

POLITICAL SCIENCE

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What is Political Science?

Political scientists study power.

Specialists in comparative politics analyze power dynamics in communities, states, and regions throughout the world.

Specialists in international relations focus on the power relationships between countries and between citizens and organizations of different countries.

Specialists in American politics look at the exercise of power domestically, through American institutions and processes ranging from the state to social movements.

Specialists in political theory address fundamental normative and explanatory assumptions, such as the nature and purpose of the state; who should have power and why; and what would constitute a good society.

Political Science Club

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Newsletter

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Constitutional Law in the Classroom and in Print

Dr. Matthew Hall addresses the relationship between the Supreme Court and constitutional law in his teaching and in his research. We asked him about his classes and about his recently published book, [The Nature of Supreme Court Power](#).

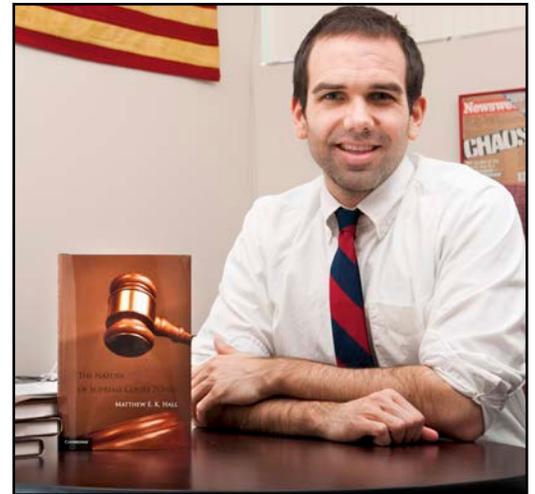


Photo Credit: Chad Williams

Why teach Con Law in a political science department rather than the traditional law school?

“Law only looks at legal reasoning, but political science also looks at political opinion, congress, ideologies.”

What’s it like teaching these ideas?

“I love it; it’s like candy. I teach about the basic ideas of American citizenship, ideas that we all care about. It’s not mundane. We can all relate to abortion, racism. These ideas relate to what’s going on here, now.”

What are interesting challenges you face with teaching these topics?

“The biggest challenge is getting students away from their ideologies. There are no consistent principles with being either conservative or liberal. That’s the complexity of law.”

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The Nature of Supreme Court Power

Cambridge University Press, 2011

Few institutions in the world are credited with initiating and confounding political change on the scale of the United States Supreme Court. The Court is uniquely positioned to enhance or inhibit political reform, enshrine or dismantle social inequalities, and expand or suppress individual rights. Yet, despite claims of victory from judicial activists and complaints of undemocratic lawmaking from the Court’s critics, numerous studies of the Court assert that it wields little real power. I examine the nature of Supreme Court power by identifying conditions under which the Court is successful at altering the behavior of state and private actors.

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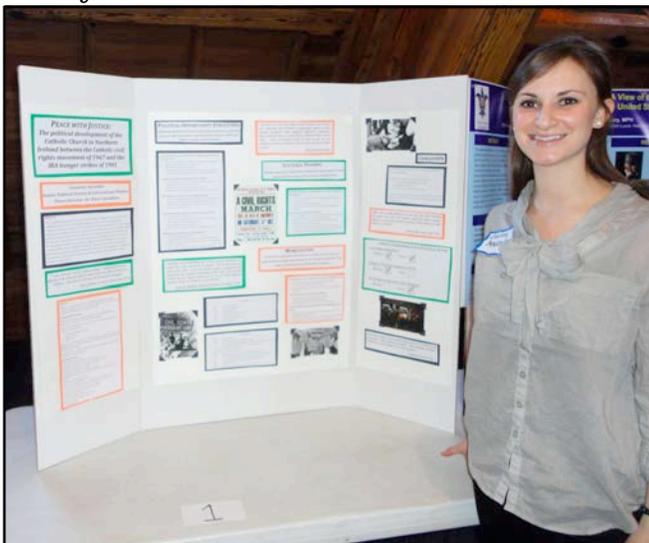
Global and Local Social Justice Conference February 18, 2011



William Halfpap - Reformation of Nicaraguan human rights policies



Perry Cold- Des Lee Fellowship and the United Way of St. Louis



Courtney Avender - Peace with Justice: the political development of the Catholic Church in Northern Ireland

Global and Local Social Justice Conference a rousing success. Internships, honors theses, and the excellent research done in our classes were very well represented. This was the first time to our knowledge that political science students presented their accomplishments via posters to the SLU campus. Students and faculty who toured the poster section of the conference appreciated the opportunity to see the great variety of projects and to talk to the students who stood by their posters and answered questions.

One session of the conference was composed of papers from students from Dr. Michelle Lorenzini's "Problems of Globalization" class from last fall. Students from that class who presented were Kristen Peters, Annie Kratzmeyer, Anu Gorukanti, Brittany Calendo, Amanda Dwyer, and Matt Stegeman.

Other students from the department who presented research (with their mentor in parentheses) were Javier Trejo (Dr. J.D. Bowen), Dino Hadzic (Dr. Ellen Carnaghan), Katie Schlechter (Dr. Maki Motapanyane), Emily Reid (Drs. Emmanuel Uwalaka and Motapanyane), Courtney Avender (Dr. Carnaghan), and William Halfpap (Dr. Bowen). A total of 27 students participated.

Internship students who presented included Max Jordan who worked in Rome, Perry Cole who worked in St. Louis, and Katy Rasmussen who worked in Thailand. They were sponsored by Dr. Robert Strikwerda, Internship Coordinator for the Department, and also Director of the Global and Local Social Justice Program, who also was the lead organizer of the conference.

