib.wfu.edu:4430/blog/tech/wp-login.php). Certain days of the semester, you are REQUIRED to post to the blog, reflecting on the next course reading. Your blog posts are due before the start of class each day (8:00am). You are also REQUIRED to comment on at least FIVE posts before the end of the term. Comments are due by 9:15am the day of class. Your comments should be about a post for the upcoming reading. Additional details about the blog and about blog assignment will be posted on Sakai.

**Food Politics and Inequality Assignment:** We will be contributing as a class to a campus event, the Food Justice Summit. You will split into four groups, and each group will be responsible for creating a resource for the event (powerpoint, bulletin board, etc) addressing one aspect of food policy/inequality. You will present your materials to the class and to the university during the summit. Each individual person in your group will also write a reflection paper, connecting your project to course materials.

**Op-Ed Submission:** Your other major assignment for the semester is an op-ed piece. There will be three lead-up assignments to the final submission: topic submission, bibliography construction, and a rough draft. Additional details about this assignment will be posted on Sakai.
**Course Policies**

**Students with Learning Disabilities:** If you have a disability that may require an accommodation for taking this course, please contact the Learning Assistance Center (758-5929) within the first two weeks of the semester. Please also notify me within the first two weeks of class if you require modified instructional procedures.

**Cell phones** should be turned OFF during class.

**Laptops:** Laptops should be used only for note-taking or in-class assignments. At times, I will ask that students close their laptops and take notes with pen and paper.

**Honor Code Violations:** ANY suspected violation will be reported to the Office of Judicial Affairs.

**Sick Policy:** If you are sick, please do not come to class. Instead, visit Student Health. There you should ask for a document that excuses you from class for a specific period of time. This document is required to make up missed assignments or exams.

**Late Assignments:** You will be given ample notice of all paper, homework, and exam deadlines for this class. Extensions will be granted only in exceptional circumstances. Late assignments will be penalized half a grade (five points) for each day they are late. Late homework assignments will not be accepted except in exceptional situations.

**Grade Disputes:** All grade disputes must be submitted in writing within one week of the day the assignment is returned to you. In your written response, you must explain – giving specific examples from your assignment and my comments – why you believe you received the wrong grade. I will re-grade the assignment, but your grade may go up or down with the re-grade.

**Disaster Plan:** In the event that the university closes due to pandemic or other disaster, read and study the required course materials on your own. Reading quizzes (distributed over Sakai, if the internet is available, or by postal service if the internet is not available) must be completed to test your comprehension of the readings. Submit any other required assignments via Sakai or by postal mail to the professor. You will be mailed or emailed any relevant exams with explicit instructions. The return date will be specified in the mailings. If the internet is available, the professor will be available for office hours using Webex and Google messaging (brownhe).

**Required Readings**


All other course readings are available on Sakai in the Resources tab.
Course Readings and Schedule

Wednesday, January 16 – Welcome and Class Introduction

Course Introduction

Foundational Questions in Political Sociology

Friday, January 18 – What is Power?

Since sociology’s early days, scholars have debated the definition of power. What is power? How do we study it? Today’s reading is a brief summary of Steven Lukes’ seminal book, *Power: A Radical View*. What are the different definitions of power he discusses? How valid are his definitions and critiques?

*B Blog Post Required*


Wednesday, January 23 – What is Power?

Review the Steven Lukes reading from Friday, and we’ll discuss it in class.

Homework: You are responsible for completing two homework assignments for class today. First, read ALL of the blog posts from Friday and comment on at least two of the posts (NOTE: These comments do not count toward your five comment total for the semester.) Second, after reading all of the blog posts and reviewing the Lukes article, re-write your own blog post to make it better. For some of you, this will involve minor edits; for others it might involve more significant revisions. If you did not originally include a link to an external news story, video, photo, etc your revised post might include one. For example, if you wrote about the third aspect of power Lukes discusses, you might try to find a video or news story which exemplifies that type of power. Be sure to check for typos and spelling errors. Make sure you got the author’s name right. Make sure you correctly summarized the author’s argument. Figure out what type of post you enjoy reading and try to make your post more like that.

Friday, January 25 – What is “The State” and What Do States Do?

“The state” is an important object of inquiry in political sociology. What is the state? What are some of the primary functions of the state, according to Scott? Do you see any parallels in contemporary society?

*B Blog Post Required*

Scott, James C. 1999. “Introduction” (pp. 1-8) and “Cities, People, and Language” (pp. 53-83) in *Seeing Like a State*. 
Wednesday, January 30 – States and Nationalism

According to Anderson, what is a nation? How is the nation different from the state? The Robbins piece is an interesting case study of how states build nationalism. Can you think of other examples?

*Blog Post Required*

Robbins, Richard H. 2004. “The Nation-State in the Culture of Capitalism” in *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*. Allyn and Bacon. (Note: The reading is in two files on Sakai. You should read both.)

Friday, February 1 - How States Affect Society: Public Policies (Immigration & Taxes)

Today you’re reading three pieces about how government policies affect the structure of society and, even, individual behaviors. Bloemraad aims to understand why immigrants in Canada are much more likely than immigrants in the United States to apply for citizenship. What is her argument? Mettler is looking at awareness of different government benefit programs. What is her argument? In what ways are the two arguments similar?

*Blog Post Required*


Wednesday, February 6 – How States Affect Society: Felon Disenfranchisement

What is felon disenfranchisement? How does it affect democracy? Citizenship? Social inequality? What are possible policy alternatives for dealing with felon disenfranchisement?

