



Political Sociology

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Abstract:

Political Sociology is centrally concerned with political relations, policies, and practices as well as larger questions of conflict, cooperation, power, influence, and authority. Drawing on innovative methods of instruction, class discussions, and group activities, this course aims to provide a fun and intellectually stimulating environment in which to survey the dynamic field of political sociology, including: the nature and roles of power, influence, and authority; citizenship, nationalism, the state and nation; the sociology of law; class, the power elite, and political economy; transnational processes, imperialism, and hegemony; social movements and social change; gender; race, culture, and identity politics; and a wide array of other topics that impact our world today. The course aims to critically survey the dominant theories in the field and will, in the latter portion of the course, briefly introduce students to a selection of research methods that can be used in the study of politics. This course is directed at critically engaging the world around us. Given the breadth and depth of the field, our topical coverage will necessarily be uneven and incomplete. Over the course of our time together we will explore many topics together, asking questions like: What is power? How are political institutions held together or torn apart? What does it mean to be a nation, state, or empire? How are our identities and relationships affected by the political institutions? How and why do some societies exert power and domination over others--and how do others resist?

Details:

Resource Types	Syllabus
Authors	DaShanne Parker Stokes University of Pittsburgh
Date Published	2/28/2012
Subject Area	Political Sociology
Class Level	College 300
Class Size	Medium
Language	English

Usage Notes:

This syllabus is designed for a fifteen week semester long course, but can be adapted for shorter summer sessions by covering one syllabus week of material per three-hour summer session class. * See also "Political Sociology: Preparing for Applied and Conceptual Multiple Choice Exams" by same author.

Learning Goals and Assessments:

Goal	Students will learn sociological principles to make sense of current world events, public policies, and contribute to social debates and social change.
Assessment	Instructors actively assess student understanding through in-class discussions and activities, analytical memos written outside of class, and exams.
Goal	Students will learn to compare and contrast different theories of political sociology and discover how politics impacts their daily lives.
Assessment	
Goal	
Assessment	

Resource Files:

SampleExamQuestions.docx
StokesPoliticalSocSyllabus.docx

Political Sociology (SOC 434)

Spring 2012, 3 Credits

COURSE SYLLABUS

Meets: M W F 1:00 - 1:50 p.m. in Posvar Hall Room 2200

Instructor: DaShanne Stokes

Contact: Department of Sociology, 2415 Posvar Hall
Phone: (412) 648-7580 E-mail: dps26 (at) pitt (dot) edu
Web: <http://www.dashannestokes.com>

Office Hours: 12:00 - 1:00 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays or by appointment.

Welcome to Political Sociology!

In an age of shifting political alliances and international conflict, future professionals are increasingly seeking to develop more thoughtful and informed political perspectives. This interactive course is open to all undergraduates who wish to explore political issues in a dynamic and multicultural environment. I anticipate having a great time in class together, so I welcome you to the class!

Course Description

Political Sociology is centrally concerned with political relations, policies, and practices as well as larger questions of conflict, cooperation, power, influence, and authority. Drawing on innovative methods of instruction, class discussions, and group activities, this course aims to provide a fun and intellectually stimulating environment in which to survey the dynamic field of political sociology, including: the nature and roles of power, influence, and authority; citizenship, nationalism, the state and nation; the sociology of law; class, the power elite, and political economy; transnational processes, imperialism, and hegemony; social movements and social change; gender; race, culture, and identity politics; and a wide array of other topics that impact our world today. The course aims to critically survey the dominant theories in the field and will, in the latter portion of the course, briefly introduce students to a selection of research methods that can be used in the study of politics. This course is directed at critically engaging the world around us. Given the breadth and depth of the field, our topical coverage will necessarily be uneven and incomplete. Over the course of our time together we will explore many topics together, asking questions like: What is power? How are political institutions held together or torn apart? What does it mean to be a nation, state, or empire? How are our identities and relationships affected by the political institutions? How and why do some societies exert power and domination over others—and how do others resist?