Dr. Strikwerda said that the conference fulfilled its objective of giving students a valuable experience and "showcasing how research can help further the university's commitment to social justice."

Thoughts from a ...

Comparativist

By J.D. Bowen

Prior to the terrorists attacks of 9/11/2001, political scientists paid relatively little attention to the Middle East because, really, how many interesting things can you say about a bunch of iron-fisted dictatorships? They're all pretty much the same, right? WRONG. What the popular uprisings (and the responses they have elicited from their respective regimes) in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, and beyond have taught us is that these regimes actually have relatively little in common. The Mubarak regime in Egypt is a classic example of an "electoral authoritarian" regime that had multiple parties and elections, but the rules of the game were sufficiently unfair so as to guarantee that the winner was always the same. Regimes in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan are more traditional monarchies which dispense almost entirely with the façade of democracy. The Gaddafi regime in Libya is (was?) a fairly unique one-man regime that largely dispensed with formal political institutions altogether (in Political Science lingo we refer to these regimes as "sultanistic").

The existence, survival, demise, and future prospects of these types of regimes appear to revolve largely around two issues: institutionalization and political legitimacy. Institutions are important because they give order and predictability to political behavior. Although we often think of dictatorships as regimes where one person decides everything, many authoritarian regimes have well-developed institutions (and some, like the Gaddafi regime, are closer to the stereotypical dictatorship). In Egypt, for example, even as the Mubarak regime fell, order was maintained because the most organized and powerful institution in the country (the military) was able to fill the power void left by Mubarak.

In Libya, where Gaddafi ruled through classic divide and conquer strategies, there are precious few (if any) institutions capable of governing in his absence. The short term prospects for Libya, if Gaddafi falls, are thus far more complicated than the situation in Egypt. Further east, in countries like Saudi Arabia, the institutional troika of the royal family, the clerical establishment, and the military suggests that, even if regimes in places like Bahrain or Saudi Arabia fall (and these institutions make it far less likely that they will fall), successor regimes will not look drastically different.

In terms of legitimacy ("the right to rule," so to speak), we often assume that dictators are, by definition, illegitimate. Untrue. Many forms of government can be legitimate, and governments that enjoy great legitimacy at one point in time can subsequently squander it. Both the Mubarak and Gaddafi governments enjoyed periods where their rule was considered legitimate by many, if not all. But years of cronyism, economic stagnation, and political corruption cost these regimes dearly.

Legitimacy can come from many sources: democratic elections, strong economic performance, religious tradition, etc. The problem for the regimes that have fallen in Tunisia, Egypt, and (maybe soon) Libya is that they have none of these. They are secular, authoritarian regimes that have governed during a period of economic stagnation and declining opportunities (especially for young people). Many of the Gulf states, by contrast, can claim the traditional legitimacy that monarchy affords, as well as providing their subjects with rising living standards (financed by oil revenues). Legitimacy can, it seems, be purchased. The royal families in both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia have reportedly raised public salaries and provided direct payments to families in order to undercut or forestall protest against these regimes. This looks like a cynical political move on the part of these governments, but it may be effective in buying the good will and quiescence of enough of their populations long enough to survive the current period of political upheaval.

3 Movies You Should See in Life if You Care About Politics

By Samuel Ha

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Ikiru (1952): Akira Kurosawa's film, which can be translated "To Live," features his long-time collaborator Takashi Shimura and follows the last months of an aged Japanese bureaucrat after he discovers he has stomach cancer. A worthy film to watch regardless, it is of particular interest to those interested in politics because it touches on themes relevant to all those engaged in public service. Those interested in Asian politics and culture will be interested in the representation of the bureaucracy, familial relationships, and intergenerational difficulties.

Hero (2002): A bravura of cinematography and martial arts choreography, Zhang Yimou's *Hero* is set in Ancient China during the Warring States Period. The protagonist, provocatively called Nameless (Jet Li), claims to have killed three assassins who made attempts on the life of the Qin's king. The king allows Nameless to approach the throne as the latter recalls his defeat of the assassins. As Nameless' story is told, despite Yimou's insistence that his films have no political message, questions regarding political legitimacy, nationality, and the relationship between the individual and the collective appear to be both asked and answered.

The Thin Red Line (1998): His first film after a 20-year hiatus from filmmaking, *The Thin Red Line* attracted a sometimes distracting number of A-list actors to Terrence Malick's project. Nevertheless, it is fantastic. It is set in World War II during the Battle of Guadalcanal and follows a fictional U.S. Army company. Malick wrote the screenplay, adapting it from James Jones' novel of the same name. In adapting it, Malick added a naturalist element absent in Jones' work, emphasizing the role of conflict in the film and providing commentary on the ongoing idealist/realist debate in political science.

Constitutional Law in the Classroom continued:

How do students react to the ideas you're teaching?

"Students have a lot of fun with engaging real life controversies. I do moot court cases. Justices, lawyers, etc. It puts students in roles where they can decide. In my Spring course we actually do cases that are in front of the Supreme Court right now. That way there are no right or wrong answers. It's exciting; they decide what freedom and equality really mean."

What is your purpose in teaching these topics?

My purpose is to get students to reexamine their beliefs, to answer tough questions and make choices.

The Nature of Supreme Court Power

continued:

Employing a series of longitudinal studies that use quantitative measures of behavior outcomes across a wide range of issue areas, I develop and support a new theory of Supreme Court power. I find that the Court tends to successfully exercise power when lower courts can directly implement its rulings; however, when the Court must rely on non-court actors to implement its decisions, its success depends on the popularity of those decisions. Overall, my theory of Supreme Court power depicts the Court as a powerful institution, capable of exerting significant influence over social change.