General Description of the Course

This course provides an overview of the field of public law in political science. Because the focus is political science, most readings are by political scientists even though public law is an interdisciplinary field. A semester course cannot include all topics in the field, nor can it assign all the "classics" or important works on the topics that are covered. Nevertheless, this course attempts to do some of both. The reasons for selecting particular readings vary. Some of the reasons include: 1) the reading is a classic, or it is familiar to most students of public law, or it is part of the intellectual history of the field; 2) the reading is seen as important by the profession; e.g., it has recently been published in a major journal, or it has won the American Political Science Association's award for the best book or article in public law; 3) the reading is an example of an area of substantive interest; 4) the reading is an example of a method of research. Given these criteria, all readings are not equally good or interesting; indeed, you may consider some dreadful, but it is important to be aware of them. Topics are selected because they are (or have been) considered important in the public law field or because they might be important in the future. The course should provide students with a good sense of this very broad field and highlight opportunities in research and teaching.

The course has two basic organizational rubrics. The first part of the course is a brief examination of the evolution of the field, which has frequently been driven by methodological approaches. The second part of the course is a more question or topic driven approach.

Requirements

Class participation (≈50%). You are expected to read all assigned materials and to participate actively in class discussions. You will be asked to write nine one-page single-spaced papers that focus on the readings for the week. You may choose the weeks with a few exceptions. You must make copies of your paper available to your classmates and me no later than 7 p.m. on the day before class. Late papers are not accepted. These papers will not be graded per se, but they will serve as part of my evaluation of you. More details will be given in class. A student or a group of students may be asked to lead all or part of the weekly discussion.

Research project (≈50%). You will submit either a research prospectus or a research paper of approximately 15-25 pp. on a topic of your choice, though it must be related to the issues raised in the course. A prospectus should be a proposed plan of study for either a dissertation or a major article. A

---

1 Short shrift is given to works on jurisprudence, legal theory, and Constitutional interpretation and history. These topics are considered more fully in other courses.
2 Familiarity with the literature and topics assigned in this course is a necessary though not a sufficient condition for preparation for the preliminary examination in public law. For example, public law concentrators are required to have a basic knowledge of Constitutional law among other things that are not covered in the course.
3 The readings are listed in a separate document and are subject to change. Several professors have been invited to lead portions of class sessions, and we may only know what they choose to assign shortly before they present. Additional readings may be added if I determine that they would be useful.
Successful prospectus will address the existing literature, lay out a problem and a theory, and propose a feasible plan to answer the problem in light of the theory. A research paper should be one that would be of the quality that might be published if expanded. Publications are supposed to make an original contribution (though one may question how close we come to that ideal). Thus, you will need to make some original claim in your paper, not just repeat in re-processed form what is already in the literature. The research paper is intended to be empirical, though we can discuss exactly what this means during the course of the semester. You will be required to discuss your project with me before beginning work on the paper. More details on both these options will be given in class.

Communications

I encourage students to come by my office. Students should not use e-mail as a way of having a conversation with me about substantive issues; that is what office hours and class discussion are for. Email may be used for administrative reasons, but when possible, I prefer that you speak to me rather than email me. I like getting to know you. I will often communicate with you via Blackboard, so make sure that the email address listed there is immediately forwarded to an email address that you check frequently.