This class will focus on theoretical approaches to the study of agenda-setting in both American and comparative settings. We will begin in the 1950s and go to the current literature, covering a wide range of methodological approaches. We will pay special attention to punctuated equilibrium and the agendas project and the movement of the literature from a focus on power, to agenda-setting, to decision-making more generally. We will also explore literature on complexity because of its tight linkage to the concepts used in explaining rapid and unpredictable shifts in public attention.

Students may be at different stages of their graduate training and therefore write different types of term papers. These might be bibliographic essays in which for example you might compare the agendas literature to another prominent literature you know from other courses. Or they might focus on the development of a research design / article / dissertation / MA thesis idea. These may be qualitative or quantitative approaches, US-based or comparative. I particularly encourage papers that seek to identify a gap in the literature and make a proposal to fill it. For bibliographic essays I would particularly appreciate papers that find paradoxes or contradictions between the agendas literature on some topic and another approach to the same topic, and seek to explain the cause of them.

Assignments will include short discussion papers due from each student seven times throughout the semester, or about every two weeks. I will use peer pressure and informal suggestions to ensure that each week about half of you write one of these papers and are therefore prepared to lead the discussion on various topics each week. I will distribute discussion topics / paper assignments each week in class for the following week’s discussion, and these will serve as an agenda for the seminar, and help guide your focus as you do the readings. The one-page (single spaced) papers are due by email attachment by noon on the day of class.

Discussion and active participation are fundamental. Note that it counts for 15 percent of the grade, and I will not necessarily assign participation grades only within a narrow B+ to A range. It is fine to come to class not having understood something, as long as you come with those questions and ask them. If it becomes clear that any students have come to class without having done the readings, I will ask them to leave. (On the other hand, if some crisis prevented you from doing one of the readings, and you let me know in advance, that is fine.)
It is impossible to do well in a graduate term paper by starting at the last minute, so I have a number of interim assignments (weeks 3, 7, and 10) designed to keep you on track throughout the semester. These also allow me to give you feedback along the way to push your project to a higher level. The grades associated with these interim assignments are not huge, but they do add up, so make sure to hand them in on time and to take them seriously. You will be pleasantly surprised what a good term paper you can do if you work on it regularly rather than all in a rush at the last second. (It may become a habit, who knows!)

Grades will be calculated according to this formula:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 one-page assignments, equally weighted</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Term paper draft assignments, equally weighted</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term paper</td>
<td>35</td>
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Books for purchase:


All the required readings should be on the class web site. If some are missing let me know and I will post them. Note that in most weeks I also provide supplemental readings; these are not required so please do not freak out. I’ve also listed some at the end of the syllabus; related topics that just don’t fit into the syllabus but which may be of interest to many of you. All these supplemental readings are there for your information, further reading, or for a start on your term papers or other projects.

Disabilities: Please let me know in the first two weeks of class if you need any accommodation for a disability. No problem. But don’t delay in letting me know.

Academic Honesty: Study together but make sure the work you hand in is your own.

Effort: Don’t come to class unprepared to participate.

Intimidation Factor: I’m the author of a lot of the work discussed here. That can either be a cause not to critique and discuss, or an opportunity to engage with a person who is active in the field. I have thick skin and welcome criticism, discussion, and challenges. So feel free!

Computers and cell phones: Turn them off, period. Pay attention to the discussion. Bring paper copies of the readings, and a pad and pen to take notes.
Weekly assignments and calendar

Please do all the readings listed in the first section in each weekly list below and use the others as a guide to further reading or browse them if they are of interest.

Week 1, August 29. Introductions and discussion, no readings.

Sept. 5, no class, happy Labor Day!


Assignment: Scan JSTOR or just the APSR for the words “power” or “influence” in the 1950s and 1960s. Pick an article by a major figure in the field and explain the approach. Each student must identify a major article in addition to those listed above. Or, skim either Crenson, Gaventa books below and give a one-page overview of the point and the methodological approach.

Recommended readings:

Week 3, Sept. 19. From power to agenda-setting.

Due in class: One-page single spaced memo explaining your proposed term-paper project. It should explain the puzzle you want to explore and your approach. If you have some ideas about the relevant literature, please include. Give as much detail as you can at this point. If you are deciding between two possible topics, give me two memos; that is fine.


Additional books to buy if you ever run across them:

**Week 4. Sept 26. Kingdon, ambiguity, and multiple streams models**


The background on where this came from:


**Week 5, Oct 3. Punctuated equilibrium**

Note: I have to be out of town on Monday Oct 3 so we need to reschedule, hopefully for Wed or Thu evening this same week.


Review articles that you might find useful:

**Week 6, Oct 10. Developing a model of choice**


Further reading, background

**Week 7, Oct 17. Threshold models, increasing returns, positive feedback**

**Annotated bibliography due.** This means you should have identified the key source material you are planning to use. You don’t have to have read it all yet but you should have identified the likely suspects. A longer bibliography is better than a short one. No need for extensive annotations, but rather just a list of readings organized by the topics that you plan to cover.


Additional readings some of which are very fun, funny, or sad:


**Week 8, Oct 24. Power laws and complexity**


Applications: Read at least one of the following, focusing on the empirical findings:


Assignment: Use the Netlogo web site to develop an intuitive understanding of a proportionate attraction system and to see the resulting distribution of observations, and in particular the
application that allows you to model Barabasi’s preferential attachment model of web linkages. Do this model yourself one click at a time, then let it run automatically for a few thousand iterations and see what the results look like. Feel free to play with the other simulation tools there as well. ([http://ccl.northwestern.edu/netlogo/models/PreferentialAttachment](http://ccl.northwestern.edu/netlogo/models/PreferentialAttachment))

Basic background and more applications

4. Zipf, George Kingsley. 1949. *Human Behavior and the Principle of Least Effort*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley. (Note: If anyone ever finds this book for sale, and it’s less than 50 bucks let me know.)

Week 9, Oct 31. Attention, information, cognition, and the distributional approach


Week 10, Nov 7. Heresthetics: Can people manipulate things?

Note: **Detailed outline of paper due.** This should include a full structure, planned cites, methods, etc. The text need not be written but the structure should be complete, in outline form. You’ll be surprised how easy it is to complete the paper if you have a complete outline in the proper order.


More Riker stuff:

**Week 11, Nov 14. Venue-shopping: Can actors shop freely?**


**Week 12, Nov 21. Comparative studies on friction and the general punctuation hypothesis**


**Week 13, Nov 28. Reading week, no class**

**Week 14, Dec 5. Comparative Studies on party effects and elections v. attention**

**Term papers due**


Literatures we are not going to have time to cover but which may be of use to you for your papers:

Social Protest Studies (small selection of many):

Communications studies (small selection of classics):

Public Policy and “Who Leads Whom?” Studies (just a few from many):

Single-Issue Studies of Interest: US-based policy histories


Comparative / IR studies of the impact of ideas on policy communities


Also see [www.comparativeagendas.org](http://www.comparativeagendas.org) for cites and publications from the comparative agendas project.