Core Seminar in Comparative Politics

This seminar surveys the field of comparative politics. Drawing from political theory and modern sociology, comparative politics studies political phenomena in multiple settings in an effort to identify and more fully understand the interplay of the factors and forces involved. Its literature has grown to enormous proportions in the last fifty years. To minimize superficial treatment of that literature, we will not attempt to “cover” all of it, but will address in some depth the following: a) the nature and limitations of social science generally; b) the strengths and weaknesses of leading theoretical approaches in comparative politics; and c) related conceptual and methodological issues. Reading materials include both classic works, and articles and surveys of the field by contemporary scholars.

The seminar will require the active participation of all. This means doing the assigned reading and coming to seminar sessions prepared to discuss it critically with others. It also means presenting four review papers of between 1,000 and 1,250 words each, in which (one or more) of the recommended readings for a particular week are briefly summarized and then assessed in terms of its (their) strengths, weaknesses, and problematic aspects. Each of these papers will count for 10% of the semester grade, and is to be submitted in advance of the seminar session to which it corresponds. In addition, students will prepare and submit a more substantial seminar essay of between 4,000 and 5,000 words, in which two or more theoretical approaches (e.g., marxism, structuralism, weberian analysis, political culture, rational choice, the new institutionalism, etc.) are compared, contrasted, evaluated in relation to specific political phenomena. These essays will count for 40% of the semester grade, and are due on December 14th. The remaining 20% of the grade will be based on the student’s participation in the seminar both in leading discussions and in responding constructively to others.

Papers containing arguments or other material taken from sources that are not properly identified and attributed (i.e., plagiarism) will be treated harshly.

The following books should be purchased:

B. Guy Peters, **Comparative Politics: Theory and Methods** (paper);
Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan Zuckerman, **Comparative Politics, Rationality, Culture, and Structure** (paper);
Alfred Stepan, **Arguing Comparative Politics** (paper);
Guillermo O’Donnell, Jorge Vargas Cullel, and Osvaldo M. Iazzetta, **The Quality**
Seminar Outline and Readings

1. August 31st - Introduction

Discussion Topic: “Political Science, Comparative Politics, and the Quality of Democracy” - using materials to be distributed at the seminar;

2. September 7th - Research Design, Case Studies, and Methods of Analysis

Required Readings: Peters, Comparative Politics: Theory and Methods, 1998, Chapters 1-4 (on comparison, case loads, and measurement and bias), pp. 1-108;


3. September 14th - Theories, Conclusions, and Problems


4. September 21st - Is a Science of Politics Possible?


5. **September 28th - Marxism**

**Required Readings:** Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brummaire of Louis Napoleon,” in McClellan (ed.), _Karl Marx, Selected Writings_, pp. 329-354; Marx, “The Grundrisse,” in McClellan (ed.), _Karl Marx, Selected Writings_, pp. 375-422; and Meiksins Wood, _Democracy against Capitalism_, Introduction, Ch. 1, and Chs. 7-9, pp. 1-48 and 204-293;

**Recommended Readings:** Meiksins Wood, _Democracy Against Capitalism_ (the rest); Nicos Mouzelis, “Political Transitions in Greece and Argentina: Towards a Reorientation of Marxist Political Theory,” _Comparative Political Studies_, Vol. 21 (4), 1989, pp. 443-466; Marx, “The Communist Manifesto,” “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” “The German Ideology,” “Capital,” Vol. 1, and “The Civil War in France,” all in McClellan (ed.) _Karl Marx, Selected Writings_, pp. 245-272, 83-121, 175-208, 452-525, and 584-603; Theda Skocpol, “Explaining Social Revolutions: Alternatives to Existing Theories” in Skocpol, _States and Social Revolution_, 1979, pp. 3-43; and Albert O. Hirschman, _The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before its Triumph._

6. **October 5th - Weber’s sociology**


7. October 12th - Political Culture


8. October 19th - Rational Choice


9. October 26th - Neo-Institutionalism


10. November 2nd - Rationality, Culture, and Structure (1)

Required Readings: Lichbach and Zuckerman, Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure, 1997, Part I (Ch.1), Part II (Chs. 2, 3 and 4), and Part III (Ch. 5 and 6);

Recommended Readings: recommendations for weeks 7 and 8 on rational choice and culture; O'Donnell, Part IV, Chapters 7-11, in O'Donnell, Counterpoints, pp. 133-215; and Arturo Escobar, Encountering Development, the Making and Unmaking of the Third World, Chapters 1-4, pp. 3-153;

11. November 9th - Rationality, Culture, and Structure (2)

Required Readings: Lichbach and Zuckerman, Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure, 1997, Part III (Chs. 7 and 8), and Part IV (Chs. 9 and 10);
**Recommended Readings:** Przeworski, “A Flawed Blueprint,” *Harvard International Review*, Spring 2003; in addition, see recommendations for week 9 and both Marxist and non-marxist (e.g., neo-institutionalist) literature on the state;

12. **November 16th - The Quality of Democracy**


**Recommended Readings:** Part II: Comments by Workshop Participants, in O’Donnell, Vargas Cullell, and Iazzetta (eds.), *The Quality of Democracy, Theory and Applications*, pp. 165-264; and Peter Smith, Ch. 1, “Dimensions of Democracy,” and Chs. 8-11, in *Democracy in Latin America*;

13. **November 30rd (Tuesday) - Latin America in Comparative Perspective**

**Required Readings:** Alfred E. Stepan, Chs. 3, 5, 8, 9, 11, 13 and 14, pp. 73-99, 167-199, 213-253, and 276-314;

**Recommended Readings:** Stepan, Arguing Comparative Politics (all remaining articles (Chapters 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, and 15);

14. **December 7th - Current Controversy in Political Science**


15. **December 14th - seminar essays due (5:00 p.m.)**