

**CSS 391: Senior Colloquium**  
**POLITICAL ECONOMY**  
**Fall 2020 WF 2:50-4:10 pm**

**Prof. Gil Skillman**  
**325 PAC x2359**

**Hours: Th 1:30-3**  
**and by appointment.**

Welcome to your senior colloquium! This course seeks to build on some of the ideas you've been working with in your last two years in the CSS while introducing some new ways to think about these ideas. In response to the difficulties created by the pandemic, this course will be taught in "hybrid" mode: all meetings with the full class will occur on Zoom, but I plan to meet with individual students or groups (about which more below) in person. My hope is that we can hold the full-class sessions during the traditional time slots for the senior colloquium (see top of page), because real-time interaction is central to what makes this course work. However, we should all be prepared to improvise depending on the situation created by the pandemic.

In this course we will attempt to develop insights concerning the logic of social interactions, particularly those pertaining to the intersection of "political" and "economic" phenomena. The course will have three segments or learning modes. The first segment, corresponding to part I of the syllabus, will be based on your participation in, and reflection on, a series of social interaction experiments mediated by an online platform provided by MobLab, to which you will all have access. There will be readings, but these will be assigned after you have played two rounds of the online interaction, an "in-class" round played among students in the colloquium and an "asynchronous" round played against a pre-programmed bot at a time of your choosing. There will also be "opportunities for focused thought" (OFTs) in which you are asked to apply what you've learned from the online interactions and the readings.

The second segment, corresponding to parts II and III of the syllabus, is constructed along traditional lines featuring full-class discussions of pre-assigned readings, but ideally building on insights derived from the first segment of the class. Here we hope to develop new ways of thinking about such familiar concepts as norms, institutions, rights, markets, (nation-)states and social developments such as liberalization and democratization. There will also be some OFT exercises in this segment of the course.

The third segment, taking up the last part of the course, will feature presentations by groups organized by topics in political economy. These groups have typically been organized along geographical lines (e.g., Northeast Asia, South America, Middle East, etc.), but we can discuss other bases for defining groups by topic. It is expected that the presentations will build on the material studied earlier in the semester.

Broad-based student involvement in the online interactions and class discussions is essential to making the course work, so class participation will count for 10% of the course grade. Regular attendance is strongly encouraged. Absences necessitated by medical or family emergencies (corroborated by your class dean) are of course completely excused. If you do choose to attend class, *please show up on time*, as late arrivals impair focus and disrupt the flow of discussion.

Course evaluation will also be based on the OFTs (40%), a group presentation (25%), and a 15-20 page term paper based on each student's component of the group presentation (25%). Group presentations will take place in the last two weeks of class, during which the four regular class periods will be supplemented with a class outside the regular slot. (If necessary, the final group presentation will occur during the final exam period for this course.) Final papers are due on Friday, December 12<sup>th</sup> by 6 pm. You have an automatic extension to Saturday, December 13<sup>th</sup> no later than 6 p.m., without penalty. If I receive your project any time between Saturday at 6 pm and Sunday at noon, it receives a five-point penalty. After that there will be an additional penalty of one point off per hour or fraction thereof. Papers should be uploaded to Moodle.

**Required Texts:**

Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship & Democracy*  
Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*  
Kaushik Basu, *Prelude to Political Economy*

All of these texts will be available for purchase at Broad Street Books. Additional readings will be made available via the course Moodle page. I reserve the right, with due notice, to add required texts as deemed appropriate for the evolving needs of the course.

**Disability Resources and Accommodations:** Wesleyan is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible. If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860/685-5581 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

**Course Outline**

**I. A Framework for the study of social interactions**

**A. Explaining and assessing social outcomes**

Basu: Preface, 1; Introduction; Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World*: 2;  
Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 1-2

**B. Simultaneous and sequential single-choice interactions**

(Readings to be announced)

**C. Sequential multi-choice and repeated simultaneous-choice interactions**

(Readings to be announced)

## **D. Evolutionary social processes**

Basu: 4.5; Skillman, “Equilibrium in Rational Choice and Evolutionary Games”

## **II. Articulation of social structures**

### **A. Social Norms**

Basu: 4; Elster, *The Cement of Society*: 3; Seabright, 2-5; Stout, “Social Norms and Other-Regarding Preferences”; Sacco, “On the Dynamics of Social Norms”; Bicchieri, *Rationality and Coordination*: 6; Bowles and Gintis, *A Cooperative Species*, 3; Strimling and Eriksson, “Regulating the Regulation: Norms about Punishment”

### **B. Institutions**

*Why Nations Fail*, 4, 6; Aoki, *Toward a Comparative Institutional Analysis*: 1, 7; Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*: 2,3; Ostrom, *Understanding Institutional Diversity*: 1, 3; Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy*, 5,6

### **C. Property, contract, and markets**

Haddock, “Force, Threat, Negotiation: The Private Enforcement of Rights”; Aoki, *Toward a Comparative Institutional Analysis*: 2; Dixit, *Lawlessness and Economics*: 3, 5.1-5.2; Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy*, 3; Seabright, 6; Milgrom *et al.*, “The Role of Institutions in the Revival of Trade;” *Why Nations Fail* 3

### **D. Emergence of the state**

Basu: 8; Michael Taylor, *The Possibility of Cooperation*, 6; Aoki, 3; Dixit, 5.4; John Gledhill, “Introduction: the comparative analysis of social and political transitions” in *State and Society: The Emergence and Development of Hierarchy and Political Centralization*; Nozick, Chs. 5-6; *Chieftoms: Power, Economy and Ideology*, Chs. 1-2; Cohen, “Introduction” and Service, “Classical and Modern Theories of the Origin of the State”; Carneiro, “Political Expansion as an Expression of Competitive Exclusion”

**Group formation and individual topic proposals due Friday, October 30th**

### **III. Development of social structures**

#### **A. Rule of Law and the Modern State**

Basu, 5; Barry Weingast, “The Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law”; Brennan and Buchanan, *The Reason of Rules*: 1-2

#### **B. Liberalization and Capitalism**

Heilbroner, *The Making of Economic Society*: 2, 3; Seabright, *The Company of Strangers*: 8-12; ; Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*: 2, 54-66; Riker and Weimer, “The Political Economy of Transformation: Liberalization and Property Rights;” *Why Nations Fail*: 5, 7-10.

#### **C. Democratization**

Rueschemeyer, Stephens & Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, Chs. 1-3; Acemoglu and Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*; Boix, *Democracy and Redistribution*; Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*: 16-18; Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*: 2, 66-99; Dunning, *Crude Democracy*: 3-4.  
Arrow, “A Difficulty in the Concept of Social Welfare”; Elster, “The Market and the Forum: Three Varieties of Political Theory”;

**Group Presentations: November 18<sup>th</sup> through December 4<sup>th</sup>.**