Political Science 186, Fall 2012
Introduction to Comparative Politics -- Honors
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Tuesdays 8:45AM - 10:45AM, Education 145
See the Learn@UW website for more course information

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Course description and objectives

This course is an introduction to some of the key concepts and theoretical approaches in the comparative politics subfield of political science, and to the government and politics in select foreign countries. Comparative politics is the study of processes and institutions within countries (whereas international relations is the study of interactions between countries). Prompted by real-world events and puzzles, comparativists investigate broad theoretical questions such as: How and why do countries democratize (or not)? What are different ways that states organize politics, i.e., how do they differ in terms of party systems, electoral rules, presidential powers, etc.? What is the relationship between the economy and the political system?

We will spend about half of the semester focusing on key concepts, and the final half studying those concepts in a sample of countries. The five countries that we will study in depth are Russia, China, South Africa, Mexico, and the United Kingdom. These represent many regions of the world and range from authoritarian and communist regimes to newly democratic states and long-established democracies. The overall objective of the course is to give students grounding in the basic tools of comparative political analysis so that you can better understand world events and politics in foreign countries.

This is an honors course and it will be based on student-centered discussion rather than lectures. Reading is essential for full participation in discussions and students will be asked to explain concepts from the readings in class. In addition students will work in groups on in-class presentations that connect readings to current events. There will also be a final paper and presentation in class.

Essential learning outcomes:

This course will address several "essential learning outcomes" of the LEAP initiative (http://www.aacu.org/leap/vision.cfm). Students' knowledge of human cultures will be enhanced by their exploration of politics, society, and the economy in other countries. The course assignments are aimed at developing intellectual and practical skills, including analysis, critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, and teamwork. Finally, the connection between the political science material in the texts and current events, as well as the linkage of concepts and countries, is aimed at achieving an integrated learning experience.
Course requirements and grading

Preparation and participation in discussions: 10%
Three in-class explanation of concepts (5% each) 15%
Four in-class presentations connecting concepts to a current event (10% each) 40%
Final Paper and in-class presentation 35%
Total: 100%

All grades based on in-class work will be posted on Learn@UW each week. Thus, you can track your grade throughout the semester.

Reading, Preparation, and Participation:

- This is a discussion-based class and active participation is essential. Mere attendance is not full participation. Active participation means being prepared by doing the reading and thinking about the material so that you can ask and answer questions related to the course material in class.
- Absences will only be excused due to religious conflicts or medical issues; contact me as soon as possible, should a medical issue or religious conflict arise.
- Students are expected to attend for the full class period; arriving late or leaving the room during class will result in a lowered participation grade for the day.
- It is acceptable to use a laptop in class to take notes, but engaging in other work or online activity unrelated to the course during class will result in a lowered participation grade for the day.
- The grading scheme for discussion participation is:
  A = Attended and actively participated (e.g. raised hand, and seemed in command of readings and material)
  B = Attended and spoke, but without evidence of preparation
  C = Attended but did not speak
  F = Did not attend
Note that there is no "D" reflecting the large gap between attending and not attending. Also, there are no A/B or B/C grades, but those liminal grades will appear in the final course grades.

In-class explanation of concepts:

Students are responsible for reading all assigned material before class. There are no traditional lectures in this course; instead each week I will randomly choose five students and ask each of them to explain a concept from the week's readings. Student explanations will be graded according to the following criteria:

A = Outstanding explanation of concept, going beyond just description of text and offering original analysis.
B = Good explanation of concept, demonstrating adequate engagement with the text.
C = Minimally able to explain or describe concept, but only in the broadest terms.
D = Unable to explain concept with any accuracy, suggesting a lack of reading.
F = Did not attend
**In-class presentations connecting concepts to a current event:**

Each week students will work in groups of 3 or 4 to prepare a 10-minute presentation, including approximately 3-5 slides, which connect a central concept from the readings to a current event article.

- Groups and presentation topics and dates will be set at the first class meeting.
- There will be two presentations for each class meeting.
- Current events articles can be chosen from any major English language newspaper in any country (e.g. *Wisconsin State Journal, New York Times, Wall St. Journal, The Guardian of London, International Herald Tribune*).
- Groups should meet during the week before their presentation to select an article.
- Students should come to my office hours to discuss the article or email me a link to the article with a short description of how it connects to the topic(s) covered in the readings.
- Students are free to use any slide technology they wish, including PowerPoint, Pages, or just plain .pdfs of text.
- I am available to discuss slide preparation and presentation tips.

