POLI 405: Capstone
Equality
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Equality is an idea central to the American experience (“We hold these truths to be self-evident, all men are created equal”). And yet we disagree on the meaning of equality, the proper scope of equality, the best way to measure equality, the value of equality and the best modes of the guarantee of equality (and this only brushes the surface of our potential disagreements). In this capstone we will explore the idea of equality through readings both theoretical and empirical. Students will be working on semester long research projects connecting the idea of equality to an area of study of the student’s own choosing. While I have assigned readings for the course, the syllabus is far more flexible than in other courses. We will decide collectively what the primary areas of focus should be.

The expectations for the course are threefold:

1) **Individual research project.** This 20-25 page paper will be broken down into component parts (proposal, annotated bibliography, literature review, rough draft) throughout the semester. The final paper is due Friday, December 7, 4pm.

2) **Class participation/leading discussion.** This class is a seminar and I expect our discussions to be wide ranging. These conversations will only succeed if people come to class prepared and ready to discuss. I have required student leaders for class discussion to keep everyone up to date and on top of the readings.

3) **Assignments.** In addition to the research project and class discussion I have devised additional assignments that give you a chance to a) think through the research process and b) think about how this capstone can be used as a place to consider your life/work after college. Most of these assignments are due in the first part of the semester.

This class is a culminating experience in the political science major. This means that we will use the idea of equality as a platform from which to explore how people do research in the study of politics. This class is both an exploration of a particular content area (equality) and an exploration of how scholars (and then how you) pursue these questions. The assignments for the class will both allow you to **display mastery of the research process** but also to follow through on that knowledge by **generating** your own research questions and answers and **display your skills** in **analysis and communication**. These outcomes are assessed in the research paper, research assignments and class discussion.

The books ordered for the class are starting points – a place to generate ideas and to examine how people are thinking through the issue of equality theoretically and empirically.
Required Books:

Robert Dahl  
On Political Equality

David Johnston, Ed  
Equality

Enrico Moretti  
The New Geography of Jobs

Rebecca Blank  
Changing Inequality

Course Requirements:

- Individual research project: 25%
  - (includes proposal, annotated bibliography, literature review, rough draft, final draft)
- Presentation of research 10%
- Class Participation: 10%
- Leading class discussion: 15%
- Reflective essay 10%
- Research assignments (3) 30% (10% each)

Course scale:

A (93-100)  A- (90-92)  B+ (87-89)  B (84-86)  B- (80-83)  C+ (77-79)
C (74-76)  C- (70-73)  D+ (67-69)  D (64-66)  D- (60-63)  F (0-59)

Schedule of readings:

8/21: Introduction

8/26: Kurt Vonnegut, “Harrison Bergeron” (OAKS) and Shlomi Segall, “Why egalitarians should not care about equality” (OAKS)

8/28: Martha Albertson Fineman “Beyond identities: The Limits of an Antidiscrimination approach to equality” 92 B.U.L Rev. 1713 (Lexis Nexis)

9/2: Theorizing Equality
    Historical arguments: Chs 1-4 in Equality

9/4: Historical arguments: Chs 5-9 in Equality
    Reflective essay due

9/9: Contemporary arguments: Tawney and Hayek (Chs 10, 11) in Equality
    Research assignment one

9/11: Contemporary arguments: Rawls, Nozick and Sen (Chs 12, 13, 14) in Equality

    Class discussion on initial proposals – bring proposal to class
9/16: Visit from Eileen Callahan, Office of Research – complete CITI training before class
9/18: Contemporary arguments: Dworkin and Walzer (Chs 15, 16) in Equality
9/23: Contemporary argument: Kymlicka and Young (Chs 17, 18) in Equality

**Thinking and applying equality**
9/30: Dahl, *Political Equality*, chs 4-7

**Research assignment two**
10/7: Blank, *Changing Inequality*, Introduction, Chs. 1-2
10/9: Blank, *Changing Inequality*, Chs. 3-4
10/14: **Fall Break**
10/16: Blank, *Changing Equality*, Chs. 5-7
10/23: Morretti, *New Geography of Jobs*, Chs. 3-4
10/28: Morretti, *New Geography of Jobs*, Chs. 5-6
10/30: Morretti, *New Geography of Jobs*, Ch. 7