Course Goals

In addition to exposing you to a broad assortment of concepts, theories, and issues, this course is designed to sharpen your critical thinking and analytical abilities. Upon completing this course you will be able to:

- Understand* Identify sociological concepts pertaining to politics and communicate with others about central concepts, theories, and problems of power, authority, and influence.
- Apply* Apply sociological principles to make sense of current world events, public policies, and contribute to social debates and social change.
- Analyze* Compare and contrast different theories of political sociology, discover how politics impact your daily life.
- Evaluate* Appraise the strengths and weaknesses of socio-political theories.

Course Rationale

- Students* *Political Sociology* is open to all undergraduate students and fulfills three elective credits required for completion of the undergraduate degree. The course is theory-based and designed primarily for students who have some prior coursework in sociology, though some come to the course out of a general interest in politics and from related disciplines like anthropology, psychology, philosophy, and political science.
- Organization* Classes will typically begin with one or more contemporary issues which provide a background and entry point from which to explore key approaches, concepts, and theories in political sociology. Class meetings will typically then move into exploration and *application* of materials covered, before finally advancing to synthesis of concepts and theories and evaluating their merit in light of issues facing people in the real world. In this way each class enables students to leave the course with a broader grasp of political sociology and how it can help us understand our world.
- Workload* Many universities view 2-3 hours of study time for every hour spent inside class as a good rule of thumb in determining how much time to invest in studying. Note that this study time is *in addition* to time spent in class.

Course Materials

Required:

Dobratz, Betty A., Lisa K. Waldner, and Timothy Buzzell. 2012. *Power, Politics, and Society: An Introduction to Political Sociology*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Optional, but highly recommended:

Adler, Mortimer J. and Charles Van Doren. 1972. *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading*. New York, NY: Touchstone.

These books can be obtained through the university bookstore or online through websites like www.amazon.com, www.ebay.com, or www.barnesandnoble.com. Please be sure when ordering online to allow for shipping times, which may vary considerably and may pose unexpected delays (e.g., a shipping time of “standard” usually means it will be shipped “book rate,” which may take three to four weeks or more). A copy of the required text will be made available in the Hillman library. Note that at the present time the course text does not appear to be available through Kindle, eBooks, or iBooks. *Note that

additional required readings (journal and newspaper articles) will be assigned. These additional readings will normally be made available on our courseweb site.

Class Policies

Attendance

Students are expected and required to attend all classes. As students taking this course are adults, I do not expect attendance to be a problem. Failure to attend class does not excuse students from their responsibilities for in-class announcements or any changes to materials, readings, assignments, exams, schedules, etc. announced in class. Attendance will be recorded.

Participation

Different cultures participate differently, and this course is meant to provide a safe, fun, and engaging atmosphere in which everyone is invited to participate regardless of their opinions, backgrounds, or how well they know the material. It is expected that students will show the utmost respect to their colleagues and will come to class prepared with questions, comments, and observations ready for classroom discussion. Students typically get out of their classes only as much as they put in; I therefore encourage you to participate because active participation is one of the best ways to help you learn the material and generate the kind of grades you may desire. Active participation will be rewarded.

Open-Door Policy

My goal as is to help you; therefore I maintain an open door policy. I encourage and welcome you to email me or stop by my office to say hello, to ask questions, to make comments or suggestions about the course, to learn about research opportunities, or to discuss your work, general direction, or plan of study. I enjoy getting to know students of all backgrounds and look at visits as an opportunity to learn, have fun, and be of greater service. If you are unable to attend my regular office hours, please contact me to make other arrangements.

Class Contacts

The space below is provided for you to write down the contact information of two fellow classmates. If you are unsure whom to ask, simply check with the people seated around you. These are people to whom you may turn for help, such as to ask questions about textbook materials, to obtain lecture notes or announcements, to form study groups, etc. The names you place below do not have to be friends or people you already know (though you may well find in the person seated next to you a new friend or study partner). Please obtain names and e-mail addresses for *at least two* fellow classmates before you leave class today.

