

POSC/WOMS 406: LGBT* POLITICS FALL 2020 SYLLABUS

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Politics is, fundamentally, about *power* — about “who gets what, when, and how” as Harold Lasswell once put it. The central goal of this course is to understand what (frequently disliked) minority groups are able to get out of a majoritarian political system, and when and how they do so. We will draw on theories and research about American politics in general to make sense of the particular outcomes of the LGBT rights movement. And, in turn, we’ll use the specific case of LGBT politics over the past sixty years to learn more about the general patterns of politics in American democracy.

The course is split into two halves. The first half looks at LGBT politics and social movement strategies. We’ll follow LGBT groups from the 1950s to the 2000s to help answer broader questions about social movements. When do groups form to fight for their rights? What mobilizes potential members to join? How do movements organize and how does that affect their odds of success?

The second half looks at LGBT politics as it plays out in representative democracy. We’ll explore the external factors that affect the success of politically oppressed groups. When and how do politicians represent marginalized communities? How does party and interest group competition shape policy toward those groups? What explains majority opinion towards minority rights?

Learning outcomes

As a result of successfully completing this class, students will be able to

- Describe, explain, and compare major academic theories about how social movements achieve success in majoritarian democracies
- Describe and analyze major turning points in LGBT* politics since World War Two
- Analyze empirical evidence and communicate their conclusions effectively to others

Teaching and learning during a pandemic

Although it is tempting to pretend that this is a normal class in a normal semester, we all know that's not true. I am fully committed to making sure that you can get whatever you were hoping to get from this class. I think the most important thing we can do to facilitate that is to be open and honest with one another. If you are experiencing challenges of any kind preventing you from learning, reach out straight away. I *promise* I never think any less of students or penalize them for asking for help. I am good at finding solutions to problems, and am happy to help. But to do that I need to know that there is a problem, so touch base when there is.

On the flip side, I hope that you will also cut me and your classmates some slack too. We are all trying to do our best in a pretty unpredictable situation. I'll do the same thing I expect you to: if I have to make changes to the course, or can't meet some deadline I promised, I will let you know. Basically, let's be kind to one another and try to make our time together a pleasant one.

Grades

Your final grade for the class will be calculated on the basis of your performance in the following areas:

- **Individual quizzes (25% total).** These are short learning activities designed to boost your understanding of the assigned material and to further your analysis skills. You should expect one of these per module. Your two lowest quiz scores from the semester will be automatically dropped from your grade. Unless otherwise noted, quizzes for each module are due by Sunday at 11.59pm.
- **Collaborative assignments (25% total).** These are more applied exercises, which will be completed as a combination of individual and team work. I am well aware that group work has a negative reputation for many students, and have designed these to ameliorate many of the problems associated with such tasks. Your lowest two scores from the semester will be automatically dropped from your grade. Unless otherwise noted, the assignment for a module is due by Sunday at 11.59pm.
- **Exams (50% total).** Each half of the course will also have a take-home, open-book exam that you will have a week to complete. More detail on these will be given throughout the course.

Course policies

- **Absences.** I am committed to being flexible and making sure that you can complete the course to the best of your ability. Some absences are going to be inevitable this semester. I ask that you be pro-active and contact me ASAP. You do not need to have an official excuse, nor do you need to go into detail about the reasons for your absence: just let me know so that I can help.
- **Late submission of assignments.** One of the challenges of online courses is keeping on track with the material. The learning activities and other assignments have due dates to help keep you accountable. I will still accept late assignments, but these are subject to a 10% deduction for each calendar day they are overdue (beginning on the day they are due). If an absence is going to result in a late submission, contact me ASAP.
- **Instructor contact.** If you have a question about course policies, the best place to post is in the FAQ discussion: I promise that if you have a question, someone else in the class would benefit from hearing the answer too. The best way to contact me is via email. I usually try to respond within a day during normal business hours (M-F, 9-5).
- **Office hours.** I have set aside time in my schedule for you, Wednesdays 10-11am and 2.30-3.30pm. [Please schedule a meeting during these times.](#) We can talk either via Zoom or via phone; you will be given contact details for both when you confirm the meeting time. If you cannot make a meeting during that time, email me with alternative times that you are available and we can schedule a meeting.
- **Zoom meetings.** Unless otherwise noted, our weekly Zoom meetings will be recorded and made available online to those enrolled in the course. I do not require you to have your video camera on for the meeting. However, I do ask that you include a photo of yourself in your profile so it feels less like I'm talking to an empty room when your camera is muted.
- **Academic honesty.** Although this is an online course, the University's policies on academic integrity still apply. To falsify the results of one's research, to steal the words or ideas of another, to cheat on an assignment, to re-submit the same assignment for different classes, or to allow or assist another to commit these acts corrupts the educational process. Students are expected to do their own work and neither give nor receive unauthorized assistance.

A note on terminology

Language itself — and especially the words we use to describe ourselves and other people — is of course highly political. As we will see, the movement that now tends to describe itself as “lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender” (LGBT) has adopted different terminology over its lifespan. The activists of the 1950s and 1960s mostly used the phrases “homophile” and “homosexual”. In the 1970s, “gay” was used by male activists to refer to both men and women, while female activists used the labels of “lesbian” or “lesbian feminist”. By the 1980s, the movement was referring to “lesbian and gay” rights, before adding “bisexual” and then “transgender” later on. Some groups also include other identities such as queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, etc (“LGBTQIA+”). To mirror most contemporary groups’ language, I’m using the phrase “LGBT*” politics. Note, however, that several of the groups we will be studying would not recognize that acronym as referring to themselves — and that we will be asking serious questions about how inclusive organizations that do use the umbrella “LGBT” term really are.

Course plan

The course is organized into two parts: (1) LGBT* politics and social movement strategies; and (2) LGBT* politics in representative democracy. Within each section, we will have weekly modules. Every module will have the following components:

- Assigned academic reading and video guides
- Individual learning activities to help you meet the learning objectives for the course
- Collaborative activities that will let you apply your learning to real-world politics
- A Zoom meeting for us to discuss that week's material and assignments (attendance optional)

PART ONE: LGBT* POLITICS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT STRATEGIES

- Week 1 (8/31) Liberation and assimilation in LGBT* politics
- Week 2 (9/7) Mobilizing resources: The homophile movement, 1950-1968
- Week 3 (9/14) Framing collective action: Gay liberation, 1969-1980
- Week 4 (9/21) Emotions and collective action: AIDS activism in the 1980s and 90s
- Week 5 (9/28) The iron law of oligarchy: from die-ins to hiring lobbyists
- Week 6 (10/5) Legal opportunities: Sodomy and the Supreme Court
- Week 7 (10/12) Exam #1
Exam #1 due October 18 at 11.59pm

PART TWO: LGBT* POLITICS IN REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

- Week 8 (10/19) Countermovement strategies: The religious right and direct democracy
- Week 9 (10/26) Party coalitions and capture: The parties take sides on LGBT issues
- Week 10 (11/2) Public attitudes: Interpersonal contact and the media
- Week 11 (11/9) Polarization and public opinion: Cues from elites
- Week 12 (11/16) Democratic representation: Politicians and policymaking
- Week 13 (11/30) Interest group representation: Intersectionality and agendas
- Week 14 (12/7) Exam #2
Exam #2 due December 13 at 11.59pm