

Political Sociology  
SOCI 008-601  
Thursdays 6:00-9:00  
Stitler Hall, Room B30  
Fall 2004

Instructor: Mirella Landriscina

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Office Hours: 5:00-6:00 or by appointment

Overview: This course will introduce students to theories of power, democracy and social change. We will examine American political values and perspectives, relating them to the shape and nature of our political institutions. We will review studies and theories about political participation—whether voting or social activism—in order to understand those activities that keep our democracy vibrant and healthy. In short, we will be sociologists peering specifically into American “civil society.” We will also use our sociological eyes to examine economic and political structures and institutions that might limit our knowledge about government, prevent participation, and make it difficult for citizens to change or contribute to political life. We will conclude by expanding our scope, examining theories of development, the global expansion of American economic and political structures and the responses to this expansion by activists abroad.

Course Goals:

1. To introduce students to political sociological concepts, theories and current research and to help students develop their “sociological eyes.
2. To develop critical thinking and analysis skills students will be able to draw upon outside of the course.
3. To develop an environment of comfortable, supportive and collaborative learning.

Required Reading, available at House of Our Own:

\*Gaventa, John. Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley.

\*McAdam, Doug. Freedom Summer.

\*Micklethwait, John and Adrian Wooldridge. The Right Nation.

\*Readings from the bulkpack available at Wharton Reprographics.

\*Additional readings will be e-mailed to the class.

All readings should be read by the beginning of that week.

Course Assignments, Projects and Expectations:

- Each student will be responsible for 3 individual assignments and to participate in one group project that will develop your research, analytical and public speaking skills.

- There will be a midterm and final exam.
- Each student is expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings, pose questions and ideas to the class to further discussions. We should all be actively learning and supporting each other.
- Each student is expected to behave respectfully when listening and speaking.
- Regular class attendance is expected.
- There will be no makeup exams or deadline extensions except for documented emergencies.
- Any indication of plagiarism or cheating will result in an automatic "F" for that exam or assignment. A report will be filed with the Dean's office.

### Grades:

Class Attendance and Participation and evidence of reading the newspaper 10 %

Midterm 25 %

Final 25 %

3 Assignments 30 %

Group Project 10 %

### Class Discussion:

Each class will begin with a discussion of the week's political happenings. However, conversations should attempt to tie current events to that week's or the previous week's readings' themes. Frame the points you want to make in terms of what we have been discussing and learning about in class. These will be student led discussion so be prepared to come with articles and issues to talk about.

### Assignment #1: Newspaper Study

You should begin working on this assignment on Day One. From September 9 to October 28, you will be expected to read the newspaper regularly. Choose one or two newspapers. Every other day, read and cut out the front page, any articles about the election, and any commentaries or editorials about the election. (Choosing two newspapers allows you to use a comparative analytical approach. This allows you to identify hidden dynamics more easily.) For your assignment, analyze the articles you have collected. Here are some questions to get you started:

\*What type of information is the public given about the elections? About issues? About policies? About the candidates?

\*Do you think this is the type of information that citizens can use to form a good opinion and make a good decision on Election Day?

\*How are the candidates "packaged"? What themes do they or their advisors/staff seem to focus on? Cite the articles or quote the candidates to build your argument.

\*Is there any noticeable bias to the newspaper's coverage? Where do you see it? \*What types of pictures or headlines are used? What type of coverage do they get? In-depth? Superficial? Treated with humor? Which way are the editors leaning? How obvious is it?

\*Provide some statistics to give depth to your analysis. For example, how many pictures of Kerry vs. Bush. How many front page stories on the candidate?

\*What assumptions are being made about public opinion, about the public's knowledge or behavior? What predictions are being made? Do you think the newspaper can affect the opinions and views of their readers?

Assignments 2 and 3 will be given out in class.

## Schedule of Topics and Readings

### September 9: Introduction to the Class

### September 16: Theories of Power

Gaventa, Part 1 and II

### September 23: Democracy and Theories of Power and Politics in America

Gaventa, Part III and IV

Bulkpack: "American Values: The View from Survey Research" (pp. 34-79)

### September 30: Citizenship, Civic Life and Political Participation (Part 1)

Bulkpack: Szreter, "Social Capital, the Economy, and Education in Historical Perspective." Maloney et. al, "Social Capital and Associational Life." (212-225)  
Wuthnow, "The United States: Bridging the Privileged and the Marginalized?" (59-136)

Film: Farmingville

### October 7: Voting Behavior; Public Trust.

Bulkpack: Popkin, "From the Reasoning Voter" (599-606)  
Barnes, "Rules of the Game" (607-615)  
Wattenberg "Should Election Day Be a Holiday?" (616-622)  
"The Withdrawal of the Voter" (99-114)  
"The Spectacle" (115-143)  
"TV Makes a Too-Close Call"  
"Media Culpas"

"American Democracy in an Age of Inequality" <http://www.apsanet.org/inequality/taskforcereport.pdf>

Film: Unprecedented

### October 14: Media and Politics

Bulkpack: "Media Power and Government Control" (1-33)  
"Media and Politics" (319-356)  
"The Media and the Public" (357-374)

go to <http://www.robertmcchesney.com/publications.html> and select

2002. Robert W. McChesney & Dan Schiller, "The Political Economy of International Communications: Foundations for the Emerging Global Debate over Media Ownership and Regulation." Paper prepared for the UNRISD Programme on Information Technologies and Social Development as part of UNRISD background work for the World Summit on the Information Society, June.

### **October 28 Media Power and Politics**

Bulkpack: Alger, "The Media in Elections: Evidence on the Role and the Impact" (161-175)  
Schram, "The Great American Video Game" (184-192)  
Sabato, "Open Season: How the News Media Cover Presidential Campaigns in the Age of Attack Journalism" (193-203)  
(additional readings to be sent electronically)

First Assignment Due

### **October 21**

In-class Exam

### **November 4: Values, Organizations and Building Political Movements**

The Right Nation: Chapters 1-7

(Assignments/presentations)

Also, go to: <http://www.cjnetworks.com/~cubsfan/libtest.html> and  
<http://www.self-gov.org/quiz.html>  
Tell us how you did.

### **November 11: Values, Institutions and Policies**

The Right Nation: Remaining chapters

(Assignments/Presentations)

### **November 18: Movements and Mobilization Processes**

McAdam, *Freedom Summer*

Third Assignment Due

**November 25:** Happy Thanksgiving!

**December 2:**      **Globalization and Protest**

Kloby: Chapters 7 and 10

Bulkpack: "Introduction"

    "The Hourglass of the Zapatistas"

    "Brazil's Landless Battalions"

    "Cancel the Debt"

    "Reclaiming the Commons"

December 9: Group Project Presentations