Name

E-mail address

Classmate One: _____

Classmate Two: _____

Course Requirements

Readings Readings will form the foundation for this course and students are expected to complete all readings for the upcoming week *before* coming to class each Monday. Selected academic readings, i.e., textbook chapters and journal articles, will be accompanied by short supplementary readings, usually in the form of newspaper or magazine articles about current or recent events that relate to the readings from the text. These supplementary readings will be posted to Course Web, are required, and are intended to be read with an analytical and critical eye in conjunction with the academic readings.

As with most courses, the majority of student learning will take place *outside* the classroom as students study, complete assignments, and critically engage the assigned readings. Students are strongly encouraged to draw connections between texts as they complete the readings as test questions will largely center on students' abilities to draw connections and apply materials between two or more readings.

Memos Memos are a useful tool to develop analytical thinking skills, increase retention and understanding, and give you practice thinking through and applying material from class to real world events. Every other week on Monday at the end of class you should submit a short memo integrating your thoughts about the readings for the *upcoming week* (e.g., if on a given Monday we're entering week three, you should read the assigned textbook chapters, journal articles, and newspaper articles for week three *ahead of time* and then write your memo applying the chapters or journal articles to one of the newspaper articles assigned for week three and submit this memo in class on Monday, the day we begin talking about material assigned for week three). In this way your memos will help you keep up with and critically engage the readings as we cover them, will help you to prepare for exams, and to participate in class discussions and activities.

Each memo asks you to draw *connections* between 1.) academic readings, i.e., textbook chapters, book chapters, and/or journal articles, and 2.) real world events described in newspaper articles. Memos should be confined strictly to the assigned readings for the particular week in which they are discussed and should not include outside readings.

Your memo should be organized into three distinctly numbered parts:

1a.) Pick a particular *perspective* or *theory* discussed in the academic reading for the upcoming week and briefly identify one of its major strengths and discuss *how* or *why* this is a strength given its scope or purpose. To accomplish this, it will help you to first identify what the purpose or scope of the theory or perspective is (knowing sometimes this may be very general or very specific), and then discuss its strengths given the limits of its scope (e.g., what it explains or accounts for that other theories or perspectives do not, what it gets at that other theories or perspectives overlook, how well it accomplishes the task it sets out to accomplish, etc.). **1b.)** Briefly identify one of the major weaknesses of the same perspective, approach, or theory discussed in 1a and give some brief rationale about *how* or *why* this is a weakness (e.g., what it fails to account for or explain and why this is important given the scope of the theory or approach, etc.). In addressing these strengths and weaknesses please address the strengths and weaknesses of the theory or approach in and of itself and/or in relation to other theories or perspectives discussed in the academic readings. In either case, please be analytical and confine your discussion to what can be said of this *particular* perspective, approach, or theory that you've chosen that cannot also be said of other theories or approaches. This will help you understand the

defining features of the theory or perspective, the tradeoffs in using the approach or theory, as well as how it inter-relates with other theories and approaches.

2.) Using the theory or approach you discussed in 1a and 1b above, briefly illustrate or explain how the theory or approach you've chosen explains, accounts for, or helps us understand (or fails to explain, account for, or help us understand) one or more events or dynamics described in one of the newspaper articles assigned for the upcoming week. For example: if we are discussing pluralism during a given week, you might discuss what questions a pluralist would ask and you might then use a pluralist perspective to show how a pluralist might explain real world events in a newspaper article; you might also show how a Marxist perspective might do a better job than a pluralist perspective in explaining events from the newspaper article; you might also consider how two theoretical perspectives (both one from 1a and 1b above and another of your choosing) might be combined or synthesized to better explain a particular world event and how this synthesis gets us something new that neither could do individually; or you might show how the platform of a particular politician exemplifies pluralist ideals, etc. However you choose to approach this part of the assignment, please be sure to *support what you're saying* with some brief rationale, illustration, or elaboration. This will further help you learn to identify defining features and connections of the theories/approaches we cover, to synthesize the readings, and develop your skills in both communicating about and applying theories to the real world.

3.) Write a short thought-provoking discussion question about the upcoming week's readings that we can tackle together as a class and include some of your brief preliminary thoughts about the question. Please be ready to discuss your questions in class.

