Bureaucracy is the institution in which the inchoate policy pronouncements of Congress take concrete form. In addition, even a policy clearly articulated by Congress is usually implemented by bureaucrats. The reach of the bureaucracy in public policy is necessarily vast, so it is no surprise that Congress, the president, courts, and interest groups all seek influence over bureaucracies. Moreover, bureaucrats and regulators are very rarely elected in the United States (not at all at the federal level) and are insulated by civil service protection from the political demands voiced by Congress, so the democratic pedigree of bureaucratic decisions is at least questionable. Because of these facts, the role of the bureaucracy in policy formulation and implementation poses interesting positive and normative questions about the functioning of American political institutions, their effects on policy, and their capacity to recognize, address, and solve public problems. Correspondingly, bureaucratic politics has been a fertile area of research on American political institutions.

This seminar provides an overview of this literature, the major substantive issues covered in the American institutions literature on bureaucratic politics, and the theoretical and empirical tools commonly used by contributors to it. The goals of the seminar are to enable graduate students to contribute to this and related literatures themselves, and to make sense of the structures and activities that characterize bureaucracies’ involvement in the policy process.

A Note on Course Background: This is not a class on formal modeling. Nevertheless an important part of the literature on the course topic employs formal models and, in contrast to statistical modeling, we cannot assume a general background fluency with these models. Therefore the first three sessions of the course will consist largely of lectures to establish a foundation to make these models intelligible. This treatment will be entirely self-contained and you will not have to execute any modeling of your own to penetrate the literature, though it does help. You will have to be able to understand and critique the arguments made in formal models.

Simultaneously, much contemporary literature theorizes about structures and goings-on in bureaucracies without explaining any background on what they are, or giving only a highly abstract gloss. Yet neither the newspaper, nor undergraduate training, nor everyday experience typically provides any comprehensive treatment of the bureaucratic substance underlying this theorizing. Therefore, to supply needed substantive background for the remainder of the course, readings for the first three weeks will consist of relatively thick substantive accounts of bureaucratic behavior at various levels. We will not have explicit seminar discussion devoted to these readings at the time they occur, but you should cover them in your written weekly critiques (see below on grades).
Reading

There are three types of required reading: books, book excerpts in a course readings packet (available at Copy Central on Bancroft), and journal articles which are available electronically. The source for each reading is listed on the sequence of topics below. The required books which you should purchase are:


Other books listed are optional; they have not been ordered for the course but you can purchase them from your favorite bookstore if you wish to read them.

Grades

The seminar grade will be determined as follows:

- Participation 25%
- Written critiques 25%
- Research paper 50%

Students must submit written 1-2 page critiques and comments on each week’s readings. They may be critical or supportive or both. They may consist of questions for clarification, counterarguments against the claim advanced in the reading, critiques of the evidence and/or theory offered, and so forth. What they should not consist of is either simple summary or unreflective diatribe.¹

The research paper should develop an original argument about bureaucratic politics or significant critique of the literature on some aspect of it. It need not fall under any of the categories listed in the sequence of topics; you can go in any direction you wish. It is also completely open with respect to methodology. It should be at least 20 pages in length. Further guidance will be provided during the semester.

¹Reflective diatribes are of course welcome.
Sequence of Topics and Readings

Note: “Req” designates required reading. “Supp” designates supplementary (optional) reading. All readings in the course packet are designated as such. All others are either required books or available electronically (JSTOR or Berkeley library web).

Part I: Formal and Substantive Background

Session 1 Introduction and Overview; Spatial Model

Session 2 Principal-Agent Models

Session 3 Information Transmission in Agency Relationships

PART II: BUREAUCRATIC STRUCTURE

Session 4 Political Origins of Bureaucratic Structure


Session 5 Information Transmission and Bureaucratic Structure


Session 6 Effects of Bureaucratic Structure
PART III: BUREAUCRATIC BEHAVIOR

Session 7 Bureaucratic Preferences and Decision-Making


Session 8 Agency Response to Incentives


Session 9 Coalition and Empire Building

PART IV: BUREAUCRACY AND EXTERNAL ACTORS

Session 10 Congress I


Session 11 Congress II


Session 12 The President

Session 13 Courts


Session 14 Interest Groups


Session 15 Interacting Principals