

## **Directed Readings in Norms and Informal Institutions**

### **An Interdisciplinary Graduate Reading Seminar**

POL 590/PHIL 590

Wednesdays 2:30-3:20 pm (Generally meeting **every other week** starting Wed August 24<sup>th</sup>  
- Come to first class for specific meeting schedule)

CL50 Room 129 - 1 Credit

Instructors: Ann Marie Clark, Leigh Raymond, and S. Laurel Weldon, Political Science;  
Daniel Kelly, Philosophy

The purpose of this seminar is to bring together an interdisciplinary group of faculty and students to read articles from a variety of disciplines on the role of norms and informal institutions in human behavior. Where simpler models of rationality once dominated, more complicated models now recognize that norms and informal institutions play a critical role in human behavior. Usually defined as unwritten rules of behavior appropriate for a given identity, social norms and informal institutions are increasingly recognized as vital determinants of human behavior in multiple contexts. Scholars ranging from cognitive neuroscientists to philosophers to economists, sociologists, and political scientists all increasingly focus on the role of these “unwritten” rules of appropriate behavior or action for a given identity in investigating everything from market behavior (Akerlof and Kranton 2010; Henrich et al. 2004) to interpersonal and gender relationships (Agarwal 2000; Elster 1989) to policy stability and change (Ostrom 1998; Raymond 2003; Helmke and Levitsky 2006). These lessons have not been lost on policy activists, many of whom now utilize norm-driven strategies such as “naming and shaming” governments in order to pressure them to adopt new standards regarding human rights, the environment, or other pressing social problems (e.g., Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Clark 2001; Friedman, Hochstetler, and Clark 2005).

Yet as Nobel Prize winning Political Scientist Elinor Ostrom (2007) has observed, studying unwritten rules of behavior that often operate at a subconscious level is a difficult research task. While much progress has been made in the past decade on these informal institutions in multiple disciplines and across multiple policy problems, the intellectual challenges remain daunting and the integration of this work across disciplines and subfields remains limited. The more we consider social norms, the more important they appear to be in explaining many forms of human behavior, including political action and choice. Although pockets of scholars in different fields of political science have focused on norms in international relations, comparative politics, or experimental work on collective action, this work remains somewhat fragmented by field and sub-field boundaries. In addition, vital work on norms is happening in the areas of anthropology, economics, philosophy, psychology, and sociology.

The faculty members leading the seminar are also co-organizers of an international workshop on this subject taking place at Purdue on April 16-17, 2012. Readings will be taken in substantial part from individuals already invited to speak at the workshop, and enrolled students are strongly encouraged to participate in the workshop as well. The class is intended for graduate students, but outstanding undergraduates may enroll as appropriate with instructor permission.

## **Tentative Reading Schedule**

(Subject to change)

8/24 Organizational session

9/7 Author: Stephen Stich. Faculty Leader: Dan Kelly

9/21 Author: Elinor Ostrom: Faculty Leader: Leigh Raymond

10/5 Author: Joseph Henrich. Faculty Leader: Dan Kelly

10/19 Author: Vivien Schmidt. Faculty Leader: Leigh Raymond and/or Laurel Weldon

11/2 Authors: Louise Chappell and Georgina Waylen. Faculty Leader: Laurel Weldon.

11/16 Special Author: Kathryn Sikkink (who will attend). Faculty Leader: Ann Clark

11/30 Author: Kathryn Hochstetler and/or Elisabeth Friedman. Faculty Leader: Leigh Raymond and/or Ann Clark.

## **In order to obtain course credit, every enrolled student must do two things**

1) Attend and be an active participant in course discussions.

2) Prepare a short written summary and set of discussion questions about the reading for one week during the semester, to be presented briefly (5 minutes) at the start of that week's discussion.