Your memo should be *concise* and make *explicit* use of terms and theories / perspectives / approaches discussed in the academic readings for the upcoming week. Quotes are not necessary, but when quoting material please be sure the quoted material is confined to readings we have used that week, that they meaningfully augment or illustrate your argument, and please also be sure to include appropriate source citations.

Your memo should range in length from 500 to 800 words *maximum*. It is advisable to spend the bulk of your effort and space on parts one and two of the assignment (e.g., 300 - 350 words on parts one and two, respectively). After your first memo, please be sure to select a *different* theory, perspective, or approach to discuss in each subsequent memo so that each time you are discussing something new.

The memos are not meant to be exhaustive in scope, time-consuming, or arduous; they are meant to help you engage the course material in a meaningful way, to help you keep up with the readings, to help you assemble your thoughts for class participation, to help you understand how the material we cover inter-relates, and to help prepare you for the tests. The length of memos as well as the quantity of time put into memos is not as strong a determinant of grades as is the *quality* and analytical engagement of the work produced.

We often don't really understand something until we've discussed it with others, so students are welcomed and encouraged to discuss terms, theories, perspectives, and world events with others in class, but each student is responsible for their own ideas and for the content of their individual memos. Duplication will not be tolerated.

Memos will be assessed by my evaluation of their quality and content using the following grading scheme:

Part One (9 points):

- 1 pt Does the memo identify the goal or purview of the theory chosen?
- 2 pts Does the memo identify a strength of this theory?
- 2 pts Does the memo briefly illustrate or explain how this is a strength (relative to the theory's scope or purview)?
- 2 pts Does the memo identify a weakness of the theory?
- 2 pts Does the memo briefly illustrate or explain how this is a strength (relative to the theory's scope or purview)?

Part Two (9 points):

- 4 pts Does the memo draw concrete or explicit connections between material described in the academic readings and one of the accompanying newspaper articles?
- 5 pts Does the memo sufficiently illustrate or explain how the theory or explains, accounts for, or helps us understand (or fails to explain, account for, or help us understand) one or more events or dynamics described in one of the newspaper articles assigned for the upcoming week?

Part Three (2 points):

- 2 pts Does the student offer a question and include their preliminary thoughts in response to this question?

Memos must be typed and should be submitted in hard copy at the end of our class on Mondays and be posted to courseweb before the end of class that day. Memos posted to courseweb are for collective student use as a study aid and to prepare students for class discussions and are not used in determining the grade. Only memos submitted in hardcopy are used for grading. *Memos not submitted in hard copy will receive no grade.* Also note that *handwritten, emailed, and late memos will not be accepted.* Be sure to retain a copy of your memos for your records. Note that assigned readings may be changed from those noted in the syllabus and only those readings assigned after such changes are made are to be used for memos. Such changes, if made, will be announced ahead of time.

At the top left corner of each memo please include your typed name, date, and memo number. Six memos are required from each student, but only five of these will count towards the final grade—meaning that I will drop the lowest memo grade a student receives. Additionally, all memos should be correctly dated and numbered (e.g., “Memo one,” “Memo two,” etc.). Please note that points will be deducted from memos that are not stapled together.

Please carefully follow the assigned readings and the memo schedule below when handing in your memos. Memos covering the wrong readings or submitted on weeks other than those assigned to students as shown below will receive no grade.

Memo Schedule

01/02	No memos due (semester begins 01/04)
01/09	No memos due
01/16	No memos due (MLK holiday--no class)
01/23	Students with last names beginning A through M submit memo 1
01/30	Students with last names beginning N through Z submit memo 1
02/06	Students with last names beginning A through M submit memo 2
02/13	Students with last names beginning N through Z submit memo 2
02/20	Students with last names beginning A through M submit memo 3
02/27	Students with last names beginning N through Z submit memo 3
03/05	No memos due (Spring Break--no classes)
03/12	Students with last names beginning A through M submit memo 4
03/19	Students with last names beginning N through Z submit memo 4
03/26	Students with last names beginning A through M submit memo 5
04/02	Students with last names beginning N through Z submit memo 5
04/09	Students with last names beginning A through M submit memo 6
04/16	Students with last names beginning N through Z submit memo 6
04/23 - 04/27	No memos due (finals week)

