Public Policy 369:  
Federalism and Decentralization  
Spring 2005  
Thursdays, 3:00-5:50 pm

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Description

From the federalist/anti-federalist debate of the U.S. founding to the current wave of decentralization in developing countries, this course analyzes the theory and practice of federalism, or multi-tiered governance. Drawing on literature at the intersection of political science and economics, we focus on the allocation of power across tiers of government and its consequences for policy outcomes. Special attention will be devoted to fears of and protections against an overreaching national government, competition among lower-tiered governments, the distinct problems of political accountability when jurisdictions overlap, and the causes and consequences of increasing decentralization. We begin by building political and economic theories of federalism, and quickly move to empirical studies of policymaking, examining cases from around the world.

Texts

There is one required book for the course:


All other assigned readings are available electronically on the course website, which can be found at https://chalk.uchicago.edu, or on e-reserve at Regenstein.

Requirements

Write six reaction papers: For six weeks of your choosing, write a short (less than one page) reaction paper. For each reading of that week, your reaction paper should describe one issue or question that you would like to discuss in class, and briefly explain why your issue/question is important. Reaction papers are due no later than noon on the day of class.
Participate actively: This is a seminar; there are no lectures. As such, each student’s attendance, preparation, and participation are essential for the course to be successful. You will receive a midterm and a final grade for class participation.

Lead a weekly discussion: Each student will choose one week to be a discussion leader. The role of the discussion leader is to be the “big thinker” for the week, taking a broad view and considering the relationships among the assigned readings. The discussion leader should start class with a brief (10-15 minute) introduction, suggesting a set of questions for the class to consider. In addition, the discussion leader is responsible for reviewing the reaction papers submitted by classmates and identifying common questions that we should address as a group, especially points of confusion in the reading. As discussion leader, you are also responsible for the supplemental readings for the week (if any), and I may call upon you to briefly summarize these readings for the class. If more than one student signs up to be a discussion leader for the same week, the group should collaborate. The discussion leader(s) must meet with me no later than the day before class to review the agenda.

Write two short policy analysis papers or one long research paper: Option 1: Write two short (6-8 page) papers using the concepts and readings from the course to analyze a contemporary or historical policy problem. Option 2: Write a significant (15-20 page) research paper. Ph.D. students must choose option 2. Other students may choose option 2 only with my permission. In either case, students doing option 2 must have their paper topics approved by me no later than the fifth week of class.

Course Grading

Your final grade for the course will be determined as follows:

- Reaction papers = 15%
- Overall participation = 30%
- Leading discussion = 15%
- Policy/research paper(s) = 40%.

Reading Schedule

Class 1, March 31  Introduction to the Course

Class 2, April 7  U.S. Federalism and the Constitutional Debate


  - Madison’s Letter to Washington (pp. 32-34)
  - The Speeches of Patrick Henry (pp. 207-216, 228-236)
  - The Pennsylvania Minority (pp. 237-248)
  - Federal Farmer October 8 & 9, 1787 (pp. 262-269)
  - Brutus (pp. 270-287, 298-304)


**Class 3, April 14**  
The Commerce Clause and Judicial Review


**Class 4, April 21**  
Contemporary Theories of Federalism and Policymaking


**Class 5, April 28  Political Accountability in Federal Systems**


**Class 6, May 5  Fiscal Federalism in Action**

**Class 7, May 12  The Politics of Decentralization**


**Class 8, May 19  Races to the Bottom: Welfare and Environmental Regulation**


**Class 9, May 26  Federalism and Economic Development**


**Class 10, June 2  Designing Federalism**