INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE POLITICS

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This core seminar is intended to provide you with a broad understanding of the main concepts, theories, and debates of comparative politics. In the first two sections of the course, we will focus on gaining a solid understanding of two major concepts: institutions and regimes. In the last section of the course, we will apply these concepts and approaches to understanding some of the substantive issues that most concern political scientists.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Critical reviews and participation (40%):

On the first day of the semester I will break the class into two groups.

On four, pre-assigned days throughout the semester, everyone in your group will be responsible for handing in a reading review. (This is not a group project. Everyone in your group will be individually responsible for preparing a set of reviews.)

- Each review will focus on at least four of the required readings within a specific week, unless fewer than four readings are assigned for that week. A good review will concisely:
  1. Identify the main puzzle/paradox that each reading addresses;
  2. Identify the main argument/s (thesis) of each reading; and
  3. Comparatively assess the readings. The following are some different ways you might assess the readings:
     - Identify each reading’s major strength/s and major weakness/es
     - Show why the interpretation in one reading is better than another
     - Link readings (either in the same week or from different weeks) in an interesting way
     - Raise neglected issues
     - Assess the validity of general arguments applied to specific national contexts

On the four, pre-assigned days that the other group is writing a critical review, your group’s members will be responsible for presenting the basic issues and arguments in the readings to the class to start the day’s discussion. (I will choose at random during class which of the readings each of you will present.)
Mid and Final exams (60%):

Each student is expected to complete two take-home exams.

A good exam will demonstrate a thorough understanding of the relevant readings on the syllabus, and additionally connect concepts and themes across different weeks of readings.
WEEK 1 (August 29) INTRODUCTION

INSTITUTIONS

WEEK 2 (September 5) STATES

Marx, Karl. “The Communist Manifesto”

Weber, Max. “Politics as a Vocation”

Skocpol, Theda. “Bringing the state back in: strategies of analysis in current research,” in P. Evans, D. Rueschemeyer and T. Skocpol, eds., Bringing the State Back In (1985).


WEEK 3 (September 12) STRONG, WEAK, AND FAILED STATES


WEEK 4 (September 19) INSTITUTIONS
[Group 1 review; Group 2 present]


WEEK 5 (September 26) APPROACHES
[Group 2 review; Group 1 present]


REGIMES

WEEK 6 (October 3) DETERMINANTS OF DEMOCRACY
[Group 1 review; Group 2 present]


WEEK 7 (October 10) ELECTORAL SYSTEMS
[Group 2 review; Group 1 present]


WEEK 8 (October 17) MIDTERM EXAM WEEK

WEEK 9 (October 24) NEW RESEARCH IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

TBD
WEEK 10 (October 31) AUTOCRACY
[Group 1 review; Group 2 present]


OUTCOMES

WEEK 11 (November 7) PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION
[Group 2 review; Group 1 present]


WEEK 12 (November 14) COLLECTIVE ACTION AND MOBILIZATION
[Group 1 review; Group 2 present]


WEEK 13 (November 21) REBELLION AND REVOLUTION
[Group 2 review; Group 1 present]


WEEK 14 (November 28) DEVELOPMENT
[no review; EVERYONE come ready to present]


WEEK 15 (December 5) PASSION, CRAFT, AND METHOD

Munck, Gerardo and Richard Snyder. 2007. Passion, Craft, and Method in Comparative Politics. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. (Chapter selections will be assigned to students the week prior to class.)

FINAL EXAM DUE DATE: December 12, 3:30 PM