Seminar in Comparative Politics
3700: 620

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Course Description

This course examines some of the major issues and theories of comparative politics. Because comparative politics is such a vast field, we will only be able to sample a portion of what comparativists have been studying over the past several decades.

The aim of the course is to educate graduate students about comparative politics by critical examination of much of the salient literature in the sub-field as well as learning through doing. Students will construct their own comparative study during the course of the semester that will help them hone their skills of comparative inquiry.

The Way the Course Will Run

This course will be run as a seminar, which entails a great deal of student input into discussions of the course material and minimal lecturing on my part. Every week, a group of five students must be prepared to lead the class discussion. Each student is required to prepare class discussion on a reading or set of readings assigned to each of the five students for a particular week. Students will be assigned readings to prepare in alphabetical order. The readings are listed in the syllabus. The students who are to lead class discussion on a particular reading(s) will be known as a rapporteur. Each rapporteur will give a presentation on his/her assigned reading that will last between ten and fifteen minutes. The students’ presentations will focus on the following questions related to each reading:

- What is the central question the work addresses?
- What are the principal theoretical arguments (hypotheses) made by the work?
- What are the empirical findings of the work, if any?
- What are the empirical strengths and weaknesses of the work?
- What are the broader implications of the work for the study of comparative politics?

Ten minutes of discussion led by myself will follow each of the rapporteurs’ presentations.
Following the presentations and the discussion, we will take a ten minute break. When we return from the break, I will lead a lecture/discussion on the topic of discussion for the week. This will take up the remainder of the class time each week.

**Research Presentations and Papers**

Students will be required to create and present a comparative study of some aspect of politics in two countries. The students will pick one of the possible research topics from the list provided by the instructor. Students are to pick the countries themselves.

**Possible topics** (not an exclusive list):

- Why does country x have a two party system and country y has a multi-party system?
- Why does country x have a stable form of coalition government but country y has unstable coalitions?
- Why does country x have a high inflation rate but country y has low inflation?
- Why has country x developed economically but country y has not?
- Why does country x have a great deal of corruption but country y does not?
- Why is the government in country x popular but the government in country y is not?
- Why is country x democratic but country y is not?
- Why does country x have a great deal of political violence but country y does not?
- Why is the citizenry in country x opposed to abortion but not in country y?
- Why does the government of country x abuse the rights of its citizens but not in country y?

Each research project must focus on the following questions:

1. What is the dependent variable?
2. Why is this an important dependent variable?
3. Why study these cases?
4. Is it a most similar systems or most different systems study?
5. What are the hypotheses?
6. Which theories support the hypotheses?
7. Does the empirical evidence found support or refute the hypotheses?
8. Does the set of findings weaken or strengthen a particular line of thinking in comparative politics theory?
9. What modifications could be made to the theory that would strengthen it?
10. What other research questions are raised by the study?

Each student will both present the study verbally as well as hand it in as a research paper. The presentation will come toward the end of the semester. The paper will be handed in the last day of class.
The presentation will last **twenty-thirty minutes for each student**, followed by **twenty minutes of questions and feedback from the rest of the class**. The presentation is meant to give students the opportunity to practice the important art of a professional presentation, but also, it gives the student the chance to get insightful and corrective feedback on their research that they can incorporate into their research paper. The research paper is an important opportunity to learn comparative politics by doing as well as fine-tuning one’s writing skills. The paper is to be **18-22 pages long**. Students will be assigned times to present in reversed alphabetical order.

### Course Requirements and Grading

It is expected that each student will do **all of the assigned readings** by the date of assignment. Although discussions will cover the readings, they may also cover material that is not in the readings; the student is responsible for the material in both the readings and the lectures. As participation in the class is **50%** of the grade, be prepared to add to class discussion. This means coming to each class having read the material and being able to offer your input. **The class participation grade is based on attendance, evidence of having done the reading, frequency of participation, and cogency of class comments.**

Your participation grade will be given as one of four possible grades. A student can get an A (which equals a percentage score of A (93%) for outstanding participation, B (83%) for good participation, C (73%) very little participation, and D (63%) no active participation. There are just these four grades for participation.

Each unexcused absence will lead to an automatic five percent drop in the student’s final percentage score. Leaving class during break will be counted as an absence.

**Papers** will be graded according to their addressing the questions outlined in this syllabus. Also, they must be cogent, clear, concise, and the signified length. **Short papers will be docked by three percentage points for every page they are above or below the allowed range. Late papers will not be accepted!**

**Presentations** must also follow the questions outlined in the syllabus and must be cogent, concise and stick to the time limits. Presentations above or below the time limit of 20-30 minutes will be penalized one percentage point for every minute the presentation is above or below the time limits. **Missed presentations cannot be made up!**

**Rapportuering** will be graded on the student’s performance in terms of addressing the questions outlined above, making a coherent presentation, and sticking to the time limit.

The grade breakdown is as follows:

**Participation:** 50%
Paper: 20%
Presentation: 20%
Rapportuering: 10%

NOTE BENE: It is the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor, beforehand, if they are unable to complete any of the class responsibilities at the assigned time. Presentations must be done on the assigned day at the assigned time unless the student is too ill to do it or there has been a death in the family. No rescheduling because of travel plans!

Office Hours

I strongly encourage you to discuss anything related to the class in my office hours. My office hours are 1-3 on Mondays and Wednesdays. I am also happy to meet you outside of my posted office hours. If you cannot meet me during my office hours, please e-mail me and make an appointment. This will ensure you ample time with me to speak.

IMPORTANT: Readings with bullets next to them are required for all students to read for class.

Class Schedule

Jan 11: Introduction: What is Comparative Politics?

Jan 18: Theoretical Approaches


**Jan 25: Political Culture**

• Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba. 1963. *Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Chps 1 and 2;

Next Person Almond and Verba Chps 3 and 12.


**Feb 1: Party Systems**


**Feb 8: Democratization**


Feb 15: Politics of Economic Development


Feb 22: Civil Unrest


Feb 29: Social Capital


March 7: Discussion of Preparations for Presentations

March 14: No Class (Spring Break)

March 21: Presentations

March 28: Presentations

April 4: Presentations

April 11: Presentations

April 18: Presentations

April 25: Presentations (if needed)

May 2: Paper due in my mailbox at 12 pm