Tests

My tests are primarily *applied* and *conceptual* and require you to demonstrate your *comprehension* of the materials we cover. This means you will not be tested simply on your ability to recall various names, facts, figures, or definitions, but rather you will be asked to demonstrate your larger *understanding* of themes, arguments, concepts, theories, and approaches as well as how they *inter-relate*, their *strengths and weaknesses*, and how they may or may not *apply* to real world processes and problems, including those described in class and in the supplementary readings. As this is not a life or physical sciences course, students should expect to grapple with terms, theories, perspectives, and issues that are not always concrete or clear-cut, challenging students to identify choices that are “most right” or “more correct” given certain contexts or conditions. Our class lectures, discussions, activities, and memo assignments are designed to help you draw connections in order to help you understand and process the material as well as prepare you for the tests. Thus, what we do in class as well as what you are asked to do outside of class directly prepares you for how you will be tested.

Students are encouraged to review their classmates’ memos posted online as part of their test preparation. I have observed that students who actively attend and participate in class score an average of one or more letter grades higher on exams than those who do not. The quantity of time a student puts into study is not as strong a determinant of test grades as the *quality* of effort put into test preparations. *Additional hints and suggestions for exam preparation can be found in the “students” section of my website* (see address above).

Tests are not cumulative and questions will be drawn from material presented in lectures, class discussions, activities, and videos, as well as textbook and supplementary readings. While questions may come in several forms, such as true/false, multiple-choice, matching, or fill-in the blank, the questions will be geared towards giving you the

opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of basic concepts and theories, how they interrelate, and how they may be applied. Please see me if you have any questions, I'm here and happy to help.

****Special Note:** You may bring and use your personal notes, memos, lecture powerpoints, as well as your personal copies of the readings on each test, but they may not be shared. Also note that *there will be no make-up tests*.

Grading

Your grade will be determined by the total points you earn:

Item	Points	Percentage of Grade	Point break-down
Memos	100 points	25% of total grade	(20 points for each memo, total five memos)
Test One	100 points	25% of total grade	(25 questions, each question worth 4 points)
Test Two	100 points	25% of total grade	(25 questions, each question worth 4 points)
Test Three	100 points	25% of total grade	(25 questions, each question worth 4 points)
<i>Total</i>	400 points		

Using the University's grading scheme, grades will be determined as follows:

<i>Total Percentage</i>	<i>Total Points</i>	<i>Letter Grade</i>
98-100	392-400	A+
93-97	372-391	A
90-92	360-371	A-
88-89	352-359	B+
83-87	332-351	B
80-82	320-331	B-
78-79	312-319	C+
73-77	292-311	C
70-72	280-291	C-
68-69	272-279	D+
63-67	252-271	D
60-62	240-251	D-
0-59	0-239	F

Note that the grading criteria above apply to most but not all students. If a student is taking the class with the grade option of Satisfactory/ No Credit (S/NC), he or she must obtain a C or better to obtain a satisfactory "S" grade. If the student receives a C- or below they receive a No Credit "NC" grade.

Students sometimes inquire about the possibility of earning extra points or credit by taking on additional work, projects, or assignments in order to raise their individual grades. Please note that these types of extra credit will not be permitted because it would not be fair to the rest of the class.

It is possible for students to earn more points than possible according to the scale above, i.e., from points earned through extra-credit that I award for class participation. This extra-credit through participation is the only extra-credit that will be made available. Please note that this extra-credit, if I choose to give it, will be awarded *randomly*. It is therefore in your best interest to attend all classes and participate actively in order to avail yourself of these opportunities when they are made available.

