Identity and the State

What is identity? How are identities made? What are some of the challenges and consequences of identity and identity politics? This course investigates these questions through comparisons of class, race, gender, ethnicity, and nation during each class session. We begin with how social scientists define identity, the types of issues they study related to identity, and the shift at the turn of the century from treating identity as a given to studying it as a process.

The second section of the course considers two dominant and one emerging approach to identity formation in the social sciences—constructivism, instrumentalism, and neo-primordialism—and considers work that integrates a variety of approaches. We then turn to two pressing challenges for students of identity: how to measure it and the relationship of identities to one another. The final section of the course addresses the consequences of identity politics, exploring how and why identity groups mobilize; violence, conflict, and war among identity groups; and the relationship of identity to democracy, political parties, voting, representation, and social policy.

Course Requirements

*Participation (20%)*
Students are expected to read the course material with care and to participate in class discussion. Attendance, preparation, and participation are expected and will be taken into account in assigning final grades. Each student also is responsible for opening up class discussion twice. While this might involve some summarizing of key arguments, the intent is to generate discussion around key issues. Students should focus on what they find to be interesting, problematic, or persuasive in the reading (5-10 minutes). Do not present long summaries of materials. Student presenters are encouraged to respond to posted reading reviews. Due anytime before class starts on Collab>Discussion and Private Messages>Worksite Discussions>Mini Presentations>Post Reply>Please change the subject line to your topic for the day and copy and paste your commentary into the box.

*Reading Reviews (25%)*
Each student will write a 600-700 word analysis of the readings for 5 of the 14 weeks. Students must not wait until the last 5 weeks of the course to write their reviews. Reviews
may briefly summarize the arguments of the chosen set of readings, but should focus principally on analysis and critique of the works discussed, as well as pose questions for further discussion. Due by Tuesday noon on Collab>Discussion and Private Messages>Worksite Discussions> Topic (for the class session)>Post Reply. Students should not post reading reviews for class sessions for which they are presenting.

**Final Assignment: Paper/Proposal (55%)**
Students will write either an analytical essay or a research paper (no longer than 20 pages), on a relevant topic of their choosing. Before spring break (by March 8) students must submit a one page proposal: Collab>Assignments>Proposal. The proposal should include the student’s question and a statement of purpose that explains why the question is important and the steps the student plans to take to answer it. If appropriate, students may choose to write a dissertation proposal instead; the student must consult with her/his advisor as well as with the instructor on the proposal. Due Tuesday, May 10, before midnight: Collab>Assignments>Research Paper.

*Occasional changes to this syllabus are possible and will be announced in advance.

**Course Outline**

*Part I. Definitions*

**Class 1 (Jan. 26): Introduction**

*What is identity?*

Discussion of the syllabus, assignments, etc.


One of the two articles below, depending on your research interests:


**Recommended background reading to do before Class 4:**


**Class 2 (Feb. 2): Objective Definitions of Identities**


Class 3 (Feb. 9): Subjective Definitions of Identities
If identities are not a thing but a process, what should social scientists study?


Part II. Identity Formation
Class 4 (Feb. 16): Constructivist Approaches
How do capitalism and the state shape identity formation?


**Class 5 (Feb. 23): Instrumentalist Approaches**

*How does strategy shape identity formation?*

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. 1902. “What is to be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement.” Ch. 2 and 3 (16-62).


**Class 6 (March 1): Neo-Primordial Approaches**

*How do culture and biology shape identity formation?*


**No Class March 8: Spring Break**

**Final Assignment Proposal Due March 8**

Class 7 (March 15): Integrated Approaches

*How might approaches for analyzing identity formation be combined?*


**Part III: Relationships and Measurement**

Class 8 (March 22): Cross-cutting, Intersecting and Integrated Identities

*How do different identities interact? If identities are not always distinct, how can they be analyzed?*


Class 9 (Mar. 29): Measurement
How should social scientists measure identity?


Part IV: Consequences of Identity Formation
Class 10 (April 5): Mobilization
How and why do identity groups mobilize?


**Class 11 (April 12) Violence, Conflict and War**  
*What explains violence, conflict and war among identity groups?*

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.1998 [1848]. *The Communist Manifesto.* Any version is acceptable: Sections I-IV.


**Class 12 (April 19): Democracy and Party Politics**  
*What is the relationship between identity and democracy? Between identity and party politics?*


**Class 13 (April 26): Voting and Representation**  
*What is the relationship between identity and voting? Between identity and political representation?*


**Class 14 (May 3): Social Policy**

*What is the relationship between identity and social policy?*


