

PUBLIC AFFAIRS CONVERSATION

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Overview

The roots of the Public Affairs Conversation are in the disciplines of economics, philosophy, political science, and theology, but it will develop an interdisciplinary approach that looks beyond the boundaries of any one discipline. The distinctive aspect of this learning community is its interdisciplinary focus on the normative and empirical analysis of public affairs in America and the world.

Overview of the Program

The first course (PACON 280 Public Affairs I: Foundational Debates) focuses on the core ideals of American public affairs including freedom, equality, democracy, justice, community, responsibility and authority. Students will study the historical development and contested nature of those ideals. The second course (PACON 281 Public Affairs II: Contemporary Controversies) extends this tradition of analysis and examines the normative commitments and empirical evidence relevant to contemporary public affairs. Students also complete a paid internship (done in either summer or interim).

Admission to the Program

Approximately 20 students will be admitted to the Public Affairs Conversation, based on an application process open to all rising juniors and seniors. While participation in another learning community will provide good background for this program, it will not be given special preference in students' applications.

Course Equivalents for General Education Requirements

By successfully completing the two Public Affairs Conversation courses, a student fulfills the following general education requirements:

- Ethical Issues and Normative Perspectives [EIN];
- Human and Behavioral Sciences [HBS] (one course);
- Writing in Context Courses [WRI] (one course)

Courses

PACON 280: Public Affairs I: Foundational Debates

This course examines American ideals and the tensions among them, ideals such as freedom, community, equality, democracy, justice, responsibility, and authority. The course analyzes the political, economic, moral, and religious dimensions of the debates and decisions that continue to shape American society. It considers classic founding documents, ideas that influenced the founders, and the major thinkers and events relevant to understanding the diverse range of models for government, markets, and society. Juniors and seniors only. Taught annually in the fall Semester.

PACON 281: Public Affairs II: Contemporary Controversies

This contemporary public affairs course examines normative commitments and empirical evidence relevant to the workings of government, markets, and society as applied to contemporary issues. Possible topics include immigration, abortion, education, sexuality, medical care, foreign policy, income inequality and poverty, affirmative action, and responses to climate change. Juniors and seniors only. Offered annually in the spring semester.

The Internship component of this program may be satisfied by: ID 295: Internship & Reflection Seminar or ID 294 Academic Internship (0.25, .50, or 1.0 credit)

Faculty

Director, 2017-2018

Michael A. Fuerstein

Associate Professor of Philosophy
social and political philosophy; social epistemology; American pragmatism

Thomas Bernardin

Assistant Professor of Economics
macro and monetary economics; finance; applied econometrics; history and philosophy of economics

Jason T. Marsh

Assistant Professor of Philosophy
bioethics; ethical theory and applied ethics; religion and cognitive science

Edmund N. Santurri

Professor of Religion and Philosophy
ethics; philosophical theology