Introduction to Comparative Politics

POLS 715
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Fall 2014
Time: Wednesday 4:00pm-6:40pm
Room: TBD

Professor: Ora John Reuter
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Office Hours: Tuesday 2-4pm (or by appointment)
Mode of Delivery: In-person

Course Description:

This is a graduate level survey of the comparative politics subfield. It exposes students to the major themes and approaches in the subfield. The focus of the course is substantive and theoretical, but major methodological issues in the discipline will also be considered along the way. The course is designed to help prepare students interested in taking the Comparative Politics preliminary exam, but should be of use to all political science graduate students.

Course Objectives:

In this course you will:

1. gain exposure to the major theoretical, epistemological, and methodological approaches in Comparative Politics
2. become familiar with the intellectual history of the subfield
3. critique and evaluate cutting edge research in comparative politics
4. encounter and work through successful examples of applied political science research
5. learn to critique cutting edge research in comparative politics
6. be encouraged to consider why some ideas have staying power

Requirements:

1) Attend class sessions and participate

The format of this class will be discussion. Your participation includes both attendance and engagement in class discussion.

Most of our class time will be spent discussing the themes and arguments presented in our readings. Everyone should have something to say in every class. Your comments need not dazzle every time. Often times, the most productive contributions to class discussions are questions. If you don’t understanding something in the readings, say so. The authors we read are not perfect; one of our primary mandates in the course is to find flaws in these readings and discuss ways to improve them. Speak up and air your grievances. We will all be better for it and you will be rewarded come evaluation time. For each reading you should be prepared to discuss the following questions (if applicable):

- What is the research question? (i.e. what is the goal of the researcher?)
- Is this research question important? What is the puzzle being addressed? What is the motivation? (i.e. why was this paper written? Should we care about it?)
What are the main concepts being discussed? Are they clear?
What is the argument? What are its component parts? Who are the actors? Is it logically coherent? Is it novel?
What are the observable implications of the argument?
How is the argument tested? (i.e. what is the empirical strategy)
How does the author measure key concepts? Are these measurements valid? Reliable?
Does the evidence support the theory?
What are the major hurdles to causal (or descriptive) inference (if applicable)? How does the author address these issues? Do they do an adequate job?

Attendance is mandatory. Our class is small, and therefore, you cannot free ride on your fellow classmates. Your absences will be noticed by all and have a palpable impact on our sessions. Each unexcused absence will result in the reduction of your participation grade by 1/3 of a letter grade.

2) Complete assigned readings before the date indicated on the syllabus
In order to participate effectively in discussion, you will need to have done the required readings for that day. Much is expected in terms of reading, but you are up to the task.

3) Seven 2-4 page reaction papers/presentation
Over the course of the semester, you will write six reaction papers on a reading (or readings) of your choice from a class session.

These papers should have three components:
1) The paper should briefly (one paragraph) sum up the main argument made by the author and the evidence provided.
2) It should contain an evaluation and critique of the author’s argument and evidence in light of the other readings for that week. Does the author’s argument make sense? Why or why not? Does his evidence (if any) comport with his/her argument? Why or why not? Do you know of other evidence that undermines (or supports) the author’s argument? Does one of the other readings for that day offer a perspective that is discordant with the perspective offered by the author? This section should constitute the lion’s share of the paper.
3) The paper should conclude with some questions for the class that flow from your evaluation/critique.

You will give a short 5-minute presentation on your paper to kick off our discussion of that reading. Your questions should help us in our discussion.

Each week we will determine who will write reaction papers for the following week. I will ask for volunteers.

The reaction papers are due in class on the day we discuss the reading.
5) Complete one mid-term practice exam and one take-home final exam. These exams are designed to mimic the comprehensive exams in the sub-field and help students prepare for that task. The mid-term will be due by email on October 17. The final will be due by email on December 19.

Evaluation Scheme:

Class Attendance and Participation: 20%
Mid-Term Practice Exam: 15%
Response Papers: 30%
Final Exam: 35%

Late Assignment Policy

All assignments are due on the assigned date. Response papers are due on the day that a reading is covered in class. I do not accept late assignments. Exceptions are made only in the most severe and extraordinary circumstances.

Expected Time Commitment:

This is a three-credit course, so the expected time commitment from students is approximately 144 hours. Students will spend 36 hours in class over the course of the semester. Approximately 60% of the remaining time will be spent preparing for class by doing assigned readings and taking notes. 10% will be spent preparing reaction papers. A further 30% will be spent preparing for exams.

Academic Honesty:

All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s academic misconduct policy. Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course and any plagiarism on any assignment will result in a failing grade for the course. When in doubt, cite. If you have questions about attribution, please see me. I am here to help! More information is available at http://www.uwm.edu/acad_aff/policy/academicmisconduct.cfm

University Policies (http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/SyllabusLinks.pdf)
PART I: METHOD AND SCOPE

September 3: What is Comparative Politics? History of the Discipline

Required:


“Symposium on Area Studies.” PS, 12/01, pp. 787-811 [Available on D2L]

http://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/3638435/bates_areastudies.pdf?sequence=4
Area studies symposium


September 10: Methodological Preliminaries

Required:


Also read John Huber’s blog post on experiments at the Monkey Cage: http://themonkeycage.org/2013/06/14/is-theory-getting-lost-in-the-identification-revolution/

**PART II: APPROACHES TO THE STATE**

**September 17: State Formation and Modernization**

**Required:**


Huntington, Samuel. 1968. *Political Order in Changing Societies* [pp1-92] [Available on D2L]


Ertman, Thomas. 1997 *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. New York: Cambridge. [Chapter 1] [Available on D2L]


**September 24: Democracy and Democratization**

**Required:**


**October 1: Transitions from Authoritarian Rule**

**Required:**


Bermeo, Nancy. 1997. “Myths of Moderation: Confrontation and Conflict during Democratic Transitions.” *Comparative Politics*


**PART III: REPRESENTATIVE INSTITUTIONS**

**October 8: Political Institutions Under Democracy: Political Parties and Electoral Systems**

**Required:**

Hall, Peter A. and Rosemary Taylor. 1996. “Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms,” *Political Studies*


Carey, John M. 2000. “Parchment, Equilibria, and Institutions,” *Comparative Political Studies*

**October 15: Political Institutions Under Democracy: Models of Democracy**

**Required:**


**October 22: Political Institutions Under Democracy: Decision-Making**

**Required:**


**October 29: Representation and Accountability**

**Required:**

Przeworski, Adam, Susan Stokes, and Bernard Manin. 1999. *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation*. pp 29-84. [Both chapters; no need to read appendix in Fearon chapter] [Available on D2L]


Kitschelt, Herbert. 2000. “Linkages between Citizens and Politicians in Democratic Polities.” *Comparative Political Studies*

**PART IV: POLITICAL BEHAVIOR**

**November 5: Voting Behavior**

**Required:**


**November 12: Participation and Social Movements**

**Required:**


**November 19: Political Culture and Civil Society**

**Required:**


November 26: Ethnicity and Nationalism

Required:


PART IV: POLITICAL ECONOMY

December 3: Redistribution and Social Welfare

Required:


December 10: Political Economy of Development
Required:


