Course Description

This course is an intensive graduate-level introduction to the study of bureaucratic organizations through organization theory (in political science, in sociology and in economics). The course focuses upon government agencies, particularly those at the federal level of government in the United States. I have chosen this focus because it reflects my area of relative specialization. It is not necessarily the case that the readings, narratives and theoretical principles discussed in this course apply to bureaucracies in other geographical, cultural or historical settings. I have attempted to include relevant readings from other historical periods, from other nations and cultural contexts, and from “local-level” bureaucratic institutions. These include the evolution of English, Prussian and Ottoman bureaucracy, the contemporary operations of public agencies in Japan, Sweden, France and other nations. Still, the limitations of the following syllabus and the course undoubtedly remain.

My aim is to leave the graduate student individually, and the class collectively, with four “products” from the course: (1) a familiarity with several different theoretical approaches to studying bureaucratic organizations, (2) a sound knowledge of the parameters of the historical development and operation of bureaucracy in the United States, (3) a good sense of “cutting edge” scholarship on bureaucratic politics, and (4) a research idea (matured more or less) on which the student can work further, with an eye toward maturation and publication. For this reason, this course is quite reading-intensive and will require a final research paper for credit.

I do not intend this course to substitute fully for (a) courses in organization theory and/or principal-agent theory, (b) courses in public management, or (c) courses on bureaucracy in economic, social or religious settings. Still, it is my hope that much about organization theory, public management and non-government bureaucracies can be learned from taking this course.
The class will meet officially fourteen times, at which I will present a lecture-based survey of the readings and relevant theoretical materials. By resorting to lecture, I do not intend to limit student participation; indeed I hope the opposite. Questions and spontaneous or scheduled discussions are very much the intent. The lecture will simply provide a structure for discussion.

In addition, I will at several junctures during the semester hold a “break-out” session for particularly technical readings such as stochastic models of organizations and game-theoretic models. These will be scheduled at the mutual convenience of the professor and the students, and none of these sessions will be in any way mandatory.

Requirements: I will require consistent and informed participation, including a familiarity with all of the required readings. Five or six times during the semester, I will require a short paper (2-3 pages) and/or a problem set. I hope to keep the technical material sufficiently accessible so that the problem sets can be completed without extensive new study of mathematics, stochastics or game theory. In addition, I will also require a final research paper in progress from graduate students taking the course for credit. My hope is less that the student produces a “completed” research paper than a theoretical argument (interpretive, inductive or deductive) and a detailed program for its empirical assessment (historically, statistically, or otherwise). Preliminary results would be welcomed but not required. I expect such papers to be 25-30 pages in length.

Readings:

The following books are required for the course. Copies are available at the Harvard Coop, and you may also purchase your own through other means. To my awareness all of these books should be available in paperback form. Apologies for assigning my own book; for what it’s worth, I waived all royalties with Princeton University Press on the first 1,000 copies (though now it has sold enough that I get royalty checks). I'll treat the class to a dinner or something with any proceeds realized from these sales.


**Articles and Chapters**: Other materials are available through the electronic journal services offered through the Harvard University Library [J-STOR], or available via packet [available at the Coop].

**Schedule of Lectures, Readings and Technical Break-Out Sessions**

**Foundational Theory (2 weeks)**

*Classic Organization Theory*

Weber, “Bureaucracy” and related essays on discipline and charismatic domination, pp. 196-266 in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. As background, it would also help to have an understanding of Weber’s two seminal essays, “Politics as a Vocation” and “Science as a Vocation.”

March and Simon, *Organizations*, Chapters 1 and 2.


**Hierarchical Theories and Principal-Agent Theories:**


Cultural and Reputational Theory:


Crozier, The Bureaucratic Phenomenon, Introduction, and Chapters Six and Seven.


Carpenter, The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy, Introduction and Chapter One, Conclusion. Skim sections on organizational reputation.


Emergence of Bureaucracy in Great Britain, continental Europe and the Mediterranean, and the United States (2 weeks)

Note: This segment not to be confused with the massive literature on the emergence of the “state” in these nations, although there are overlaps. See Theda Skocpol, States and Social Revolutions (Cambridge, 1979) for a classic and informative argument about state formation.

• Also, for further reading, see Aylmer’s books on Civil Service during the Republic and under Charles II.


Daniel Baugh, *British Naval Administration in the Age of Walpole* (Princeton, 1965) [Selections, packet]


• Optional background reading:

*Federalist* essays (relevant ones to executive and administration).


• Background and a much more extensive argument in: John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).
• See also: Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick, *The Age of Federalism.*
Leonard D. White, selections from *Federalists, Jeffersonians, Jacksonians, The Republican Era*. [Selections, packet.] Also available on reserve.
- Background: Sidney Aronson.

Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State*, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2. [text, required]


D. Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy*, Chapter 2. [text, required]

Optional background reading:
- Scott C. James, *Presidents, Parties and the State* (Cambridge, 2000).

**Bureaucratic Behavior: Learning, Culture and Structure (4 weeks)**

**Behavior and Culture (1-2 weeks):**


Crozier, *Bureaucratic Phenomenon*, Chapters 8, 9 and 11.

Additional Readings for this segment, of particular interest to students of government organization and the U.S. federal bureaucracy:


**Learning and Information-Processing (1-2 weeks):**

Simon, *Administrative Behavior*, Chapters 3-6, 10, 12.


**BREAK-OUT SESSION: STOCHASTIC MODELS OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING AND SEARCH (prob 2 hours)**

Organizational Structure, Redundancy and Bureaucratic Arrangements (1 week):

Hierarchy: Miller, *Hierarchical Dilemmas*, Parts II and III.

**BREAK-OUT SESSION: STOCHASTIC MODELS OF REDUNDANCY (prob 2 hours)**
Policymaking, Rulemaking and Bureaucratic Autonomy (2 weeks)

Carpenter, Daniel P. *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy*, Introduction and Conclusion, Chapters 4, 5, and 8.

Terry M. Moe, “Political Control and the Power of the Agent,” unpublished manuscript, Department of Political Science, Stanford University.


Kerwin, *Rulemaking*, passim.


Other:


The Creation and Termination of Agencies, and Appointments/Staffing (1 week)


Carpenter and Lewis, “Political Learning from Rare Events: Poisson Inference, Fiscal constraints and the Lifetime of Bureaus,” *Political Analysis* 12 (3) (Summer 2004) 202-235. [offprints provided]


McCarty, “The Appointments Dilemma,” *AJPS* July 2004. [e-journal or instructor will provide]


**Delegation and the Theory of Political Control (1 week)**


**BREAK-OUT SESSION: FORMAL MODELS OF DELEGATION** (prob 2 hours)

Earlier work (not required):


**External Control of Bureaucracy (Empirical Studies of Political Control) (1 week)**


Carpenter, Adaptive Signal Processing, Hierarchy and Budgetary Control in Federal Regulation.” *American Political Science Review* (June 1996) [J-STOR]; For another look at the data, examining a different hypothesis, see Charles R. Shiman, “Political Regimes and the FDA,” *APSR* (November 2004).


**BREAK-OUT SESSION: COMMON PROBLEMS AND ISSUES IN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF POLITICAL CONTROL** (prob 1 hour, maybe more)

**Background and Optional:**

**Military and Intelligence Bureaucracy (1 week)**


Niall Ferguson, *Empire*, chapter on governance of India.


*Pentagon Papers*, selections


**Others, not required [ask Tim Chafos]:**


Other Non-U.S. Cases (1 week)


Other (optional):


Nice comparison of U.S. and Sweden in occupational safety regulation.