Informal Leaders: Poetics and Politics of Leadership in Postcolonial Societies

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Jepson Hall 238
Spring 2018
Monday & Wednesday: 10:30-11:45
Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday – 2-3 pm
Tuesday: 10 am-12:30 pm; 2-3 pm

Course Description
Informal leaders are pervasive and integral figures in postcolonial and developing countries. Often, they constitute a critical link between the sovereign state and its citizens, facilitating interactions and providing access to scarce information, public goods and services to ordinary people. They also act as a buffer against harassment and extraction by state agents and help mobilize public opinion to challenge unfavorable political actions.

However, the continued relevance of informal leadership in developing countries makes us confront the vested interests such leaders may have in sustaining systems of inequality, patronage and dependence.

This course examines forms of informal and quasi-political leadership in postcolonial, developing countries. The primary theoretical aims of this course are:

a) to grasp the structural conditions that necessitate the rise of informal leaders, and
b) to consider the how such leaders impact the social system in which they intervene.

This course relies primarily on ethnographic case studies and employs an anthropological framework to pursue these objectives. Students will read ethnographies from South Asia, particularly India, (complemented with relevant case studies from Africa and South America) that outline the myriad roles of informal leaders in enabling people to access state benefits and economic resources and opportunities, and to avoid harassment. Subsequently, we grapple with the more questionable aspects of informal leadership examining the power and politics that undergird informal leadership and the motivations of such leaders to ensure that status quo is maintained.

The course is designed to equip students with a holistic understanding of informal leadership in developing countries by paying equal attention to structural factors and personal motivations, and to the positive and negative manifestations of informal leadership.

**Course readings will be made available on blackboard. Some readings are electronically available; they are mentioned in the syllabus along with a link. It is the responsibility of each student to ensure that assigned readings are accessible. If you are unable to access a reading through the link provided, please inform the instructor by 2 pm on the day before class.**

Objectives

**Methodology**
This class introduces students to research design with the goal of writing fundable proposals to external organizations for research funding. By the end of the course, students will become familiar with:
a) qualitative research methods, like ethnographic data collection
b) how to read and treat data collected through ethnography, intensive fieldwork and participant observation
c) how to draft competitive research proposals for external grants
d) ethical issues involved in research, especially that which involves human subjects and participants

Theory
This class will equip students with anthropological theories on informal leadership. Students will:

a) become familiar with governance and political-economic systems in developing, postcolonial countries that engender informal forms of leadership
b) develop a critical approach and understanding of leadership

Syllabus Design
Assigned class readings are mandatory. In addition, if recommended readings are listed, students are strongly advised to read them but can exercise their discretion. Students will be required to submit response papers that comprise 2-3 questions and observations based on readings a day prior class. Discussion topics for the class will be drawn from these questions. Assignments are divided between oral presentation and written papers. Class attendance and participation will also carry weight.

Assignments
The final assignment is an ethnographic research proposal for external grant applications that students may or may not choose to submit to grant organizations like Fulbright, NSF etc. Throughout the course, we will work towards this aim. Detailed prompts for each assignment will be provided during the course.

Assignment #1 (5%): Formulate a research question (250-300 words) and identify 10 secondary literature references that can support your research. The research question MUST be finalized in discussion with the instructor. One meeting with me during office hours is mandatory for this assignment. Please be mindful of the date of submission for this assignment and ensure you meet with me well in advance to have time to complete this assignment.

Assignment #2a (10%): 10 minutes class presentation to explain your research question, area of research and to discuss 5 sources of literature that are relevant to your proposed research. This exercise is designed to introduce students to the process of peer reviewing research proposals.

Assignment #2b (20%): Submit a 2000-2500 words paper that outlines a (previously approved) research question and area of research and provides a literature review of 5-7 academic sources that are relevant to the project.

Assignment #3 (35%): Research proposal: Submit a 3000-3500 words research proposal explaining: (1) the topic you wish to explore ethnographically; (2) the significance that research topic; (3) literature you will enter into dialogue with; (4) methodology you will use to gather your research data; (5) your training and preparedness for this research; and (6) ethical considerations when conducting research with human participants.

