Instructor: Ian Turner  
*Course Day/time:* Tuesday: 9:00 – 11:50  
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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Bureaucracy is the institution (or, collection of institutions) in which Congressional policy pronouncements take concrete form. Even a policy clearly articulated by Congress is usually implemented by bureaucrats. Bureaucratic action is far-reaching and touches on basically all aspects of governmental policy and, in turn, citizen lives. For this reason, Congress, the president, courts, and interest groups all seek to influence bureaucracies. Moreover, bureaucrats are very rarely elected in the U.S. and are insulated by civil service protections from political demands from Congress. This raises a potential problem for democratic governance: are bureaucratic decisions compatible with democracy given that bureaucrats are unelected and insulated from the public? This question drives a large literature examining the role that bureaucracy plays in policy development, formation, and implementation with a particular focus on the interesting positive and normative concerns about American political institutions, their effects on policy, and the capacity to recognize, address, and solve public problems. For all of these reasons bureaucratic politics has been a fertile area of research on American political institutions.

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1 Most of this syllabus, with respect to structure, is borrowed from Justin Fox’s “Formal Models of Elections and Representation” course taught at WashU. Many thanks are owed to Justin for sharing his resources with me.

2 Of course, the emphasis need not be on the U.S. exclusively but in this course we will largely deal with literature in American politics.
This seminar provides an overview of this literature — the major substantive issues covered in American institutions literature on bureaucratic politics — and the theoretical and empirical tools commonly used to contribute to it. The goals of the seminar are to enable graduate students to contribute to this and related literatures themselves, and to make sense of the structures and activities that characterize bureaucracies’ involvement in the policymaking process. With these goals in mind the structure of the course is really two-fold. First, it provides a representative, though not even close to exhaustive, overview of the most prevalent and important themes in the study of bureaucratic politics (largely in political science and economics). Second, much of this literature has utilized game-theoretic modeling and/or sophisticated empirical modeling to explore different questions and issues facing bureaucracy, and we will spend a significant portion of time in the seminar breaking down the mechanics of articles. Thus, the course is simultaneously a concise survey of theories of bureaucratic politics and a skills-based seminar to help students develop the ability to model (formal or otherwise) political situations of interest to them.

**Prerequisites**

This is not a class on formal modeling. However, an important part of this literature employs formal models and the course will be more useful if you have a baseline level of familiarity with fundamental formal modeling techniques. Accordingly, while this course does not have formal prerequisites, I strongly recommend that all students that enroll have taken graduate-level game theory. Many, though not all, of the papers we discuss in depth in this course will employ game-theoretic argumentation (formal or not) and I will not spend much time in the course teaching basics of game theory that are covered in the first-year grad game theory course. Note that this does *not* mean that you ought to understand all the modeling in all of the papers on this syllabus ex ante.

**Course Materials**

Most of the course will involve reading published articles that are easily found online. I do recommend, however, as a general reference the book, “Formal Models of Domestic Politics” by Scott Gehlbach. There should be some available for sale in the bookstore or it is easily found online. This is a great reference to have for applied formal modeling. We will likely not engage the book directly in the course, but it’s good to have on your bookshelf. Additionally I am happy to recommend extremely good sociological or ethnographic books about (largely American) bureaucracy to those interested in delving deeper into the study of bureaucratic agencies.

**Course Requirements**

The grading will be done according to the following rubric:
Assignments will not be accepted late except in cases of University-recognized excuses. Each component of the grading rubric above is described in more detail below.

**Analytical summaries (2/5 of grade)**

You will write six short analytical summaries over the course of the semester. Each summary should not be longer than 4 pages (double-spaced, 12pt font) and focus on one class reading. Each summary should (1) identify the paper’s research questions; (2) provide a brief overview of the paper’s model; (3) identify the paper’s main results; and (4) explain the logic underlying key results with as little mathematical notation as possible. I will circulate an example of one that I wrote in grad school in a similarly organized course. The “meat” of each summary should be devoted to explaining the logic of the results. When writing the summary, think of your audience as a scholar who knows the literature, knows game theory, but hasn’t read the paper you’re reviewing very closely. Summaries are to be e-mailed to me (irtturner@tamu.edu) by noon the day before class. So, if you write a summary dealing with an article we will discuss on February 2nd you need to email it to me before 12:00PM on February 1st.

**Research prospectus (1/5 of grade)**

Your research prospectus is due at 5PM, Thursday May 12th and should be about 5 pages long, double spaced. We will schedule a special session of class where you will be given ten to fifteen minutes to present your prospectus followed by questions from your classmates and I.

Your research prospectus should consist of an extension of an existing model. Two potentially fruitful approaches are the following: (1) Begin with a question of interest, e.g., “Does increased transparency of policymaking lead to better public policy?”, and use an existing theoretical setup to address your question; or (2) take an existing paper, modify one of its key assumptions in an interesting manner, and explore how the key insights of the original paper are affected. The way to do this is by constructing a simple example that illustrates the primary effect of changing one of the original model’s assumptions. A third possibility, though I am not strongly endorsing this option, is to take a primarily empirical article we read and try to develop a formal model that leads

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3Statements like, “option A and option B” are fine, but don’t include equations. For a nice example of how to discuss a model with no math that still conveys a good idea of the model and its results see the introduction in Stephen Morris, 2001, “Political Correctness,” Journal of Political Economy 109:231-265.


to the implications of that article. An article of this sort will already have strong verbal theory (or I wouldn’t have chosen it) so this would be an exercise in formalizing a non-formal argument. Note that this option is not easy, and I often find it much more difficult than starting from scratch. In any case, we will meet to discuss the different options throughout the course.

