Course Description

In fields as diverse as economic history, applied economics, sociology, political science and political economy, the role of geography is of mounting interest. Geography seems to shape processes as diverse as factor accumulation and economic development, ethnic conflict, distributive conflicts, the design of constitutions, the mobilizational incentives of political parties, the dynamics of social protest, the preferences of voters, etc. The impact of geography also seems to be strongly conditioned by the territorial distribution of political preferences and key political institutions, such as electoral systems.

What is common across these topics is a new interest in the patterns of territorial concentration of these different factors. Understanding the origins and consequences of these patterns poses significant theoretical and methodological challenges across the social sciences, where researchers are only beginning to grapple with these issues. Theoretically, geography implies the introduction of a new dimension to the study of political and economic processes. Under what conditions does economic geography become salient? Through which mechanisms and under what conditions do the geographical patterns of economic development, unemployment, and inequality shape the preferences of relevant political actors on policies or institutional choices? How do different systems of preferences aggregation interplay with the geographic distribution of different types of voters? What is the relationship between geography and collective action? How do economic and/or political geography interact with other dimensions such as distribution, religion, or exposure to the international economy? These and other questions require new theoretical models and pose significant challenges to scholars in comparative politics and political economy. Methodologically, geography highlights the spatial dimension underpinning political processes and highlights the need to model spatial dependence over time and spatial interdependences across regions.

The course will proceed in four steps. First, we lay out some conceptual and methodological foundations. We introduce the general terms of the debate by drawing a comparison between “old” and “new” geography based analyses and outlining the main areas of interest in the subfield. Second, we will focus on the origins of geographical patterns of concentration/dispersion across a whole range of dimensions. Where, for instance, do geographical disparities come from? In this block, we will pay particular attention to the geography of development and economic growth. Third, we analyze the role of geography in shaping individual preferences and incentives to engage in politics, along with how elections serve to shape the representation of those preferences. Fourth and finally, we turn to the macro-level, with attention to how everything we’ve learned at the micro-level shapes aggregate outcomes such as state building and civil war.
This class is an experiment. We know of only one related class taught in any other political science department. Thus, we will approach these issues with a sense of experimentation and learning. We will be learning with you and hope to do less teaching than in a standard graduate course. Together, we will evaluate the ways in which economists, sociologists and political scientists are exploring the frontiers of this nascent field. Our jobs are two-fold: first to consume and think hard about the readings on the syllabus as a means to familiarize ourselves with the issues; second, each of us (yes ‘us’ means the professors too) will be writing an original research paper that contributes to this research frontier. As an incentive to write particularly excellent papers, we will be organizing a one-day mini-conference for the end of the semester, which will include a handful of academics from around the country. Each of us will present our semester’s work and have it pulled apart by each other and these distinguished outsiders. All of us are expected to circulate to the group a one-page description of the paper we intend to write by February 11th, 2009.

This course is designed with graduate students in mind. Advanced undergraduates with a background in economics and some statistics are welcome. We are happy to discuss ways to adjust the syllabus for undergrads to make the class more doable, but be aware that the demands will remain high.

REQUIREMENTS

• Presentations (20 percent). Each student will be responsible for presenting at least one critical discussion (not a summary!) of the weekly readings during the semester and leading discussion for that class. A two-page outline of the major points of his/her discussion will be circulated in advance to all members of the seminar. This outline must be circulated no later than the Tuesday before the seminar at 8 pm. In your presentation you might consider addressing some of the following questions: What are the central issues at stake in this literature? What are the principal arguments of the works under study? How does each relate to the debates in the field? What are the main theoretical or empirical strengths or weaknesses of these studies? How effectively do the works marshal empirical evidence in support of the arguments? What further work might still be done to resolve remaining scholarly disputes?

• Participation (20 percent). Class sessions will be conducted in a highly participatory seminar format. As the class will depend heavily on the quality of class participation, it is essential that members of the seminar attend all sessions, participate actively in class discussions, and complete the required readings prior to class. In order to facilitate discussion, we ask that you email us three questions/comments to each weeks’ readings by noon the day of class. We will then put all of the questions/comments together and email them to you as a group. You can raise questions about theory, method, point out conflicts between readings, develop links with previous weeks’ readings, whatever. These needn’t be long and detailed, but they also shouldn’t be a one-line question/comment.

• Final Research Paper (60 percent). You will write an original research paper of 20-25 pages that bears on the themes of the class. We would encourage you to talk with us about topics, methods, etc. early and well in advance of starting. Late papers will not be accepted.
POLICY

• No Extensions on Final Papers.
• Plagiarism and cheating are violations of academic integrity and thus violations of the Duke Community Standard. As specified by the Academic Integrity Council, such violations could result in a variety of disciplinary actions, including suspension or permanent dismissal from the University. For the purposes of this class, plagiarism will be defined as submitting a piece of work which in part or in whole is not entirely the student's own work without attributing those same portions to their correct source. If you are at all unsure as to what constitutes plagiarism, see this website: https://plagiarism.duke.edu/. I will report any perceived violation to the Office of Judicial Affairs for investigation.

PART I: FOUNDATIONS

Jan. 14: Conceptualizing Place and Space in the Social Sciences: The Role of Proximity, Networks and Diffusion


Recommended:


Jan. 21: Mapping spatial relationships using Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

2. Introduction to GIS Workshop with Gary Thompson. The workshop will take place at SSRI during class time.


Jan. 28: Modeling spatial relationships
2. Workshop with Michael Ward.

PART II: ORIGINS OF GEOGRAPHIC DISPARITIES

Feb. 4: Economic Concentration/Deconcentration and Development


Recommended:


Feb. 11: Cities and Urban Form

[One Page Paper Outline Due!]


Recommended:


¹ You also might check out Taylor’s response to this piece in the ASR.
Part III: Geography and Micro-level Politics

Feb. 18: Geography and Preferences: Self-sorting, Segregation and Preferences


Recommended:


Feb 25: Geography and Collective Action


Recommended:


March 4: Geography and Preference Aggregation: Parties and Elections


Recommended:

27. On second chambers see Gibson, Calvo, and Falleti (full cite available below, under April 5).

March 11: NO CLASS; SPRING BREAK

PART IV: Geography and Macro Political Economy

March 18: The Geography of State Formation


Recommended:
7. V.I. Lenin Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism, Moscow, Foreign Language Publication House, 1947
March 25: The Geography of State Breakdown: Conflict and Civil War

6. “Social Distance in Bosnia and the North Caucasus Region of Russia” Kristin M. Bakke, Xun Cao, John O'Loughlin, & Michael D. Ward

Recommended

April 1: Geography And Institutional Choices

Recommended:

April 8: Geography and Redistribution

**Recommended**


April 15: TBA FINAL WORKSHOP W/OUTSIDE SPEAKERS