POLITICAL SCIENCE 9566a
Comparative Politics

Fall 2012

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Office Hours: W 3:00 - 4:00 p.m. or by appointment
Class Meeting: M 2:30 – 4:30 p.m. SSC 4105

Course Objectives
This seminar introduces students to the academic study of Comparative Politics with an emphasis on examining competing conceptual, methodological and theoretical approaches to this political science subfield. We discuss the historic roots of comparative politics and examine of a variety of comparative methodological approaches including most similar and most different systems, case studies, large n, small n, and rational choice. Current substantive debates will illustrate the various approaches. Topics are explored by examining classical and contemporary contributions from leading scholars.

Course Materials
There is no required text for this course. Students are responsible for locating the required materials. Some course content may be accessed through the course page on the OWL system. Course content on this page may include copies of and/or links to the required readings as well as a variety of other materials including discussion group postings and course change advisories. You should plan to access the course web page on a weekly basis. Should the need arise, course materials may also be accessed via the UWO library page (utilizing available full text databases). As well, the UWO library holds print subscriptions for many of the books and journals in the reading list. Finally, some of the required readings may be put on reserve in Weldon Library. As always, please be aware of CanCopy regulations.

Course Requirements
Participation 40%
Class Presentations 10%
Critical Reviews 35%
Research Design 15%
Participation
This is a graduate-level seminar. As such, preparation, attendance and active participation are mandatory. Every seminar day, students will sign a register of attendance. The instructor will take note of the quality and quantity of verbal contributions and will award marks based on the intellectual content and evidence of learning contained within such remarks. The grade for this portion of the course requirements will be calculated as the average of all class sessions beyond the first class. To be perfectly clear, the minimum expectation is that prior to the beginning of class, students have thoroughly read and considered the assigned materials. Each student is expected to actively participate in the in-class discussions. The instructor will attempt to facilitate these discussions so that everyone has an opportunity to participate but it is the student’s responsibility to actively engage in the discussion on a weekly basis.

Class Presentations
On a minimum of two and a maximum of four occasions (depending on class size), students will be responsible for introducing one or more of the assigned articles or chapters to the class. Each time, you will give a very brief summary of the material, discuss it with reference to other materials under review that day and in prior classes, evaluate its overall argumentation, and identify key weaknesses and omissions. Marks are awarded based on overall understanding of the reading’s arguments, a discussion of its merits and weaknesses, as well as its context and value for studying comparative politics. Students are expected to coordinate their presentations to prevent unnecessary duplication of arguments as well to avoid ignoring portions of the assigned materials.

Critical Reviews
Students will submit a critical review of the assigned readings. The purpose of these reviews is to help you to refine your research, analytical and writing skills, as well as expose you to central material that is relevant to the subject under study and your own research interests. The reviews should consist of a maximum of five, double-spaced pages (employing appropriate font, text size and margins – to be further clarified as necessary). Students will submit a total of six critical reviews during the course of the semester. The entire class will hand in a critical review prior to the week 2 class. After week 2, students will hand in a critical review every other week (as per the schedule set during the week 1 class). Due dates for papers are not negotiable.

These papers are graded on marks accumulated in four main areas: argumentation and critical analysis, spelling and grammar; organization; and evidence of contextual understanding. The essays are to be original works that communicate your individual thoughts and insights in your own words. The professor will NOT pre-screen your paper ideas.

Research Design Essay:
Students will submit a research design essay on the last day of class. The exercise is designed to offer students the opportunity to synthesize an overarching understanding of the material covered across the whole term by proposing and defending a comparative research design for a research question of interest. All of the readings covered during the course form the basis for the analysis; additional research is not required or desired. Student research question areas must be approved by the professor. More detail related to form and content will be discussed in class at the end of October. The summary essay is graded in four main areas: argumentation and critical analysis, spelling and grammar; organization; and evidence of a deep and defensible understanding of the main approaches to comparative research covered in the course material.
**Paper Submission Issues**

For each written assignment, one hard copy and one identical electronic copy submitted to the class OWL TurnItIn site are due no later than the start of class on the assignment deadline date. Papers not received at the beginning of class will receive a mark of zero (the late penalty is thus 100%). A paper is not considered as submitted unless both the hard copy and the electronic copy are submitted. Documentation of rare and exceptional circumstances will be reviewed only to the extent legally required by the University. There is ZERO flexibility as regards due dates and times so do not bother to ask for extensions.