The ultimate aim of this assignment is to get practice developing the “essential insight” that underlies a research paper. Students are required to meet with me no later than March 15th to discuss initial ideas about their research prospectus and to begin the conversation about what will constitute an acceptable prospectus.

**CLASS PARTICIPATION (2/5 OF GRADE)**

This is very likely the most important component of the course. First, you are expected to come to class prepared. This means that you have read, very closely, the articles assigned for the week. Further, this means that you should be able to discuss the articles in some detail as well as come prepared with questions, concerns, confusion, etc. related to the articles. This is really where the most learning in this course can occur. Aside from being prepared (which I really shouldn’t have to list for a graduate seminar), students will engage in class presentations of papers we read during the semester.

**Student presentations:** All students will be expected to present one to two papers over the course of the semester (the total number of presentations will depend on the number of students taking the course). To the extent possible, I will take student preferences into account when papers are assigned to everyone.

Each presentation should be roughly 60 minutes long. The presentation should have the following general structure: (1) The first couple minutes should be devoted to framing the question the paper is seeking to address; (2) the presenter should then go through the model’s setup in detail. Be sure to clearly articulate who the players are, their respective strategies, and the solution concept employed; (3) the presenter should then work through the paper’s main results on the white board/chalk board. Here the aim is not to reproduce every step of the paper’s proofs, but to give a deep sense of the model’s mechanics (this sometimes requires using figures, sometimes examining simplified variants of the model being discussed, etc.) and the general logic underlying the paper’s main results. By watching me work through the papers during the first few class meetings, what I’m looking for in presentations will become more concrete. *Presenters should meet with me before their presentation to discuss the details of their talk.*

**Readings and class format:** All readings are available online. For most weeks, we will cover two theoretical papers (though I reserve the right to add papers—theoretical, empirical, or otherwise—as I see fit). Typically, I’ll spend the first couple minutes at the start and end of class highlighting how the assigned papers connect to a larger literature and broader questions of interest in political
science and economics. Your analytical summaries will also help guide the discussion in these periods. We’ll devote roughly 75 minutes per paper.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, currently located in the Disability Services building at the Student Services at White Creek complex on west campus or call 979-845-1637. For additional information, visit [http://disability.tamu.edu](http://disability.tamu.edu).

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Plagiarism and/or academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. The Aggie Honor Code: “An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do.” As commonly defined, plagiarism consists of passing off as one’s own the ideas, words, writings, etc., which belong to another. In accordance with the definition, you are committing plagiarism if you copy the work of another person and turn it in as your own, even if you should have the permission of the person. Plagiarism is one of the worst academic sins, for the plagiarist destroys the trust among colleagues without which research cannot be safely communicated. If you have any questions regarding plagiarism, please consult the Aggie Honor System Office website ([http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor](http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor)) or the latest version of the Texas A&M University Student Rules, under the section “Scholastic Dishonesty.”

**COURSE OUTLINE**

The following outlines the general structure of the course in terms of topics to be covered and articles. Some weeks I may include extra reading for those interested. Note that this may change/evolve as the semester progresses. That means I reserve the right to alter the course outline at any point in time. Of course, you will receive appropriate notice should this occur. Note that there are too many topics listed to cover in the allotted time. This is purposeful. It leaves me (and you) some flexibility based on interests and how the course progresses. My suggestion for seminar purposes is to go through the required readings closely and skim the supplemental readings to get a sense of the “bigger picture.”

1. *Introduction/Course Overview*

   Required readings:

2. **Delegation I**

   Required readings:


   Supplemental readings:


3. **Delegation II**

   Required readings:


   Supplemental readings:


4. Political Origins of Bureaucratic Structure

Required readings:


Supplemental readings:


5. Information Transmission and Bureaucratic Structure

Required readings:


Supplemental readings:


6. Effects of Bureaucratic Structure

Required readings:
7. **Bureaucratic Preferences**

**Required readings:**


**Supplemental readings:**


**Supplemental readings:**


8. **Coalition Building and Bureaucratic Autonomy**

   Required readings:


   Supplemental readings:


9. **Bureaucratic Implementation**

   Required readings:


10. **Bureaucracy & Congress I**

    Required readings:


11. **Bureaucracy & Congress II**  
Required readings:


12. **Bureaucracy & Courts**  
Required readings:


Supplemental readings:


13. **Bureaucracy & The President/Executive Oversight**  
Required readings:


**Supplemental readings:**


14. **Bureaucracy & Interest Groups**

**Required readings:**


**Supplemental readings:**

- Just about any Susan Webb-Yackee article.
15. Bureaucracy & the Public (e.g., “street-level bureaucracy”)  
Required readings:  
  • Selections from Lipsky. 1980. *Street Level Bureaucracy*.  

16. The Politics of Appointments  
Required readings:  

Supplemental readings:  
  • David Lewis. 2008. *The Politics of Presidential Appointments*  

17. Final class: student presentations of research designs  
  • **Note:** Final research designs due by 12:00PM the Friday following this class period.