

# Political Science 198

## Spring 2005

### Geopolitics/Political Geography

**Faculty: Professor Stephen Gale**

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**Place: 214 Williams**

**Time: Wednesday, 3:00 to 6:00**

#### **Course Outline**

This course has one objective: to assist students in understanding the relationships between geography (location, connectivity, region) and politics (the processes of making social and economic decisions).

Geography and politics are often treated as independent, distinct, separable subjects – and, at least in terms of the organization of academic discipline, they are clearly presented in that manner. But as we look at the way the world is currently organized – its resources, its populations, its social structures, its economies, and its cultures – it is clear that there are significant geographic differences and a seemingly endless number of political systems that are themselves ever changing. Based on just simple observations of the everyday life, there is a great deal of variety in the patterns of taxation, education, neighborhoods, transportation accessibility, and employment.

Just what is it that accounts for the patterns of geographic distribution? What sort of influences produced spatial differences? Are there any ways to use changes in geographic systems as the leverage for changes in societies – and, if so, just how could decisions about the desirability of these changes be determined? What has prevented changes in geographic distributions in the past and how might these barriers be overcome in the future – and without giving rise to barriers of quite different kinds?

All in all, these seem to be pretty complex and weighty topics. There are questions of scale, location, connectivity, regionalization, the organization and structure of political systems, And then there are the interactions and on-going changes in these systems and processes. At times, even the terminology we use, as referents appear to be changing both over time and in with respect to place.

Finally, we should also address questions about the means – and even feasibility -- of making purposeful (teleological) changes in geographic/political systems, processes, and organization. Even in view of the complexity of the world, there are always those who believe that the systems, processes, and organizational structures can and should be sorted out and redirected in order to produce new and better outcomes.

As broad and complex as all these issues may be, this course will try to assist those sufficiently interested to make a start. As a first step, the course will concentrate on simply describing examples of geographic and political distributions, organizing principles, and processes of change. The next step will on a number of conceptual issues: spatial organization; the structure of political systems and organizations; the interaction effects among geographic/political systems and organizations; and, of course, the processes that have brought about or influenced changes in all of the above. Finally, we will try to get a handle on just what it means to effect changes in geographic/political systems, organizations, and processes – the explication of the goals, strategies, and tactics of decision and action.

### **Readings**

A number of books (see below) have been ordered for the course and should now be available in the bookstore. In addition, there are a host of additional books, Internet resources, and library materials on most of the topics and issues related to the course.

Barnett, T. P. M. *The Pentagon's New Map* (Putnam, 2004) ISBN 0399151753

Bloomfield, L. P. *Global Markets and National Interests* (CSIS, 2002) ISBN 0-89206- 404-8

Bobbitt, P. *The Shield of Achilles* (Anchor Books, 2002) ISBN 0-375-41292-1

Dodds, K. *Global Geopolitics* (Pearson, Prentice Hall, 2004) ISBN 0273686097

Klare, M. T. *Resource Wars* (Henry Holt and Co., 2001) ISBN 0-8050-5576-2

Lazare, D. *The Frozen Republic* (Harcourt, 2001) ISBN 0151000859

Lord, C. *The Modern Prince* (R. R. Donnelley & Sons, 2003) ISBN 0-300-10007-8

Stephenson, N. *Snow Crash* (Spectra, 2000, Reprint Edition) ISBN 0553380958

## **Requirements**

1. Students are expected to be in class and participate in the discussions. (This is particularly important since many of the concepts, issues, and concerns that will be serve as the framework for the final exam and the extra credit papers are not immediately available in any one reading – or even set of readings.)
2. There will be a take-home final. It will be handed out on the last day of class (Thursday 21 April 2005) and is due in my office (554 McNeil) on Thursday 5 May 2005 by 5:00 PM. The answers to the exam questions will be turned in typed (double-space) and with all spelling and grammar checked.
3. Those who wish to earn extra credit can submit a paper on any of the topics related to the course. Proposals for the papers will be submitted by Wednesday, 16 February 2005. For those who wish to act on the Proposal by actually writing the paper, two conferences with the instructor are required in order to discuss the topic, organization of the paper, and suggested readings, The paper is due on the last day of class (Wednesday, 20 April 2005) typed (double space) with full reference to all sources, and with spelling and grammar checked.