Written assignments are not group-authored projects and group work on any written assignment will be viewed as plagiarism. All acts of plagiarism are serious academic offences and will be dealt with as per UWO’s articulated sanctions. In the case of plagiarism in a graduate-level class, my preferred recommendation regarding sanctions is a fail on the assignment, a fail on the course, and expulsion from the program. All material that is borrowed from other sources must be appropriately acknowledged through using quotations and/or proper reference citations. Be aware that The University of Western Ontario uses software for plagiarism checking. Your essays will be reviewed via such software for the purpose of plagiarism checking. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf
Course Schedule
Please be aware of the fact that the instructor reserves the right to change the weekly topics, the dates various topics are covered as well as the individual readings within a given topic. Announcements regarding changes to the course schedule will be made no later than the week before the affected class meeting.

Week 1: Course Introduction

Week 2: What is Comparative Politics?

This week we begin by asking what is comparative politics? The first explores the scope, objectives and methods of comparative politics. The next three readings are short response pieces to the first article. The last five readings are drawn from ‘typical’ second year textbooks and address the state of comparative politics. You should think about what we mean by comparative politics. Is it a subfield? Or a method? Or was it killed off by IR? Or is it something else?


**Week 3: Concepts in Comparative Politics**


If you are unfamiliar with the debate surrounding the definition of democracy, I would suggest doing a quick scan of the brief Diamond & Przeworski articles before you read Armony & Schamis.


Week 4: Measurement in Comparative Politics

This week, we start out with two theory articles. The first gives a brief overview of a symposium looking at the use of data in comparative politics and the problems we should consider. The second examines data assessment. The third looks at the issues around measurement of democracy and the problems associated with the choices we make when moving from definitions to measures. The fourth is one of the first efforts to evaluate the big democracy indices. The next four are mini-replies to the fourth (and to my mind, these four amount to less than one real article). The last is a boots-on-the-ground attempt to address problems with democracy indices.


HAPPY (Fake) THANKSGIVING – we do not meet the week of Oct 8
**Week 5: Most Similar Systems/Most Different Systems Analysis**


**Week 6: Evaluation of MSS/MDS**

Two of the classic readings on MSS/MDS:


One more recent take on MSS/MDS:


Two more recent articles on MSS/MDS followed by 4 short rejoinders:


Week 7: Case Study

Read one or the other of Gerring – MA students should read the 07 version.


Week 8: Case Selection

Geddes, Barbara. 1990. How the cases you choose affect the answers you get: Selection bias in comparative politics. Political Analysis, 2, 131-150.


**Week 9: Multivariate Analysis**


**Week 10: Experiments in Comparative Politics**

The first five papers are from the APSA Comparative Democratization Section newsletter. They are brief accounts of the issues around experimental research in democratization. Please note that these five papers only amount to 24 very short text pages. Moehler looks at the application of experiments in the study of development assistance. Dunning provides a more in-depth examination of natural experiments. Hyde is an example of a natural experiment paper. Driscoll and Hidalgoz is another example paper - Cris and I saw this paper delivered at the 2009 APSA and the authors agreed to let me use it as a class reading.


**Week 11: Putting Small n to the Test**

This week we are going to read several examples of small n analysis of varying quality to put the critical lessons we have learned this semester to the test.

**Week 12: Putting Big N to the Test**

This week we are going to read several examples of big n analysis of varying quality to put the critical lessons we have learned this semester to the test.
(Graduate) Statement of Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf