POSC 312

American Political Culture and Values

Fall Term 1998

Sayl 253 TTh 2:30-4:15

Professor John Sullivan

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Office Hours TTh 1-2, 4:30-5:15
F 10-12

This class is designed as a research seminar. Each student will conduct a series of interviews on topics in American political culture and values with a citizen of Northfield. These interviews will include both structured and open-ended discussions, as well as the collection of data through what is known as Q-methodology. Q-methodology provides quantitative data that can reveal structures of perception and preference. It can also serve as a springboard for further discussions with each participant. More details will be provided in class.

We will also read scholarly discourse and social science research on topics such as individualism, democratic and capitalistic values, citizenship and participation, patriotism, political heroism, tolerance, and so on. We will view videos of intellectuals and others discussing their ideas about American political culture, and we will discuss your own thoughts about the central elements of our political culture. This reading, viewing, and discussing--as well as your own views and perspectives--will generate fuel for your interviews.

The overall objective of the course is to examine the relationship between scholarly and intellectual discourse and research on U.S. political culture, and the everyday political experience of ordinary citizens in the United States. Your role will be to serve as an observer--an observer of multiple modes of discourse--and to arrive at tentative conclusions about the relationships among them. In some small sense, you are being asked to evaluate the relationship (or lack thereof) between academic discourse on the one hand, and the subjective empirical realities of the people who allow you temporary access to their thoughts, experiences and understandings.

There will be some common content to your interviews--everyone will cover the role of government, citizenship and participation, the election, political heroes, and patriotism. There will also be some unique content to your interviews, depending on your interests and those of your interviewee.

Much classroom time will be spent organizing and clarifying ideas for your interviews. We will discuss the assigned readings as they fit into this process. Please keep in mind that the readings are meant to stimulate your thinking about these topics and to guide you in talking to people about their own political values and about American political culture. They provide background material that should enrich your own understanding and enable you to interview people in an effective way about these topics.

Copies of the assigned readings are on reserve in the library. You are expected to read the assigned material for each class, in order to make sure we are all "on the same page" in our efforts to discuss and clarify ideas and prepare for the interviews with citizens.

Grades will be based on class participation; on your willingness and ability to help other students conduct their research projects; on the quality of your own efforts to prepare and conduct interviews; on the short written assignments; and finally, on the research paper you write, which is due the last day of class (Tuesday, November 17). Details of the research project and paper will be presented in class. Because of nature of the research project assigned for this seminar, class attendance is mandatory.
Thursday, September 10 Introduction

Tuesday September 15 Political Culture


Thursday September 17 Interviewing and Active Listening Skills


Tuesday, September 22: Political Perspective and Q-Methodology


Thursday September 24: Participation and Citizenship


Tuesday September 29: American Individualism


Thursday October 1: Individualism vs. Collectivism


Tuesday October 6: Self Interest vs. The Common Good

Thursday October 8: Social Capital


Tuesday October 13: Attitudes Toward Government


Thursday October 15: Welfare and Values


Tuesday October 20: Patriotism & Heroism


Thursday October 22: Political Events as Socializers


Tuesday October 27: Political Expertise


Thursday October 29: Electoral Behavior and the Elections of 1998


Tuesday November 3: Democratic and Capitalistic Values


Thursday November 5: Race and Politics

**Read:** Donald R. Kinder & Lynn M. Sanders, *Divided by Color: Racial Politics and Democratic Ideals*, chs. 5-6, pp. 92-160.
Tuesday November 10 Equality

**Read**: Hochschild, *What's Fair?* Chs. 5-6, pp. 111-191.

Thursday November 12 Catch up day

Tuesday November 17 Hand in Paper