*Blog Post Required*


Friday, February 8 – How States Affect Society: Criminal Justice and Exoneration

One of the most critical and unique capacities that states have is the (legitimate) power to punish and to revoke/restore rights. They also have the legitimate power to kill, as evidence by the death penalty in the United States. In today’s class we’ll have a visit from Dr. Saundra Westervelt and from exoneree and activist, Darryl Hunt. Come ready with questions!

*Blog Post Required*

**Wednesday, February 13 – How States Affect Society: Exoneration and Felon Disenfranchisement**

Review the reading you did for Wednesday, February 6 by Manza and Uggen (Locked Out). Read over your blog post and your classmates’. We’ll finish watching “The Trials of Darryl Hunt” and have a class discussion about the chapters you read from Locked Out.

**Friday, February 15 – Review of Blog Posts, Grading Rubric Construction**

*Blog Review Assignment Due*

Now that you’ve written six blog posts, it’s time for us to reflect on what makes a good blog post. Using the “Tips for Writing a Quality Blog Post” handout, available on Sakai, review the four posts you have written so far. Select your best blog post so far and you’re your worst. Write 1 page (double spaced) explaining why you selected these as your best and worst posts. Then, review your classmates’ posts and select the one blog post you think is the best of them all. Write another page (for a total of 2 pages) explaining why you picked this one post and specifying 3 criteria to include in our formal grading rubric for your blogging assignments. Turn in all of this on Sakai by 9am today (the start of class). There is no reading.

**How Society Shapes the State: Social Movements, Civil Society, and the Media**

**Wednesday, February 20 – The Media, Civil Society, and Social Movements**

To start our new course section on the media and politics, we’ll read an article about the role the media play in the formation of collective identities during social mobilization. What Roscigno and Danaher’s argument? How effectively do their data prove this argument? This study is about the early 20th century; what would the corollary to radio be today? Would it have the same effects?

*Blog Post Required*


**Friday, February 22 – Guest Speaker, Dr. Vincent Roscigno**

Dr. Vincent Roscigno from The Ohio State University will join us for breakfast and coffee to talk about his research and answer questions. We’ll meet at 10am today instead of 9:30am.
Wednesday, February 27 – The Internet and Social Movements

*Blog Post Required*


Friday, March 1 – Discussion of Op-Ed Assignment

*Blog Post Required*


Friday, March 1 – Discussion of Op-Ed Assignment

Read the Op-Ed assignment posted on Sakai and read these op-ed pieces, keeping in mind that you’ll soon write one of your own. Bring to class written answers to the follow questions: Which of these pieces is the most compelling? Which is the least? Why? Which best meets the criteria for your class assignment? Why? Come to class ready to share you reactions and to review our guidelines for the class for writing a strong op-ed piece.


Wednesday, March 6 – The Media and Politics: Framing

*Blog Post Required*

**Topic Due for Op-Ed; Submit on Sakai by 9am**

Friday, March 8 – Spring Break
No Class

Wednesday, March 13 – Spring Break
No Class

Friday, March 15 – Spring Break
No Class

Wednesday, March 20 – The Media and Politics: Public Opinion

How has the media influenced perceptions of poverty and welfare in the United States? What relationship do these perceptions have to race?

*Blog Post Required*

**Bibliography Due for Op-Ed Piece; Submit on Sakai by 9am**


Friday, March 22 - The Media and Politics: Policy and Disaster Management

Klinenberg is an expert on disaster response. In this book, he connects the ability of governments and citizens to respond effectively to natural disasters with a federal policy change in the 1990s. What is the policy change? What did it do? What would Lukes say about how power is operating under these conditions?

**Blog Post Required**


Wednesday, March 27 - WFDD Studio Tour

Meet at the WFDD station on campus for a studio tour; please listen to some broadcasts from the station before class

Friday, March 29 – Good Friday
No Class

**Monday, April 1 – Op-Ed drafts due**
Wednesday, April 3 – Political Comedy

*Blog Post Required*


Food Politics, Policy, and Inequality

Friday, April 5 – Food Politics & Policy: Introduction

Today starts our section on food politics and inequality. Read the following articles in preparation for your group project for the Food Justice Summit. In class, we’ll divide up into groups and select topics for these projects.

*Blog Post Required*


Wednesday, April 10 – Food Politics & Policy: Group Work

Last class you selected a group and topic for your food politics and inequality project. Bring at least two resources to class that your group might use in preparing your presentation and report. These can be statistics, academic articles, news articles, etc. In class, you will work with your group on your project.

Friday, April 12 – Food Politics & Policy: Group Work

No Class. Use this extra time to meet with your group to prepare your presentations and reports.

Wednesday, April 17 – Food Politics & Policy, Class Presentations

*Food Policy Assignments Due on Sakai by 9:00am*

Class Presentations & Final Planning
Politics and College Life

Friday, April 19 – College Campuses and American Politics

To close the semester we’re reading a new book on how college campuses shape political activity and beliefs. How similar are the colleges in Binder and Wood’s study to Wake Forest? What reactions do you have to their research methods and their discussion of conservative politics in the United States?

*Blog Post Required*


Wednesday, April 24 – No Class

Class is cancelled today.

Friday, April 26 - No Class

Class is cancelled today.

Wednesday, May 1 - College Campuses and American Politics, Continued

What role do colleges play in molding the political persuasions and activities of students? Do you have any critiques of Binder and Wood’s study? What would you do as a follow up study? How prevalent are these different activities and attitudes at Wake Forest? What can Wake Forest learn from this study?

*Blog Post Required*


*Thursday, May 9: Final Op-Ed Assignment Due on the Course Blog at 9am*