Syllabus, PSC 335/535 "Bureaucratic Politics"

Instructor:

Stu Jordan  
Fall 2006  
University of Rochester  
sjordan@mail.rochester.edu

Time and Place:

Wednesdays 12:30 to 3:15 in Harkness 113

Prerequisites:

Much of the material we cover relies on game-theoretic argument and statistical evidence. You should have taken at least one course in Positive Theory and one course in Statistics.

Overview:

This course covers a selection of work in Political Science, Political Economy, and Economics on government bureaucracies. The works we examine are grouped into 5 topics: (1) Delegation of policy authority from politicians to bureaucrats, (2) the operation of patronage systems and explanations for the emergence of "merit systems", (3) the extent of "autonomous" bureaucratic influence in policy-making, (4) concerns over the "capture" of regulatory agencies by the firms they regulate, and (5) the role of bureaucrats’ motivations and policy preferences in the performance and design of bureaucratic institutions; Because my expertise is almost totally confined to U.S. politics, almost all the work reviewed addresses bureaucratic politics in the U.S.

Requirements:

This course is a seminar. Although I will spend some time during each meeting introducing the material and (when needed) clarifying the technical aspects of the readings, the primary purpose of our meetings is student-lead critique and discussion of the readings. As such, I require all students to show up to class having read the readings for that week carefully, and ready to contribute critiques and questions for discussion. I’ll give some suggestions during our first meeting on how each of you should prepare for these discussions.

The one graded assignment for the course is a research paper that each student must submit by the end of the semester (I’ll specify a due date during our first meeting). I will grade this paper on the extent to which it amounts to a good start towards a fully-developed piece of original research on a topic in bureaucratic politics. At a minimum, the paper should address a well-defined question or set of questions, and include a theoretical argument along with a detailed plan for the empirical assessment of that argument. Preliminary empirical results regarding that argument will be rewarded, but are not required.

Finally, I require that each student meet with me individually by November 1 to establish the primary question(s) his/her final paper will address and to discuss his/her "plan of attack" for the paper.

Schedule:

Almost all of these readings are available electronically. Those that are can be accessed by clicking on the hyperlink. Excerpts from books (the un-linked readings) will be posted on EReserves.

Week 1 (Sep 6). Delegation from Politicians to Bureaucrats: Overview and some Normative Motivation

- Useful, but not required, survey: Bendor, Glazer, and Hammond (2001) "Theories of delegation." Annual Review
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Week 2 (Sep 13). Explanations for Delegation: Blame Shifting and Credit-Claiming.


Week 3 (Sep 20). Explanations for Delegation: Politicians’ Needs for Information


Week 4 (Sep 27). Control by the U.S. Congress? Part 1


Week 5 (Oct 4). Control by the U.S. Congress? Part 2


Week 6 (Oct 11). Administrative Procedures as Instruments of Political Control


Week 7 (Oct 25--Fall Break is the Previous Week). Patronage vs. Merit, Part 1: How and Why Patronage Work(s/ed)

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Week 8 (Nov 1). Patronage vs. Merit, Part 2: The Transition from Patronage to Merit


Week 9 (Nov 8). "Bureaucratic Autonomy"?

- Kernell and McDonald (1999) "Congress and America's political development: the transformation of the post office from patronage to service" AJPS 43(3): 792.


- Chapter 1 of Adams (1981) "The politics of defense contracting."

Week 11 (Nov 29--Thanksgiving Break is the Previous Week). Capture and Collusion, Part 2.


- Chapters 3 and 6 of Kaufmann (1960) "The forest ranger." As reprinted in 2006 by Resources for the Future Press.