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SENIOR CAPSTONE SEMINAR: CITIZENSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

Instructor: Professor Paul Haber
Political Science Department, course #495
Autumn 2005

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Meets: TR 2:10-3:30

Office hours in LA 355: TR 12:30 - 2:00 (and by appointment)

This seminar is designed for political science seniors with grade point averages of 3.5 or higher and prepared to take on the responsibilities of a guided research project.¹ The most important idea motivating this seminar is that political science graduates should be able to reflect on the meaning of citizenship and, based on the meaning they ascribe to it, plan and perhaps execute a strategy for making a political intervention (i.e., taking action to achieve a political goal).

Because we are likely to have different ideas about the meaning of citizenship, worthy political goals, and suitable political actions and strategies, each student's research project will be unique. For example, political theorists or aspiring public intellectuals may prefer to "do politics" in this seminar by writing a paper on the nature and requisites of citizenship in an interdependent world, the political power of civil disobedience, or the political prerogative of non-participation (Thoreau comes to mind). Someone with a more empirical bent might want to explore the causes and effects of different types of political participation or the participation strategies of different social groups. Still others might want to write a well-documented defense or critique of the theory, practice, and effects of neoconservative foreign policy. Finally, students with a more behavioral or activist bent might want to design a political intervention or project to achieve a particular goal; this would involve anticipating obstacles and calculating the resources (public opinion, money, social mobilization, knowledge, military force, etc.) that would be required to make headway on the goals of your political intervention. Depending on the nature of the project, this may also involve taking some action (e.g., making a presentation to a local high school, writing letters to the editor, etc). Students who have participated in political projects or intend to do so in the future might want to link their project to this experience.

As you can see, different students will approach this assignment in different ways. The only requirement for the project is that everyone will be required to reflect on the concept of citizenship. What does it mean to be a good citizen today? How should this be measured and who should be empowered to make such judgments? How is your paper an effort to exercise the rights and obligations of citizenship as you understand them? Students are required to take an explicitly normative stance although how one defines the taking of a normative stance is the prerogative and obligation of each individual student.

One of the assumptions of pluralist democratic theory (Dahl, Polsby) is that motivated citizens can find points of entry into the political process and make a difference. Although other schools of thought have challenged this assumption, it is my hypothesis that the best of our graduating seniors in political science should be able to exercise their citizenship muscles. It

¹ Students with 3.7 GPAs who receive an A or A- grade in this class will automatically graduate with high honors. Students who take this class and do not receive an A or A- and otherwise qualify for high honors will retain the option of completing the requirements in the manner already established by the department.

may or not be the situation that citizens of the United States have the capacity to think through a political project. However, it seems a reasonable expectation that the best political science department graduates should be able to do so. This year's seminar is the department's first effort to test this hypothesis. No doubt we will all learn a lot from this first trial run.

How will the seminar work?

We will begin with an initial conversation about citizenship. What does it mean to us? What does it mean to others? Are there better and worse ways of thinking about citizenship? What is the criteria of our judgments?

While we will likely all read some things together, I have decided not to select a set of required readings and then assign them as is the usual classroom procedure. I have decided rather to let our conversations motivate us to together decide whether there are readings that we should all do together.

I offer the following as some initial thoughts of my own regarding some of what we might want to do together. Read together, or assign different people different readings and then come together and bring perspectives from the diverse readings, a set of core readings that address citizenship and political participation from a variety of perspectives. These works might include broad readings (such as Max Weber's "Politics as Vocation") and other readings that focus on particular forms of political participation (individual, interest groups and lobbying, social movements and mobilization, political parties). We could together read materials that address political intervention at different levels: local, state, national, and international.

We might want to watch and discuss films that address political participation from a variety of perspectives. Throughout, I would anticipate that our discussions will include a concern for the meaning and ethics of citizenship and political participation (and nonparticipation). I would hope we would be concerned to evaluate different strategies from a utility perspective: in other words, do they work or not and why in pursuit of particular goals. We will likely find that the selection of strategy or combination of winning strategies is very much conditioned by the goal being set. In other words, transformative projects tend to require the inclusion of a social movement strategy while more moderate policy reforms do not. While we will certainly discuss the differences between citizenship and political participation in authoritarian vs. democratic settings, I anticipate that the class will be biased toward an investigation of what it means to participate as a United States citizen.

If we choose, the seminar could benefit from a series of guest speakers. Our guests could include members of the Political Science Department, faculty members from other departments, and members of the community who will come and share their citizenship experiences.

Also, each year there occurs an event called The Governor's Conference on Civic Engagement. This year, it will be in Missoula on Monday, October 3. I have secured free passes for all the members of this class. It is my hope that we will all attend. The theme of citizenship is an important one at this conference. Our assignment will be to record how this theme was discussed at the conference and then to discuss it in subsequent classes, as well as perhaps writing a memo to the conference organizers that summarizes our observations.

Course requirements:

Do whatever we decide to be the assigned readings and participate in class discussion of them.

Prepare a project statement by October 1; complete a first draft of the written project before the Thanksgiving break; complete a final draft by the last day of the semester.

Read all the project statements and first drafts of other students. This includes teaming up with at least one other person in class with whom you will exchange extensive written comments.

Request to work with one faculty member in the Political Science Department on your project in addition to Professor Haber. This faculty member will serve as your second mentor: someone with whom to discuss your project and read and comment upon your written work.

Make a class presentation to other members of the class after the first draft is written and before the final draft is handed in.

Stay tuned to correspondence and postings on blackboard. Basic info available at <http://www.umd.edu/ce/umonline/students/welcome.htm>

Possible Readings:

Max Weber. "Politics as a Vocation" (Easy to get off the web)

David Thoreau. "Civil Disobedience" (Easy to get off the web)

Keith Faulks. *Citizenship*. Routledge, 2000.

Engin Isin. *Being Political: Genealogies of Citizenship*. University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

Ann Florini. *The Coming Democracy*. Brookings Institution Press, 2005.

Stephen Macedo and others. *Democracy at Risk: How Political Choices Undermine Citizen Participation, and What We Can Do About It*.

Walter Berns. *Making Patriots*

Richard Dagger. *Civic Virtues: Rights, Citizenship, and Republican Liberalism*.

Michael Walzer. *Obligations: Essays on Disobedience, War, and Citizenship*.

Paul Rogat Loeb. *Soul of a Citizen: Living With Conviction in a Cynical Time*. New York: St. Martins, 1999.

Initial list of potential conversations (we will add to this list):

Dan Kemmis

Judy Smith

People at Office of Civic Engagement

Ramona Grey

Janet Finn

Becky Richards

Steve Siebert

Jill Belsky

George Dennison