Purposes of the Course: This course is designed to give students a basic overview of the traditional approaches to the study of culture in the social sciences as a background to the introduction of an “equilibrium” approach to culture as has been developed in the past few years in political science and economics. The equilibrium approach seeks to account for the influence of culture on economic and political behavior, yet seeks as well to account for shifts in culture. It should also show the different role of culture in institutional life in preindustrial and modern societies. The course will assess the pay-off for this approach, in examining whether it can shed new light on old questions such as the sources of democracy, inter-group violence, nationalism, and economic growth.

Requirements of the Course: Students will be expected to read broadly for each week’s readings, and to participate in seminar discussions of the readings. But the principal requirement of the course is the research for and writing of a seminar paper that develops or critiques some aspect of the equilibrium approach to culture. The paper will be due on Friday of the examination week.

Week 1: Overview of the Course

David Laitin and Barry Weingast “An Equilibrium Approach to Culture and Cultural Change” [A draft version of this paper will be posted on the class website. For the opening session, the instructor will summarize the paper. Students can refer to it later in the course for reference purposes.]

Part I: What is Culture?

Week 2: Traditional Approaches to Culture

A. Cultural Anthropology
   Ruth Benedict The Chrysanthemum and the Sword, chaps. 1-3, 12
   Clifford Geertz “Thick Description” and “Deep Play”, both in his Interpretation of Culture

B. Social Anthropology
   E.E. Evans-Pritchard The Nuer, Introduction, chaps. 1, 4-5

C. Post-Modern Critique of the Culture Concept

D. Political Culture” in the Behavioral Tradition
   Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture chaps. 1, 6, 12-13
   David Laitin and Aaron Wildavsky “Political-Culture And Political Preferences” American Political Science Review, V. 82(#2) Pp. 589-596 Jun 1988
   Ronald Inglehart Culture Shift

E. Sociology
   Pierre Bourdieu Outline of a Theory of Practice

Week 3: A New Equilibrium Approach to Culture and Identity

A. Culture
   Michael Chwe Rational Ritual

B. Identity
   James D. Fearon “What is Identity (As We Now Use the Word)? Unpublished manuscript

Part II: Cultural Dynamics

Week 4: Mechanisms of Cultural Production
   Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, introductory essay in The Invention of Tradition
   Thomas Schelling A Strategy of Conflict, chap. 3
   Jon Elster Cement of Society
   Robert Boyd and Peter Richerson Culture and the Evolutionary Process chaps. 1, 3.

Week 5: Mechanisms of Cultural Enforcement
  Robert Ellickson Order Without Law
  Richard Fenno Power of the Purse, chap. 2

Week 6: Mechanisms of Cultural Shift
  David Laitin Identity in Formation, chap. 1
  Timur Kuran Private Truths, Public Lies
  Gerald Mackie “Ending footbinding and infibulation: a convention account” ASR 61, 6 (1996)
  Aver Greif and David Laitin, “How Do Self-Enforcing Institutions Endogenously Change?: Institutional Reinforcement and Quasi-Parameters” (draft manuscript)

Part III: Problems to be Solved

Week 7: Cultures in Conflict
  Samuel Huntington Clash of Civilizations
  Donald Horowitz The Deadly Ethnic Riot
  Paul Brass “Theft of an Idol” in Theft of an Idol
  James Fearon and David Laitin “Explaining Ethnic Cooperation” in APSR 1996
  Barry Weingast “Political Stability and Civil War” in Bates et al Analytic Narratives
  Russell Hardin All For One

Week 8: Democracy
  Robert Putnam Making Democracy Work
  Brian Barry Sociologists, Economists and Democracy
  Adam Przeworski Democracy and the Market (chap. 1)
  Barry Weingast “Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law” in 1997 APSR

Week 9: Nationalism
  Ernest Gellner Thought and Change chap. 7
  Benedict Anderson Imagined Communities
  Eugen Weber Peasants into Frenchmen
Michael Hechter Containing Nationalism

Week 10: Economic Growth and the Rise of the West
   Max Weber The Protestant Ethic and the Capitalist Spirit
   David Kreps “On Corporate Culture” in James Alt and Kenneth Shepsle Perspectives on Positive Political Economy pp. 90-143
   William Easterly and Ross Levine “Africa’s Growth Tragedy” QJE, November 1997
   Edward Miguel “Ethnic Diversity and School Funding in Kenya”