

Political Participation and Leadership

PubPol 270.01, Spring 2016
Duke University

Monday, Wednesday, 1:25-2:40
Room 102 Sanford Building

Instructors:

Alma Blount
blt@duke.edu; 919-613-7323 (o)
116 Sanford Building (office hours by appointment)

Steve Schewel
steveschewel@gmail.com; 919-451-9215 (c)
202-A Sanford Building (office hours by appointment)

The polls are unanimous: Across our country, across every demographic group, Americans believe our political system is broken. The disgust with the gridlock and infighting in Washington, D.C. is pervasive, and among young people in particular this has led to disillusionment and a visceral aversion to politics. And yet, all of us—especially those of us who teach or study in the Sanford School of Public Policy—want good policy to come out of Washington, as well as state and local government. We are ready to dig in and figure out the best policies to deal with crime or education or nuclear weapons or terrorism because we know those policies are necessary.

Here's the problem: The only way to enact the policies we want is to engage in political activity, to take up the work of leading political change.

That is why we are teaching this course. We want our students to work together to make the connection between policy and politics. We want you to practice politics together. We want you to support each other in building your own sense of political identity and agency. We want you to figure out how you, yourselves, can help lead political change in your communities and in this country.

To help you towards these goals, we will be reading books, newspapers, websites and other texts about people who are exercising leadership to create political change—some from positions of formal authority in large institutions, and some without formal authority at the grassroots. With the 2016 presidential election season moving around us, we will be in constant touch with current events through traditional and non-traditional news sources. We will see how policies can get advanced—or buried, evaded, and distorted—through the electoral process. And we will bring to class a political organizer who will help us refine our

skills for thinking politically, developing strategies for political interventions, learning to work in political settings, and figuring out how to win.

This course is the gateway to PEPP, the Political Engagement Pilot Project, which includes a summer internship with an agency working towards political change. Early in the semester we will coach you in finding an organization that is making a difference on an issue you care deeply about. We will ask you to develop a proposal for a summer project with the organization and to apply for a PEPP grant from us to support your internship. We have enough funding in PEPP to support every class member in a summer internship.

The final leg of PEPP is a capstone experience back here at Duke. This experience could be a special research project within a regular public policy course, an independent study project or honors thesis about politics and policy, or enrollment in PubPol 415: Adaptive Leadership, a signature course in the Hart Leadership Program about policy, politics, and systemic change.

Enrollment for the spring gateway class is limited, so the class will be taught in the seminar style. We will learn together, and your participation and ideas will be crucial to the success of our class.

What are the highest goals of this class? Informed by scholarship and the ideas of your classmates, you will think deeply about how to practice politics—both from the grassroots and from positions of authority. You will examine your own values and preconceptions. You will explore how you can, over time, enact the policies you want through leading political change.

Course Outline

Week #1—January 13

Introduction to the Course

Week #2—January 20

Reading and analyzing the news I—The Trump Phenomenon: What does it mean? Reading assignments to come.

(Writing assignment in class on Monday.)

Week #3—January 25, 27

Reading and analyzing the news II; reading assignments to come.

(Essay due in class on Monday.)

Week #4—February 1, 3

Running From Office: Why Young Americans are Turned Off to Politics,
by Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox.

Additional readings to be announced.

(Essay due Monday in class; also, discussion with Professor Eric Mlyn.)

Week #5—February 8, 10

The Prize: Who's in Charge of America's Schools? by Dale Russakoff.

(Essay due Monday in class.)

Week #6—February 15, 17

Reading and analyzing the news III; reading assignments to come

(Writing assignment in class on Monday.)

Week #7—February 22, 24

The Conservative Heart: How to Build a Fairer, Happier and More Prosperous America, by
Arthur C. Brooks.

(There is no essay due this week. There will be a short quiz at the beginning of the
class on Monday; also, discussion with Professor Marty Morris.)

Week #8—February 29, March 2

*Don't Tell Me to Wait: How the Fight for Gay Rights Changed America and Transformed
Obama's Presidency*, by Kerry Eleveld.

(Essay due in class on Monday.)

PEPP Grant Proposals Due: March 4, 5:00 p.m.

Week #9—March 7, 9

Reading and analyzing the news IV; reading assignments to come.

(Writing assignment in class on Monday.)

On Wednesday, March 9, we will begin the group project work in class.

Spring Break—Week of March 14

Week #10—March 21, 23

Political organizing workshop with Ivan Parra; reading and writing assignments to come.

Week #11—March 28, 30

Political organizing workshop with Ivan Parra; reading and writing assignments to come.

Week #12—April 4, 6

Race and inequality; reading assignments to come.

(There is no essay due this week. There will be a short quiz at the beginning of the class on Monday; also, discussion with Professor Deondra Rose.)

Week #13—April 11, 13

Summer project coaching; analyzing the news; assignments to come.

Week #14—April 18, 20

Presentation of group projects.

(No essay or quiz this week.)

Week #15—April 25, 27

Wrap up

Course requirements

- Complete and punctual attendance at all classes.
- Careful reading of the required texts and/or viewing of the required films before class each Monday.
- Coming to class ready for full and vigorous discussion.
- Weekly writing assignments (see below).
- Daily reading of the *New York Times* and the *Wall St. Journal*.
- Being prepared for occasional pre-announced quizzes on the readings. These will not be surprises.
- Enthusiastic and constructive participation in assigned small-group work.
- Potential travel one morning or afternoon, possibly on a weekend day, around Durham to visit sites of conscience.
- Occasional attendance at specified campus or Durham lectures or programs.
- Preparation and submittal of PEPP grant application.

