Research Seminar: Public Participation, Democracy, and the Environment

Objectives: The seminar aims to assess critically the essential, core literature in public participation and its relations with theorizing about the nature of democracy. As such, it is both an inquiry into the current state-of-the-art and an identification of promising research directions. The topic is framed by an explicit consideration of normative theories of democracy, which will occupy the first six weeks of effort. An assessment of the state of empirical work on participation will be included, but this will necessarily be more limited in scope. The course will also introduce participants to the collaborative research process since the seminar will include a research track in the second half of the course aimed at exploring a research problem collaboratively and preparing the first draft of a manuscript for publication. All good work in this field, of which there is little, is theoretically anchored, so the interplay between theory, empirical research, and normative inferences will have center stage throughout the seminar.

Format: During the first seven weeks, sessions will intensively explore the literature and current state of knowledge. Each participant will be expected to chair one of these seminar sessions identifying themes, critiquing approaches and arguments, and leading the discussion. The instructor will provide his perspective and a summary at the end of each seminar session. The second half of the course will have two tracks: a continuation of the assessment of literature and a research track in which seminar participants identify a joint research problem, design, and conduct research tasks, present and debate findings, and develop a collaborative manuscript aimed at publication. Some extra class time may be needed during the first two weeks of December.

Expectations and Evaluation: Five short written paper associated with seminar discussions will be required. In addition, participants will each chair and direct a seminar session. Each participant will also be part of the collaborative research effort, conducting conceptual or empirical research, and will be responsible for writing a portion of the joint manuscript and critiquing the work of others. The seminar grade will reflect the instructor judgment of the quality of seminar participation, the five position papers, the handling of the leadership seminar session, and the contribution to the collaborative research effort.

SCHEDULE AND READINGS

August 30: Introduction; Overview of Seminar
Resource: Throughout the course, you may wish to consult the 35-page bibliography on citizen participation prepared by the Workshop on Social and Political Theory at Indiana University. Still far from comprehensive or complete, it is nonetheless a useful research tool. Check it out.

September 6: No class (Labor Day)

September 13: Theories of Democracy: Classical and Madisonian Conceptions
Readings: The politics of Aristotle, Tr. Ernest Barker,
(a) The theory of citizenship and constitutions, 92-110.
(b) The principles of oligarchy and democracy, and the nature of distributive justice, 116-137.
(c) Actual constitutions and their varieties, 154-202.
Madison, The Federalist No. 10.

**Assignment 1:** In not more than 2-3 pages, compare and contrast, in list form, the key assumptions and elements of the classical and Madisonian conceptions of democracy, including the role of public participation.

**September 20:** *Elitist Theories of Democracy and their Critique*

**Readings:**

**September 27:** *Participation in Non-Democratic Settings*

**Readings:**
- Paulo Friere. 1970. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*
- Saul Alinsky. 1969. *Reveille for radicals*
- M.K. Gandhi. 1951. *Non-violent resistance*
- C. Wright Mills. 1956. *The power elite*

**Assignment 2:** Select one of these classic critical works on participation. Prepare a 4-5 page essay in which you (1) characterize the concept of democracy implicit in the author’s work, and (2) elucidate the place of political participation as it relates to that conception. Which underlying assumptions are most flawed? How consistent is the view of participation and the conception of democracy? Justify your positions.

**October 4:** *Culture and Democracy*

**Readings:**
- Alexis de Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Read selectively and as much as you can. This is an extraordinarily insightful work into democracy American-style and justifiably a classic.

**October 11**

**GUEST SPEAKER**

**October 18:** *Dialogic Theories of Democracy*

**Readings:**


**Assignment 3:** Do the dialogic theories of democracy add anything essentially new to previous theoretical writings? In a 4-5 page paper, argue either side of this question. If in the affirmative, state specifically what these new departures or extensions of theory are. If in the negative, explain why the perception exists among some that this is a markedly different approach.

**October 25:**

**Social Capital and the Writings of Robert Putnam**

Readings:


**Assignment 4:** State your definition of social capital, justify it, and provide a set of indicators for identifying and measuring social capital (3 pages maximum).

**November 1:**

**Empirical Research: What Do We Know About Participation**

Readings:


**INITIAL DISCUSSION OF CANDIDATE RESEARCH PROBLEMS.**

**November 8:**

**Institutional Mechanisms and Approaches**

Readings:

- J.L. Creighton et al., eds. 1998. Public involvement and dispute resolution. 2 vols. Scan and read selectively. A very extensive recent compendium, much drawn from participation programs of the Corps of Engineers, by one of the leading practitioners.


**SELECTION OF SEMINAR RESEARCH PROBLEM; ASSIGNMENT OF RESEARCH TASKS**

November 15: Evaluating Success/Lessons Learned

Readings:


Assignment 5: Prepare a set of normative criteria for evaluating the success of public participation programs based on your work in this course, not to exceed 10 criteria, with an elaborating paragraph for each. In a short (2-3 pages) accompanying statement, explicitly shows the links between the criteria and normative democratic theory. Entire paper not to exceed 5-6 pages. Be prepared to defend your judgment.

**RESEARCH PROGRESS AND ISSUES: DISCUSSION**

November 22: Risk, Trust, and Participation

Readings:


December 6: No class

December 13: **DRAFT RESEARCH TASK WRITE-UPS PRECIRCULATED; SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS. STRATEGY FOR MANUSCRIPT PREPARATION**