Power in Theory and Practice
Spring 2018

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OVERVIEW

Those who study international politics for a living are certain about two facts: power is the defining concept of the discipline, and each scholar’s idiosyncratic definition of power is superior to everyone else’s. This lack of consensus is a problematic state of affairs. The most widely-cited definition is Robert Dahl’s: “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would otherwise not do.” Most scholars, however, cite Dahl’s definition only to criticize it. This problem has been compounded by the enormous gap between theoretical debates about power and efforts to develop concrete ways to measure and observe it.

The practical need for a better conceptual and empirical understanding of power should be obvious. In the decade since the 2008 financial crisis, there have been an extraordinary series of debates about whether the distribution of power has been rejiggered. Scholars and commentators have fiercely debated the relative power of the United States and China. Some argued that the 2008 financial crisis left the United States as still the most powerful actor in the world; others argue that it is now China. Public opinion polling shows that ordinary citizens are as divided as experts about these questions. Scholars and policymakers appear similarly split on Russia’s relative power. Others have argued that the nature of power itself has diffused so rapidly that no actor or concert of actors can credibly wield authority anymore.

The goal of this course is to confront these conceptual and empirical problems head-on, so as to get a better understanding of what power means, its myriad dimensions, how it is perceived over time, and how it is exercised by actors in world politics.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A note about the readings. This is a seminar course for Fletcher students. This means that I expect you to have done all of the readings in advance and that you are prepared to discuss them in class. Indeed, you will be expected to email me discussion
questions the morning of our class sessions. I place great importance on this: you will note that 20% of your grade is determined by your class participation. Read all of the assigned materials before class meets. I am aware that this is not the only course you will be taking this quarter, and I have really, really tried to keep the number of pages per week down. Scanning the syllabus, you will probably believe this claim to be insincere, but trust me, there is a lot that is being left out.

You will have two written assignments for this class. The first paper, due right before spring break, is a 2,000 word essay that defines and categorized who you think the great powers are in world politics. The second paper, due the last day of reading period, is a 2,500 word analytical essay that hypothesizes which components of the current liberal international order are most likely to endure through the year 2100.

All told, your grade in this course will be determined as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>First paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>Second paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
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THE READINGS

Required books


COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1 (1/23): Greetings and salutations and power and world politics

Drezner, *Theories of International Politics and Zombies*, all.


Week 2 (1/30): The historiography and definition of power


Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, all.


Baldwin, *Power and International Relations*, chapters two and three.

Week 3 (2/6): Is power in world politics different from domestic politics?


**Week 4 (2/13): Power and time**


Edelstein, *Over the Horizon*, introduction and chapter one.

**Week 5 (2/19, 7:00 PM: NOTE SPECIAL DATE/TIME): The fungibility of power**


**Week 6 (2/27): Operationalizing and measuring power**


**Week 7 (3/6): Power and international relations theory**


Baldwin, *Power and International Relations*, rest.

Edelstein, *Over the Horizon*, rest.


**Week 8 (3/13): Military power**


**3/14, 2:00 PM: FIRST PAPER DUE.**

**Week 9 (3/27): Economic power**


**Week 10 (4/3): Legal power**


Hathaway and Shapiro, *The Internationalists*, all.

**Week 11 (4/10): Soft power**


Week 12 (4/17): Power and non-state actors


Week 13 (4/24): Power, the end of the Cold War, and the present day

Sarotte, *1989*, all.


5/1, 2:00 PM: FINAL PAPER DUE