Political Science 541

SEMINAR ON ORGANIZED INTERESTS

Spring 2006
6:00-9:00 p.m. Wednesday

Prof. Marie Hojnacki
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Wednesday 11:00-12:00
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Course Description

Interest groups play major roles in American politics and the policy making process. A variety of organizations of interests – business organizations, professional associations, public interest law firms, unions, corporations, governments at the national, state, and local level, and citizen groups advocating on behalf of a multitude of issues and causes – provide a mechanism for representation and contribute to the growth and diversity of the interest group universe.

The purpose of this seminar is to acquaint you with the significant themes, research approaches and questions addressed in recent and classic studies of organized interests. The topics we will survey during the seminar include the formation and maintenance of organizations; the forms of advocacy used by organization representatives to achieve their policy goals; the impact of organizational advocacy in the policy making process; the nature of interest group influence; and, the representativeness of and modes of bias apparent in organizational communities. Throughout the seminar we will be attentive to how political scientists think about, formulate, and execute research on groups. The seminar is designed to meet the needs of graduate students in political science who hope at some time in the future to do original research, master a doctoral field, or teach in one or more aspects of American politics.

Course Requirements

Throughout the semester, seminar participants will engage in three basic activities. First, each week we will as a group work through a set of required readings on a scheduled topic. I expect you to read and analyze these selections with care. (You may also wish to review some of the recommended selections but these readings are not required for the seminar discussion.) The readings, especially the articles, are often dense, and require time and patience to assimilate. You should come to each seminar prepared to discuss and debate what you have read, to dissect the arguments and evidence presented in the readings, and to raise and respond to questions about how the readings inform the topics we address.

Second, to assist your participation in the weekly seminars and to help you think critically about the work we cover, you will be required to prepare five short (a maximum of three pages) written responses to the readings (I will assign you weeks in which to respond). The reading responses are to be posted to ANGEL by 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday. These papers should help you to crystallize your thoughts on the readings and will serve as a basis for your contribution to the seminar discussion that week. Notice that I am not asking you to summarize the readings each week. Rather, I’m asking you to engage them, to take them up and consider why they are relevant. There is no single formula or approach to writing a
response paper. You should always communicate what is important about the material but beyond that
your response to the work is likely to vary. For example, in some weeks you may believe that there is
something important that the authors miss. In other weeks, the material may raise important questions
that remain unaddressed. You might take issue with the strength of the authors’ arguments and/or
evidence. In addition, you might want to explore some interesting connections between the set of
readings we cover in a week, between the current and a previous week’s readings, or between the required
and recommended material. I encourage you to draw into your discussion any additional reading that you
deev relevant. On 18 January we will spend time in seminar drafting a response paper so that you have a
clear sense of both my expectations and the nature of this exercise. You should read the papers posted
each week as part of your preparation for the seminar meeting.

Third, each seminar participant will prepare a review of one book from among the recommended
selections. Asterisks denote the books that are eligible for review. The reviews are to be posted to
ANGEL by 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday. You will be required to summarize (but not read) your review during
the seminar session. A good model for your review may be found in the book reviews published in
Perspectives on Politics as well as those published in the Journal of Politics. Your review should not
exceed five double-spaced pages.

There are two ways in which you can fulfill the final requirement for the course. First, you may
design an original research project that takes up questions relevant to our understanding of organized
interests. The research questions for this project design are due in class on February 15. Plan to submit
the research question(s) for your project along with a brief description of why the questions you pose are
important to the study of organized interests, and how answers to those questions can move the field
forward (in other words, I’d like you to justify the importance of designing a project to address the
questions you pose). Second, you may undertake some original research that addresses questions relevant
to our understanding of organized interests. The research questions for the project you will undertake are
due in class on February 15. Plan to submit the research question(s) for your project along with a brief
description of why the questions you pose are important to the study of organized interests, how your
questions relate to existing scholarship (you need not conduct an extensive literature review by this date
but you do need to have some sense of the work that is done on the topic you pose), and how you plan to
address your questions (e.g., data you expect to gather, research techniques you plan to use). If you opt to
undertake original research, I encourage you to consider some type of smallish, pilot study that is doable
in a semester rather than a large-scale research project that cannot be completed in the semester.
Regardless of which option you choose, I encourage you to speak with me about your paper throughout
the semester as questions arise, as you encounter difficulties, and so on. Seminar participants will present
their research design/research in our final seminar session on April 26. Plan your presentation with the
goal of educating seminar members about the research you completed, what you uncovered, and what you
learned. You will have about 10 to 15 minutes to make your presentation (I will tell you a few weeks in
advance about the format for this session). Final papers should be roughly 25 pages in length (not
including tables or references).