University Policies

Academic Integrity

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity (<http://www.pitt.edu/~provost/ai1.html>). Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

Disabilities

If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, you need to notify both the instructor and the Disability Resources and Services no later than the 2nd week of the term. You may be asked to provide documentation of your disability to determine the appropriateness of accommodations. To notify Disability Resources and Services, call 648-7890 (Voice or TTD) to schedule an appointment. The Office is located in 216 William Pitt Union (See also: <http://www.drs.pitt.edu/policies.html>)

Email Policy

Each student is issued a University e-mail address (username@pitt.edu) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by your instructors and the University for official communication with students. Students are expected to read e-mail sent to this account on a regular basis. Failure to read and react to these University communications in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. The University provides an e-mail forwarding service that allows students to read their e-mail via other service providers (e.g., Hotmail, AOL, Yahoo). Students that choose to forward their e-mail from their pitt.edu address to another address do so at their own risk. If e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to official communications sent to their University e-mail address.

Cell Phones, Laptops, Audio, and Mobile Device Policy

The ringing or use of cell phones for talking or texting in class is highly disruptive. Each student is expected to turn off the volume of his or her cell phone prior to the beginning of each class and to not use the device (e.g., no texting) during class. Laptop computers may be used, but only with volume turned off. Ipods, cd players, walkmans, and other devices not required for medical or learning purposes should also be turned off and put away prior to the beginning of class.

Other Information

Students frequently spend a lot of time trying to decipher and orient themselves to instructor expectations and teaching methods. Becoming familiar with an instructor's teaching philosophy, which describes some of the rationale or the "how" and "why" of an instructor's approach, can be helpful. It is not required reading, but for those who are interested a copy of my teaching philosophy and other useful materials can be found online at <http://dashannestokes.110mb.com/students.html>. Also note that I reserve the right to change the syllabus, course schedule, learning activities, course policies, materials, etc. as needed.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF LECTURE TOPICS AND READINGS

*Note: PPS = "Power, Politics, and Society." Chapters and required readings from outside PPS, including newspaper articles to be read each week, are posted online in our CourseWeb site under the week they will be covered (e.g., the readings by Nice as well as Redlawsk and McCann for week five, along with the corresponding newspaper articles for the memos that week, are posted to CourseWeb under "Week Five"). Note that this list of readings may be subject to change. Changes will be announced ahead of time.

Week One (01/04, 01/06)

- Giddens et al., "What is Sociology?"

Week Two (01/09, 01/11, 01/13)

- PPS Chapter 1: Power

Week Three (01/16 no class, 01/18, 01/20)

- Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party."

- Bell, "The Power Elite Reconsidered."

Week Four (01/23, 01/25, 01/27)

- HPS Chapter 1 ("Rulemaking, Rulebreaking, and Power")

Week Five (01/30, 02/01, 02/03)

- Redlawsk and McCann, "Popular Interpretation of 'Corruption' and Their Partisan Consequences."

- Nice, "The Policy Consequences of Political Corruption."

EXAM ONE WILL BE HELD IN CLASS ON 02/03

Week Six (02/06, 02/08, 02/10)

- PPS Chapter 2: Role of State

Week Seven (02/13, 02/15, 02/17)

- PPS Chapter 3: Politics, Culture, and Social Processes

Week Eight (02/20, 02/22, 02/24)

- PPS Chapter 4: Political Economy

Week Nine (02/27, 02/29, 03/02)

- PPS Chapter 5: Institutions and Social Relations

03/05 - 03/09 SPRING BREAK (NO CLASS)

Week Ten (03/12, 03/14, 03/16)

- PPS Chapter 6: Participation
- Giddens et al., "Asking and Answering Sociological Questions."

EXAM TWO WILL BE HELD IN CLASS ON 03/16

Week Eleven (03/19, 03/21, 03/23)

- PPS Chapter 7: Elections and Voting

Week Twelve (03/26, 03/28, 03/30)

- PPS Chapter 8: Social Movements

Week Thirteen (04/02, 04/04, 04/06)

- PPS Chapter 9: Violence and Terrorism

Week Fourteen (04/09, 04/11, 04/13)

- PPS Chapter 10: Globalization

Week Fifteen (04/16, 04/18, 04/20)

- Open Topics week and review for final exam

EXAM THREE WILL BE HELD IN CLASS ON 04/23 FROM 4:00 TO 5:00 P.M.