**Final Paper**

This paper will connect the theoretical material from the first half of the course with the case studies. Students should choose one of the five case-study countries (Russia, Mexico, China, South Africa and the United Kingdom) and one of the theoretical topics covered in class from Sept 11-Oct 23 (these are the same as the chapters in the main text book) and write a paper focusing on the chosen theoretical topic in the chosen country.

- I encourage you to sign up for my office hours to discuss your final paper topic.
- The sources for the paper can come entirely from course readings, or you can use additional sources. Be sure to cite all sources fully and properly.

**Paper Proposal**

- Due Monday, **October 22, 9 am**, posted on Learn@UW as a .pdf.
- 1 single space page, including the following:
  - Title
  - Paragraph describing the theoretical concept (e.g. elections, the state, protest, political economy, etc.)
  - Paragraph describing the empirical case (Russia, Mexico, China, South Africa and the United Kingdom) including the time period and region of the country if applicable.
  - List of primary sources to be used (can come mostly or entirely from the course material)

**Final Paper**

- Due Friday, **Dec. 7th, 11:00 am**, posted on Learn@UW, as a .pdf.
- No longer than 2,500 words (Approximately 10 double-spaced pages).
- Include your name, date, a title, and the total number of words.
- Use 12-point font, 1-inch margins, and double-space this paper.

**Final Paper Presentations**

- **Dec. 11 in class.**
- Papers will be arranged into panels of 3-4 papers.
- All students will give a 5-minute presentation based on their papers. No slides necessary.
Other course policies

Disability accommodations:

People with disabilities will be fully included in this course. Please inform me if you need any special accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, or assessments of this course to enable you to participate fully. Confidentiality of the shared information will be strictly maintained. Certain accommodations may require the assistance of the McBurney Disability Office on campus. The McBurney Disability Resource Center can be reached at (608) 263-2741 or via email at mcburney@odos.wisc.edu.

Contacting me:

• Feel free to talk with me before or after class, go to my office hours, or send me an email. You don’t need to make an appointment to go to office hours – just come!

Course readings

The following books are required and are referred to in the syllabus as either "Textbook" or "Casebook," as noted in brackets below.

• These books are sold together as a package in paperback at the University Bookstore.
• The price of the two together is substantially less than the individual prices, and the e-book versions cost much less.
• They are available on the Norton website as electronic books:
  http://books.wwnorton.com/books/detail.aspx?ID=18837 (online version)
• Note that these eBooks are Flash based and will not work on the iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch, and some Android devices.
• The books also available at the Reserve Section of the Helen C. White College library.

In addition to these books, there are some assigned articles available on the Learn@UW course website.

Class schedule and readings

Tues., Sept. 4: Introduction to the Course and What is Comparative Politics?


Tues., Sept. 11: States, Nations and Society


**Tues., Sept. 18: Political Economy**

Textbook: ch. 4, Political Economy, pp. 77-108.

**Tues., Sept. 25: Democracy**

Textbook: ch. 5, Democracy, pp. 109-140.

**Tues., Oct. 2: Non-Democratic Regimes**

Textbook: ch. 6, Non-Democratic Regimes, pp. 141-166.

**Tues., Oct. 9: Advanced Democracies, and Less Developed and Newly Industrializing Countries**


**Tues., Oct. 16: Communism and Post-Communism**

Textbook: ch. 8, Communism and Post-Communism, pp. 197-229.

Mon., Oct. 22, 9:00 am: Paper Proposals due, posted on Learn@UW as a .pdf

**Tues., Oct. 23: Political Violence, and Discussion of Student Paper Proposals**

**Tues., Oct. 30: Russia**  
Casebook, ch. 7, Russia, pp. 245-284.  

**Tues., Nov. 6: China**  
Casebook, ch. 8, China, pp. 285-326.  

**Tues., Nov. 13: China and South Africa films**  
*In-class film, China from the Inside*  
*In-class film, Long Night’s Journey into Day*

**Tues., Nov. 20: South Africa**  
Casebook, ch. 13, South Africa, pp. 490-530.  

**Tues., Nov. 27: Mexico**  
Casebook, ch. 11, Mexico pp. 407-449.  

**Tues., Dec. 4: United Kingdom:**  
Casebook, ch. 2, United Kingdom, pp. 31-74.  

Friday, Dec. 7th, 11:00 am: Final Papers due, posted on Learn@UW as a .pdf

**Tues., Dec. 11: Concluding Discussion and Student Presentations**  
- Read student papers that have been posted on Learn@UW.