POIR Program: American Politics

Field Description

The POIR Program features a distinguished faculty in the field of American politics, whose work covers a broad range of topics, including voting behavior, race and ethnicity, political communication, political psychology, congressional politics, American political development, urban politics, public law, and judicial politics. Their work appears in the leading peer-reviewed journals, such as the *American Political Science Review, American Journal of Political Science*, and *Journal of Politics*, and academic presses, including the University of Chicago, Cambridge University, Oxford University, Stanford University, and University of Michigan presses. In recognition of their contributions to the field, they have won numerous prizes from the American Political Science Association, including the Woodrow Wilson Foundation Award for the best book in political science, Pritchett Award for best book in public law, the Swanson Prize for contributions in the field of political communication, the Race and Ethnicity’s Section’s award for best first book, and the Goodnow Award for lifetime achievement.

The intellectual hallmark of faculty in the American field is investigating political phenomena at the intersection of institutions (broadly conceived) and ordinary people. Neither strictly “behavioral” nor “institutionalist,” the faculty do not see their units of analysis as fixed. Instead, the strength of their work is based in the fact that it is substantively problem-driven while at the same time informed and enriched by broad concerns within democratic theory. In terms of methodology, no single approach predominates and scholars in the American field utilize a variety of approaches to collect data and assess the dynamics of the problems under study.

Given the multi-disciplinary nature of their work and the breadth of their substantive interests, the faculty seek creative and intellectually diverse students and help them develop the analytic tools needed to develop their interests and produce rigorous scholarship.

Core Faculty:

Jeb Barnes *
Ann Crigler
Howard Gillman
Christian Grose
Ange-Marie Hancock
Jane Junn
Mark Kann
Mat McCubbins
Michael Preston
Alison Dundes Renteln
Jeffery Sellers
Nicholas Weller
Janelle Wong

* Field Coordinator
Field Requirements

Overview.

Students are required to complete three courses in the field prior to taking the qualifying examination. All students must take a core sequence that consists of POSC 510 and 618, which are designed to reflect the faculty’s commitment to methodological pluralism and training its students to place their interests within the broader context of recurring empirical puzzles and normative concerns in American politics.

Students must also take a third course in the field consisting of either (a) a graduate seminar approved by the field or (b) a directed research seminar (POSC 590) developed in consultation with the student’s advisor and approved under the Program’s rules.

There is no language or methods requirement for the American field. Students are expected to develop the relevant language and methodological skills needed to read the literature critically, prepare for the qualifying examination, and pursue their research interests.

It should be stressed that these are the minimum requirements needed for students to take the qualifying examination. Students are strongly encouraged to take further courses in American politics, work with faculty to generate reading lists in their areas of interest, and develop a research design or substantive paper that can be presented to the core faculty in American Politics prior to their fifth semester.

Core Field Sequence

Every student in American politics will be required to take a core sequence that consists of two seminars. The first seminar will introduce students to various approaches to the study of American politics, such as rational choice, political psychology, behavioralism, and new institutionalism. It will then look at enduring problems and questions in American politics, such as representation, collective action, delegation, coordination problems, moral hazard, and institutional stability and change.

The second semester will build on this foundation by providing students an overview of key substantive areas of American politics, such as voting behavior, Congress, the Presidency, the courts, the bureaucracy, political parties, interest groups, the media and mass movements. The primary goals of this course are (a) to reinforce the competing approaches to studying American politics and enduring problems and questions examined in the first semester of the sequence and (b) introduce the students to classic works in the field.

Drafting and Grading of Qualifying Exams. Prior to the POIR Program’s examination dates, the field coordinator will solicit questions from members of the student’s guidance committee and other faculty in the American field. Exams will be graded by the student’s guidance committee in accordance with University rules.
Courses in American Politics Field

POSC 540: Law and Public Policy.
POSC 545: Critical Issues in Politics and Policy.
POSC 546: Seminar in Environmental Policy.
POSC 610: Seminar in Party Politics.
POSC 611: Seminar in Executive and Legislative Processes.
POSC 612: Seminar in Urban Politics.
POSC 619: Seminar in Supreme Court Politics.
POSC 621: Seminar in Public Law.
POSC 622: Seminar in Political Attitudes and Behavior.
POSC 623: Seminar in American Constitutional Development.
POSC 624: Seminar in American Constitutional Law and Theory.
POSC 652: Seminar in American Political Philosophy.

Reading List

The faculty will maintain a reading list to help students prepare for the qualifying exam. The field coordinator has the responsibility of maintaining and regularly updating the reading list in consultation with the field faculty.

Language Requirement

No language requirement. Exception will be that students will have taken the core methods sequence at a minimum prior to the exam. If American Politics is not the student’s primary field and language is required in the student’s primary examination field, the student must satisfy the relevant language requirement before taking the qualifying examinations.

Sample Program of Study

Year 1
Core theory course
Core methods sequence (POSC 500 & 600)
POSC 510
POSC 618
One other field exam course
Year 2:
Four more courses including American politics elective or POSC 590 directed research
Year 3:
Four courses to complete third field and elective