POLS 4000 – 01 Honors Seminar
Sunday 17:00 – 19:40

Professor: Sean McMahon, Ph.D.         Sept. – Dec. 2015
Office: 2017 HUSS
Office Hours: U 13:30 – 15:30 and W 10:30 – 11:30, or by appointment

Course Description and Objectives

POLS 4000 is the capstone seminar for the Department of Political Science’s Honors Program. The course affords students the opportunity to explore the discipline of political science and their place in it, while concomitantly developing a framework for a major research project.

This course, inter alia, familiarizes students with some of the enduring and emerging questions and debates in political science, introduces them to a range of authors, texts and ideas associated with critical social theory, and enables them to conduct theoretically informed research and write and present work to the highest undergraduate standard.

Course Expectations and Assignments

There are two sets of requirements for this course; one related to the course material proper, and the other to the student’s preparation of her/his honors research project. As regards the course material, students will make in-class presentations on assigned readings, submit reading reviews and write a conceptual essay.

First, this is the Honors Program seminar course. As such, a premium is placed on student attendance and a high level of participation in class discussions. All students will read thoughtfully and thoroughly the assigned readings and come to class prepared to discuss the readings. Moreover, they will also critically and constructively engage the works of their peers, be it in response to presentations on readings or of research reports, and during the student conference. Attending class, without participating or engaging peers, is not sufficient and will produce an extremely poor grade.

University policy stipulates that a student who misses more than the equivalent of three weeks of class meetings during a semester for any reason may be assigned a reduced grade for the course — including the grade of “F” — solely on the basis of inadequate attendance, regardless of excuse. Students who miss fewer than three weeks of class sessions may not be penalized on the grounds of attendance alone. Students are personally responsible for making up any academic tasks and assignments missed due to their absence.
This seminar is rooted in constructivist learning. Students will be the meaning makers and constructors of knowledge in this environment. They will make meaning and construct knowledge through extensive collaboration and peer-teaching and -learning. This means that students should expect the instructor to only occasionally weigh into discussion.

Second, in addition to regular class participation, students will make two presentations on all of the day’s assigned readings over the course of the term. These presentations are to be of a critical nature. Do not write descriptive summaries – you can assume the professor and other students have read the material and do not require a synopsis. The presentations are critical commentaries designed to 1) highlight salient aspects of the readings, 2) make inter-textual connections between the day’s texts as well as with other material encountered in the course, 3) reference and/or illuminate recent events, and 4) raise provocative questions for class discussion. Special attention should be paid to how the assigned material speaks to contemporary issues defining the discipline of political science. The presentations should be approximately 10-15 minutes in length and the questions will serve to guide the day’s engagement with the readings. Students must submit a written copy, typed and properly formatted, of their presentation to the instructor on the day of presentation.

Third, students will submit five reading reviews over the course of the semester. Each review will identify the author and title of the week’s readings as well as outline the theses, argumentation, analyses and/or conclusions of the texts. Ideally, students will relate the texts to other readings encountered throughout the course and/or within the larger discourse of political science. Each review is not to exceed two pages in length and is due before the start of the class when the selected readings are discussed. Students cannot submit reviews of readings on which they make presentations; presenting on a set of readings precludes a student from submitting a review of those same readings.

Fourth, students will write a final essay for POLS 4000. The essay must address the interrelated issues of the state of the discipline of political science and the student’s location or “fit” in the discipline. Within these broad parameters, the precise substance of the essay is at the student’s discretion. It is highly recommended that students discuss their essay with the instructor prior to writing. The essay is to be 20-30 pages in length (double-spaced with proper 12 point font and margins). It is due 29 November 2015.

Fifth, students will propose their thesis in a course conference of sorts. More specifically, students will author and present an overview of the major research project they intend to produce for the Honor’s Program. This overview will articulate the research question the student will answer, the student’s thesis – the answer to the research question, and a “roadmap” – an explanation of how the thesis will be executed. The “roadmap” will include an explanation of the thesis’ theoretical framework. The overview can be understood as an elaborate outline. The overview will also locate the project in the discipline of political science, outline the student’s research plan and identify the faculty supervisor. Project overviews will be presented and peer-reviewed on 8 November 2015.
In all of the written work for this course, students must use footnotes and provide a proper bibliography (in-text citations and “Works Cited” pages are not acceptable) in order to acknowledge their intellectual indebtedness. Use of the Chicago Manual of Style is mandatory. Consult the following link for a proper citation guide: www.chicagomanualofstyle.org. You will be penalized if you do not follow this format.

Finally, research conducted and used for POLS 4000 must be of an academic nature. Wikipedia, for example, is not an acceptable resource. Its content is not evaluated according to academic standards. If a student is in doubt as to the quality or academic relevancy of a particular resource, (s)he should contact the professor.

The American University in Cairo is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated and, in accordance with departmental policy, will result in the immediate assignment of a grade of “F” for the course.

Students are expected to be familiar with the standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with their rights and responsibilities and avoid any behavior which could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offense. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and will be treated as such.

**Grades, Assessment and Interaction**

Course grades will be assigned as follows:

1) Participation 20%
2) Presentations (2 X 10%) 20%
3) State of the Discipline Essay 35%
4) Thesis Proposal 15%
5) Reading Reviews (5 X 2%) 10%

The following scale will be employed in the assessment of student work:

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<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93+</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
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Two final notes. POLS 4000 is supported by a Moodle site. It can be accessed through the following URL: http://moodle.acuegypt.edu. Also, the professor does not use email. Email undermines the professor-student relationship, is heavily surveilled, distorts temporal balances and structures, atomizes communities and reduces productivity. All class related conversations will be had during the assigned office hours, which are extensive, or by appointment. Exceptions will be made only in case of emergency (smemahon@aucegypt.edu).

Required Texts

There are three required texts for this course:


All other assigned readings will be available through the course website. Inter-textual connections will be made regularly, and, as a result, students are required to bring all three assigned texts to class every week.

Schedule of Readings (note: this is a guideline and subject to change)

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings and Course Material</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 6</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Course overview and presentation sign up.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>References</td>
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<td>Nov. 8</td>
<td>STUDENT CONFERENCE</td>
<td>THESIS PROPOSALS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
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<td>Nov. 22</td>
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<td>Dec. 13</td>
<td>Restructuring Social Science?</td>
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