Daily reading

We want to emphasize the importance of one of the course requirements above, a requirement that will be critical to the success of our mutual education this semester. This is the requirement to read the *New York Times* and the *Wall St. Journal* daily. We will be reading in a wide range of texts, some of your own choosing, as the semester progresses; but

a firm grounding in the strong reporting and the editorial positions found in the *Times* and the *Journal* are foundational to our work. These publications are too large to read daily from cover to cover, so we will help guide your selection of articles, editorials and op-eds to read.

Grading Policy

Weekly assignments	45%
Class participation	35%
Final paper	10%
Group work	10%

Electronics Policy

Since this class is a seminar, and your undivided attention is critical to the success of the class, please close your lap-tops and silence all electronic devices when class begins. The exception to this rule is that those of you who are reading the texts electronically can refer to those texts in class. There will be occasions such as in-class group work when computers will be useful, but please close them during class discussion.

Evaluation of your writing and class participation

You will receive midterm grades for your weekly writing assignments and class participation. We will provide detailed, guided feedback on at least one-half of the weekly assignments, and we expect improvement over the course of the semester. This semester, we anticipate that some of the individual feedback on your writing will be given orally through recorded responses to your work, though we will also respond to some assignments in writing.

A note about participation:

Participate actively in class. Pay attention to both the content and the dynamic of our class discussions, and find creative, effective ways to help deepen our conversations throughout the semester. Make your comments count. This is a safe place to express yourself honestly, so take some risks to bring fresh perspectives to our work. Quality matters far more than quantity. If your tendency is to talk a lot, try observing more, and you will be more effective. If you are shy about speaking in class, we can help you. This class is a great opportunity for you to find your authentic and effective voice.

Group work

Beginning on March 9, each of you will be assigned to work on a group research project for presentation to the class and potentially to invited guests on either April 18 or 20. Your group will decide the exact nature of the project, which will relate to leading political change. You will be expected to be an active member of the team in conducting research and

in the final presentation. Participate actively in the work of this group. Carry your weight. Express your opinions. Listen well to the voices of others.

You will participate in the choice of the research topics. You will help your group frame the critical questions, search out the relevant data, interview the right sources and research potential courses of action and solutions. You will participate in the group's efforts to think strategically about how to lead political change in the case you select. These will be real-life problems, and your research should present genuinely useful ideas and solutions.

Writing assignments

1. Weekly assignments. Assignments will include essays, pre-announced quizzes as scheduled above, and other in-class writing assignments.
2. Final paper. Due Thursday, May 5, at 7:00 p.m. This is our class exam date. We must turn in grades shortly thereafter, so we will not be able to accept late papers. During the latter part of the semester, we will describe the final paper in more detail, and we will pre-approve your topic. You will be writing about an issue that is important to you concerning political change.

Guidance for Writing Assignments

Whether you are writing an essay or taking a quiz on the readings or films, the following questions are important: What is your analysis of the text? What are the author's core themes and arguments? What are your own thoughts and ideas in relation to the author's viewpoint?

Your essays should be concise, well crafted, energetic pieces of writing that are a pleasure to read. Limit them to 500 words. As you write your essay, think of yourself as priming the pump for our class discussions. Use the essays to develop your own distinct voice, and remember that you are doing so in order to add something useful to our class discussions and to enhance the quality of the learning experience for all of us. As the semester progresses, you will be able to relate earlier readings, films and class discussions to the texts for the current week. We are interested in your reflections about the various people and issues we study in relation to the core themes of the class: politics and policy, and the process of leading political change.

We are also interested in your response to the way in which the authors present their subjects. What points of view do you detect in their framing of these subjects, and how does that matter? Do you agree or disagree? What points do you find most compelling, most interesting, most challenging? Pick a salient aspect of the text and focus on that. You will do your best writing when you are writing about an aspect of the text that is important and compelling to you.

It is important to remember that the weekly readings—including books, articles and news updates from a variety of media—are your primary focus of analysis. Use your

creativity in the weekly papers, but anchor them closely to the texts to demonstrate that you are coming to grips with them in some important way. We are looking for original, challenging thought and excellent writing on a coherent thesis closely related to the texts and to the themes of the course.

At times we may read excerpts of your papers in class, or ask you to post your papers on our Sakai website so the entire class can read and respond to them.

To make sure that your ideas are well developed, give yourself time to reflect after finishing your reading and before beginning to write. This period of critical reflection is essential to good thinking and writing.

As you write, remember these four core principles of strong analytic writing: (1) Make sure you have a strong thesis to support, and state this thesis clearly near the beginning of your essay. (2) Marshall key details from the text(s) to support your thesis. (3) Write with clarity. Re-read and edit your essay so that you are sure your reader can follow your argument without difficulty. (4) Make sure that your writing is fluid. That is, your reader should be able to move easily from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph without confusion or interruption. Once you have mastered these four essential elements, you can go on to the fifth and higher goal: You can make your writing sing.

Required Texts

The required books are available in the textbook department of Duke University Stores. Additional readings will include articles and book excerpts, which will be available on the Internet, or on e-reserves, as indicated above.

Reading the books on an e-reader is also fine.

In addition to the *New York Times* and the *Wall St. Journal*, the required texts are:

1. *The Prize: Who's in Charge of America's Schools?* by Dale Russakoff.
2. *Running From Office: Why Young Americans are Turned Off to Politics*, by Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox.
3. *The Conservative Heart: How to Build a Fairer, Happier and More Prosperous America*, by Arthur C. Brooks.
4. *Don't Tell Me to Wait: How the Fight for Gay Rights Changed America and Transformed Obama's Presidency*, by Kerry Eleveld.

Dinner and informal discussion

In the second half of the semester, we will invite you to a progressive dinner-dessert meal and class discussion in our homes. (Steve Schewel and Alma Blount live three blocks away from each other in the Watts-Hillandale neighborhood in Durham, near campus.)