Class Attendance and Participation (15%)
- Class attendance and participation are mandatory. After 1 absence from class, students will be penalized 0.5% from their final grade for each unexcused absence.
- The classroom is a safe learning environment for students. All of us must collectively work towards ensuring that everyone feels secure and confident to participate in classroom discussions.
- Students must be respectful and receptive towards the viewpoints of their peers, and be mindful of the fact that their peers come from diverse backgrounds. Disagreements must be expressed thoughtfully and in ways that do not constitute personal attacks, ridicule or discriminatory behaviors.
- Students are expected to complete their assigned readings and come to class prepared to discuss these readings.

**Response Papers (15%)**

- Response papers are my way of ensuring that students have done their readings.
- Unless explicitly stated otherwise, students are required to submit a response paper on the eve of each class (by 7:00 pm on the day before class). These response papers will comprise 2-3 questions or observations on the scheduled readings. They should be emailed to me at rbhandar@richmond.edu.
- Class discussions will be based on these responses.

**Policies:**

a) Use of electronic gadgets (phone, laptop, ipad) is not permitted during class. If students need an exemption from this rule, they need to get my permission and will have to furnish credible reasons for the same.

b) Make-up exams and extensions will only be granted in cases of extreme duress like documented medical emergencies and/or religious observance.

c) If some form of academic accommodation is needed, students should contact me at the earliest with documented proof to support accommodation and to discuss whether such accommodation can be provided.

d) Please familiarize yourself with the school’s policies on Academic Integrity and Plagiarism.
Class Schedule

January 17: Introductory Class. Discussion on the Courses aims, objectives and assignments.


January 22:

January 24:

WEEK 2: Structures of Governance: Why Informal Leadership Prevail in Developing Countries.

January 29:


- Recommended: FG Bailey, Selected readings.

January 31:

WEEK 3: Structures of Governance – Continued. Overlaps between Leadership and Brokerage in Developing Countries

February 5:
- Chelsey Kivland. 2014. Becoming a force in the zone.


February 7: Preparation for Research Proposal.
- Visit by Lucretia McCulley (Head, Scholarly Communications, Boatwright Library). She will discuss on how to search for resources and literature in the library.


- **Assignment #1** to be Completed. Students should have research questions ready and should have visited with me to get a go-ahead for the proposal.

February 12:


Selected Readings: Step 1 – Advice to Proposal Writers; Step 2 – Writing the Proposal.

WEEK 4b-5a: Getting Things Done: Informal Leadership in the Vacuum of the State

February 14:
- Veena Das & Michael Walton. 2015. Political leadership and the urban poor.


February 19:
- Anastasia Piliavsky. 2016. The ethics of efficacy in North India’s goonda raj

- Jaffe and Cummings. A battle for hearts and minds?

WEEK 5b-6a: Leadership through the Lens of Criminality: Understanding Intersections of Power, Identity and Democracy

February 21:
- Criminal Voting in India: Milan Vaishnav Selected Readings.


February 26:


WEEK 6b-7: Review and Submission

Feb 28 and March 5:
Assignment #2a: Each student will make a 10 minutes presentation on their research proposal to discuss their research question, research method, location of research, and 5 literature sources that are relevant to their proposed work.

March 7: Class cancelled. Submit Assignment #2b.
---SPRING BREAK---

WEEK 8: Leadership and Change

March 19:
- Lucia Michelutti. 2007. The vernacularization of democracy.

March 21:
- Visit by Carver Weakly (Writing Instructor, Virginia Commonwealth University) on how to write competitive grant proposals and ethnographic pieces

WEEK 9: Women in Leadership: Learning about Intersectionality and Ethics

March 26:

March 28:
- AAA Code of Ethics (http://ethics.aaanet.org/category/statement/)
- Two entries (your choice) from the AAA Ethics Blog (http://ethics.aaanet.org)

WEEK 10: Women in Leadership – Continued: Life Stories

April 2 & April 4:
- Javier Auyero: Contentious Lives: The Picketer (Pp. 15-100)

WEEK 11: Critical Overview of Leadership

April 9:
- Stephanie Savell. 2015. “I’m not a Leader”

April 11:

WEEK 12: The Importance of Empathy in Research: How to Do Fieldwork and Write Ethnography Empathetically

April 16:
- Atreyee Sen. Selected Reading.

April 18: TBD

**WEEK 13:** Course Review and Class discussion on Final Research Proposals (April 23 & 25)

Assignment #3 due on May 5, 2018