Grading

I will base your final grade on the extent and quality of your participation in class (15 percent),
the quality and coherence of your reading response papers (35 percent) and book review (15 percent), and
your final research paper (35 percent). As is appropriate in a graduate seminar, I expect you to attend and
be prepared for each and every session, and to submit all assignments on time.

**Required Books & Other Reading Material**


Seminar participants who have no prior acquaintance with the literature on interest groups may find it useful to read Jack Wright’s (1996) *Interest Groups and Congress: Lobbying, Contributions, and Influence*, Jeff Berry’s (1997) *Interest Group Society, 3rd* edition, and/or David Lowery & Holly Brasher’s *Organized Interests and American Government* as a prelude to and in preparation for our discussions in this seminar. These books serve well as introductions to the study of organized interests but each has a distinctive style. Wright examines empirically many of the key themes and questions in the literature. Berry’s presentation is narrative and he gives more emphasis than Wright to the normative implications of changes in the group system. Lowery & Brasher use three distinct perspectives on organized interests to frame their presentation of how groups operate in the “influence production process.”

All books listed above are available through regular reserve. Journal articles and excerpts from books are available through JSTOR or through electronic reserve except as noted.
Course Schedule

**Week 1 (11 January): Introduction to the Course**

**Week 2 (18 January): The Formation and Maintenance of Organized Interests, Part I**

*How Do Common Interests and Incentives Affect the Formation of Groups? What Are the Difficulties of Collective Action?*

**Required**


**Week 3 (25 January): The Formation and Maintenance of Organized Interests, Part II**


**Required**


*Also recommended*


**Week 4 (1 February): Participation, Access, and Influence**


**Required**


*Also recommended*


**Week 5 (8 February): Advocacy Targets, Tactics, and Objectives**

*What Are Organized Interests Trying to Accomplish When They “Lobby”? What Types of Activities Will They Engage in to Protect and Defend Their Interests? Do Organizations’ Goals for Advocacy Vary? How and Why?*

**Required**


Austen-Smith, David and John R. Wright. 1994. “Counteractive Lobbying.” *American Journal of Political Science*. 38:25-44. **Note:** You should review the exchange about counteractive lobbying between Austen-Smith and Wright, and Baumgartner and Leech in the *AJPS* 40:521-69.


Also recommended


**Week 6 (15 February): Assessing the Influence of Organized Interests**

*How Do (Can) We Know When An Organization Has Been Influential? What Does It Mean to Say That An Interest Has Been Influential?*

**Required**


Also recommended


Week 7 (22 February): Organized Interests and Public Policy, Part I
To What Extent, If At All, Does Business Dominate Public Policy? What About the Impact of the Public? (How) Is the Public Interest Represented and Reflected in Policy? How Relevant is Public Opinion When Assessing the Impact of Organized Interests?

Required


Also recommended


**Week 8 (1 March): Organized Interests and Public Policy, Part II**

*What Is the Role of Expertise in Shaping Policy? Are Groups Purveyors of Expertise? How Does Expertise Vary Across Interests?*

**Required**


**Also recommended**


**Week 9 (15 March): Activating the Grassroots**

*Under What Conditions Should Organized Interests Seek To Engage the Public? Are Some Segments of the Public More Important to Activate Than Others? Can the Grassroots Compete With the Grasstops?*

**Required**


**Also recommended**


Week 10 (22 March): Interest Groups and Campaign Finance
Why Do Groups Make Political Action Committee Contributions? How Do Contributions Affect Public Policy and Decision Makers’ Behavior?

Required


Also recommended:


**Week 11 (29 March): Advocacy Communities and the Process of Policymaking in Washington**

What Types of Interaction Exist Among Organized Interests? How Does Their Interaction Affect the Choices They Make As Advocates?

**Required**


**Also recommended**


Week 12 (5 April): Interest Groups and Representation
Whose Interests and What Types of Interests Are Represented Before Government?

Required


Also recommended


**Week 13 (12 April): Research on Organized Interests**

*Where is the Subfield Headed? What Are the Strengths of the Existing Scholarship? What Are Its Weaknesses?*

**Required**


**Week 14 (19 April): No Session**

This session is cancelled because the Midwest Political Science Association meeting runs from Thursday, April 20 through Sunday, April 23. I will be available to meet with you earlier in the week if you would like to discuss your research design/paper.

**Week 15 (26 April): Interest Group Research 2006, Seminar Participant Presentations**

Presentation schedule and format to be announced. Final papers are due at 5:00 p.m. on Friday, April 28. Late submissions will be penalized.