11/4: **Rough Drafts due in class**

**Research assignment three**
11/6: TBA
11/11: TBA
11/13: Presentations
11/18: Presentations
11/20: Presentations
11/25: Presentations
11/27: Thanksgiving Break
12/1: Presentations

**Final Papers due Friday, December 7, 4pm**
Class Participation/Leading class discussion

Rather than do individual reading responses we will divide the responsibilities of leading discussion. For each class four students will bring in questions, passages and connections between the reading and contemporary debates or the area of interest of the student. Other students will have done the reading and so all will participate, but the four students will help to direct the discussion based on questions about the reading, concerns or interest in the arguments of the reading and the applicability of the reading to other areas. I will circulate a sign up sheet on the first day of class.

Reflective essay

Due in the third week of the course, this essay asks you to think about your academic autobiography (and thus will hopefully help spur you to ideas for a research paper): what questions/issues have motivated your choice of courses and research topics throughout your four years? Have you found that you are consistently writing on a similar set of problems or issues, or are you consistently researching using one set of methodological approaches? Look back at the papers and projects you have done over the last 4 years, where did you learn the most? (Choose 2 or 3 particular assignments from courses and talk about your process and your results.) Which ones have made you think about your future life plans? In what ways? What kinds of writing/communication do you expect you will be doing in 5 years? Are there links between those future plans and classes you have taken? Use examples from your own coursework and the papers and projects that you have produced. This essay will be 1200 words and submitted in class.

Research Assignments

Below is a sketch of what I want you to do for each of these assignments. More information will be given out as the time for the assignment approaches.

- The first research assignment gives you a chance to explore research as a satisfaction of curiosity. Choose one are of equality in which you have a current interest (housing, healthcare, rights, income, etc.). Think about the different kinds of research you might look for (studies done, articles written in scholarly journals, policy papers) and how you might use that research. Give yourself a set period of time (2 hours) and explore what is available on that topic – using different databases, the library, etc. A mixture of scholarly and popular articles or books is acceptable. The paper that you will write will focus on three things: 1) What is one key debate that you see emerging from those who study the issue you explored? 2) How would you use the information you have found – how can you go from a popular article on affordable housing, for example, to the scholarly literature? 3) In your final paragraphs reflect on your process – how did you go about doing this research? What does that tell you about the research process for an issue? This paper will help you narrow your focus and will give you a sense of what you need to do to begin this process.
The second research assignment is on methods, theories and frameworks. Different kinds of questions will yield different kinds of answers depending on the method you use or the theory you apply. While there are practical limits to the methodological approaches you can use in a capstone paper (which must be completed during one 15 week semester) there are still a number of ways that you could approach the topic you choose for your paper. For this assignment you will again start from an issue that you might want to pursue for your final paper (either a narrowed version of where you were in assignment one or a new area). Drawing either on the research you did for assignment one or drawing on new research, formulate at least 5 research questions and indicate the best way to answer those questions. Go beyond simply asserting that you will (for example) do a survey. Instead think about why the approach you choose makes sense for the question you are asking and what background theories or frameworks or even ways of looking at the world are informing your choice. This assignment will take the form of a stated question and then an explanation of how you would answer such a question (with at least 5 questions).

By the third research assignment your paper topic will be chosen. For this assignment I want you to focus on one particular skill – framing scholarly debates (e.g. a literature review). While this assignment may not be your completed literature review it will: 1) set out the debate that scholars are having on the question you are asking – are there sides? Are there particular complementary positions or approaches? 2) Using the research you have done thus far set out the relevant debate, discussing the key thinkers. 3) Be aware of gaps – what is missing? This assignment is due on the same day as the rough draft. For most of you the literature review will simply be a part of your rough draft – if that is so you can label the literature review within your rough draft. If the literature review is not going to be a part of your final paper then attach it separately.

Research paper

Alongside these research assignments you will each be working on a research paper of your own design. This paper will require the following:

- Initial proposal (coming out of research assignment 1)
- Annotated bibliography
- Hypothesis and proposed method (coming out of research assignment 2)
- Literature review (research assignment 3)
- Rough draft
- Oral presentation
- Final paper

You will be working on these papers throughout the semester. While the final paper is not due until the end of the semester, this is a semester long project of independent research. We will devote class time to working through the pieces of this project.