Overview
This seminar invites Ph.D. students to explore the interplay of democratic politics, social inequalities, and public policy in the United States today. The course is designed around three core agendas. First, it provides an opportunity to investigate the complex ways that democratic politics, public policies, and social inequalities shape one another. Second, it invites us to pursue a deeper dialogue between political theory and empirical research and to seek out creative and fruitful ways to work across this divide. Third, it challenges participants to develop clear positions on how we should understand and evaluate the current practice of democracy in America and its relation to social inequalities and public policies.

Democracy, Inequality, and Public Policy is neither a “political theory” course nor an “American politics” course, as these labels are sometimes narrowly applied. For example, we will not conduct close textual readings of canonical theorists of democracy (ancient, modern, or contemporary), nor will we dig deeply into empirical literatures that analyze, say, the workings of U.S. political institutions. Instead, we will try to draw theoretical and empirical writings into dialogue around a series of key analytic concepts, such as power, justice, care, democracy, representation, participation, citizenship, social control, social construction, neoliberalism, paternalism, and so on. In each case, we will ask (1) how key normative and explanatory concepts can be clarified and contested by studies that pay close attention to the concrete operations of politics and policy and (2) how critical engagements with normative and explanatory concepts can help us develop more interesting and important empirical studies of politics and policy.

Class Meetings
The course will be structured as an advanced research and writing seminar. At most class meetings, I will pose some discussion questions and present brief lecture material on key concepts and historical details. In the main, though, I expect our meetings to emphasize conversation and student engagement. As you complete your readings each week, I hope you will think about how you want us to spend our time together. Like most Ph.D. seminars, this course has a lengthy reading list designed to encompass contrasting perspectives and provide students with a solid intellectual foundation for future work. Our seminar meetings cannot and should not strive to address all the readings in any significant detail, nor should we feel bound by the readings when deciding what issues are most worth our time as a group. Class meetings should complement our independent work with the readings by offering a forum for dialogue on issues that we find particularly important, challenging, and promising. Here, as in scholarly dialogue more generally, it is your responsibility to make sure that the conversation does not bypass the issues that you consider most important. Please do all that you can to improve the quality of our discussions and to make sure that your interests and questions get addressed. Class participation will count as 20 percent of your seminar grade.

Critical Essays
During weeks 3 through 14, two students will write brief critical essays in response to the assigned readings.
1. Your critical essay should not be a “personal reaction paper,” nor should it be a summary of the readings. Rather, you should try to (1) isolate an important concept, theme, question, or disagreement in the readings, (2) clarify its meaning and significance, (3) present a critical analytic perspective on it, and (4) do so in a way that prepares the ground for a fruitful seminar discussion. You will be responsible for a critical essay three times during the semester, and you should treat it as a significant course assignment. Your essay should be approximately two pages single-spaced and should be posted to the class email list as an attachment no later than 24 hours before our class meeting. Everyone will be responsible for reading the two critical essays before we meet the following day.

2. At each class meeting, one or two students will be assigned to the role of commentator. The commentator will read the critical essays with extra care and prepare brief comments to deliver at the start of class. In your role as commentator, please do not summarize the posted essays or assigned readings. Rather, you should use your time to respond to the essays written by your two colleague. You might elaborate on them in some way, question their assumptions, present counterarguments, or use them as a basis for developing a discussion question. Commentators will not be asked hand in a written document. Commentator’s remarks should be 5-8 minutes in length, and cannot exceed 10 minutes. Each student will serve as a commentator twice during the semester.

You are responsible for keeping up with the due dates for your critical essays and commentaries. These activities will count as 20 percent of your seminar grade.

Two final comments on the class email list. First, please bear in mind that the list is a public academic forum. You should follow the same writing standards that you would expect to encounter in other academic settings. Second, I invite you all to use the email list for any discussions you consider relevant to the course. Announce upcoming events, start an exchange on relevant current events, continue a discussion from our last seminar or start a discussion for our next one, ask for help (“Can anyone suggest a good reading on…”). The email is yours to take advantage of or ignore.

**Major Paper**

Students in this course are expected to research and write one major seminar paper. The paper can be on any topic of your choosing, so long as it is relevant to the course. The length and form of the paper should be suitable for presentation at an academic conference and, eventually, submission to a scholarly journal. Beyond these criteria, you should feel free to pursue any type of empirical and/or theoretical project that interests you. You are welcome to meet with me to discuss plans for your seminar paper at any time, but you must do so no later than February 26. Students who are entering the dissertation stage are welcome to substitute a dissertation proposal (including a research design) for this assignment, so long as the dissertation topic is relevant to the course and you meet with me to discuss your plans no later than February 26.

Unless prior arrangements have been made, late papers will be penalized one unit immediately, and then again for each 48 hours after the due date/time. For example, an “A” paper will be lowered to an “A-” if turned in after the due date/time, and then to a “B+” 48 hours after the due date/time.

**Grades**

Essays/Commentaries (20%), Seminar Participation (20%), Seminar Paper (60%)

**Readings**

The reading assignments for this course consist mostly of journal articles and selected book chapters. All these readings will be available in pdf format on the course website. In addition, there is one required book to purchase for the course.

REASING SCHEDULE

I. Political Theory, Empirical Analysis, and Policy Practice

1. Democracy, Inequality, and Public Policy: Normative-Empirical Dialogues
   January 21

2. Power: Exploring a Key Concept in the Study of Inequality, Policy, and Politics
   January 28

3. Justice, Care, and Democracy: Aligning and Enacting Normative Commitments
   February 4

4. Citizen Participation and Democracy: Promises and Challenges
   February 11
II. Three Frames for the Analysis of Inequality, Policy, and Politics

5. Social Citizenship
February 18

6. Social Construction
February 25

7. Social Control
March 4

III. The American Polity Transformed?

8. Organizations, Inequalities, and American Democracy
March 11

9. The State’s New Look I: Globalization and Neoliberal Governance
March 25

10. The State’s New Look II: Paternalist Governance, Enforcement, and Custody
April 1
IV. Citizens and the Politics of Inequality

11. Quiet Citizens: Why So Little Outcry as the Rich Pulled Away from the Rest?  
April 8

April 15

13. Democratic Citizenship in Decline?  
April 22

April 29

V. Reflections on Our Role

15. What Role Should Scholars Play?
May 5