PS106: Introduction to Comparative Politics

Fall 2014
Lectures: Tue, Thu 9:30-10:45
Sterling 1310

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Course Description:

This course is an introduction to comparative politics, one of the four sub-fields in Political Science, which involves the comparative analysis of political institutions, processes, and outcomes at the national level.

During this term, we will try to figure out how we can usefully compare politics in a variety of countries. We will make comparisons explicit and systematic in order to determine how governments work, how power is organized and contested at the national level, and how regular people can participate and pursue their interests in different political settings.

One of the primary goals of the class will be to introduce you to the study of comparative politics, including its key concepts, theories, methods, issues, and language. Some of these may seem quite removed from the “real world” at first, which is why we will look at six countries in some detail in order to make the application of comparative politics more concrete and accessible. The group of countries we cover in this class consists of the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, East-Central Europe (especially Poland), China, and Mexico.

Objectives:

In this course, you will:

- Learn about some basic theoretical and methodological problems in the study of politics (concepts, theories, issues).
- Learn about the "real" world and how to explain it.
- Learn to identify interesting questions about politics in different countries.
- Learn to identify differences and similarities, and what both tell us about what we are studying.
- Learn to understand and compare different forms of democratic and non-democratic rule.
- Become familiar with the language of political science.

By the end of the semester, you should be able to apply the concepts of political science to analyze (and evaluate) political events in a variety of settings.
Requirements and grading:

1. Regular attendance and careful attention during lectures, including detailed note-taking.
2. Regular attendance, careful attention, and active participation in your discussion section. This requires doing the readings and thinking about the assigned materials so that you are able to participate in the discussion. The discussion section TAs will be evaluating you in this regard. Your participation is worth 17.5 percent of your final grade. Part of your participation grade is based on the completion of six online exercises covering the history of each of our country cases.
3. Three midterm exams, each worth 27.5 percent of your final grade, for a total of 72.5 percent.

A few important notes (please read very carefully):

- You should make a habit (if you have not already) of reading at least one newspaper or periodical with substantial international coverage, such as *The New York Times*, *The Financial Times*, *The Washington Post*, or *The Economist*. Exams will reference current events in the countries we are studying, so it is in your best interest to stay on top of things.
- Anything covered in lecture, discussion section, or readings is fair game for the exams. So just doing the reading on the last night before the exam will not earn you a decent grade. Come to class, come to your discussion sections, and do your readings carefully and on time. *Note that even readings that have not been explicitly addressed in lecture or discussion section will be covered in the exams!*
- I allow discussion section switching only under exceptional circumstances, i.e. when you would have to drop this class entirely if you could not switch into another section. You will have to present documentation to this effect. However, we may not be able to accommodate your request even then.
- I prefer you contacting me via email. Note, however, that I will have several hundred students in my two classes this semester, so getting in touch with me will never be the quickest or most straightforward way to get an answer. Please contact your section TA before getting in touch with either the head TA or me. The section TAs will forward your inquiry to me if need be. If you do have to contact me personally, please be sure that it says “106” in the subject header (otherwise, your email may be discarded as spam). Also be advised that it may take several days for me to get back to you, given the large number of students I am teaching this term.
- If you know that you will be absent from class for religious or other reasons that can be known in advance, tell your section TA before class. Also let your section TA know if you have to miss class due to sickness or family emergencies. Your TAs will note your attendance in section, so you want to make sure they know when you are missing class for legitimate reasons.
- I will not provide detailed lecture or other class notes. Actively taking notes during class time is an important skill and learning tool. To facilitate your note-taking, however, I will upload an outline of my lecture to our Learn@UW course website on the night before the relevant class meeting. This outline will allow you to anticipate the topics discussed, and to “fill in” the information provided in the lecture. Please note, however, that the lecture outlines are very basic and will not in any way be a substitute for you attending lecture. If you don’t come to class, you will be missing important information that will be required knowledge on the exams.
- My policy on re-evaluating grades is the following (please read very carefully!):
  - You must wait for 48 hours after the assignment has been returned before issuing any complaints.
  - You will contact your section TA with a request to re-evaluate your grade. They will take the case to me. I will not respond to a request that comes directly from you. If you have any concerns about your section TA handling your case, please contact the head TA.
You have to draft a 1-2 page double-spaced memo outlining why you deserve a better grade. Please note that this memo has to be based entirely on the merit of your own work, i.e., it cannot be based on comparisons with the grades of other students.

Your grade will be fully re-evaluated. This means that the TA or I may revise the grade downward as well as upward. So please be certain that you have a very specific and justifiable reason before asking us to make any changes – this is not a risk-free process!

- The exam days are set. Clear your schedules now. There will be no make-up examinations unless you can provide proper documentation that your absence is due to a) a genuine family emergency, b) illness or injury, or c) travel away from Madison for university-related (!) obligations. If an exam is missed for a valid reason, you will be able to do a substitute assignment. This will be an essay of 10 pages based on the material covered in the exam and will be due two days after the date of the missed exam. In order to qualify for the make-up assignment, you must notify me by the time the exam starts.

- Students needing special accommodations to ensure full participation in this course should contact me as early as possible. All information will remain confidential. You also may contact the McBurney Disability Resource Center regarding questions about campus policies and services.

- Cheating is a very serious offense that will get you in great trouble. You will receive a failing grade for the class, and the reason for the grade will be noted in your transcript. This will make it extremely difficult for you to gain entrance to graduate or professional schools and will jeopardize your opportunities with a large number of employers in the future.

There can be absolutely no exceptions to these rules! Please bear in mind that in a class of this size we lack a lot of the flexibility that smaller classes can afford.

Required readings:


NOTE: A (less expensive) e-book version of this book is available on the publisher’s website.


NOTE: This is a custom textbook that was printed specifically for our class, which makes it cheaper for you (about half the list price), but it also means that you must purchase a new copy (with this exact ISBN), available at the university bookstore. The only used copies from previous years that may be floating around are those with ISBN 9781285339801; others are not the same book. A final option is that you purchase an e-book version of Kesselman, Krieger, and Joseph. Introduction to Comparative Politics, 6th Edition (2013). Cengage. ISBN 9781111831820. Five of the six chapters in our custom edition are drawn from this book. But note: if you want to go this route, you must borrow somebody else’s book for the "East-Central Europe" chapters (which is from Kesselman et al. European Politics in Transition, 6th Edition (2009). Cengage. ISBN 9780618870783), or get a hold of it some other way.

All other readings listed in this syllabus are also required and available for download on our Learn@UW course website. If you prefer hard copies, I suggest that you download all readings, put them on a flash drive, and take them to one of the local copy shops. For a reasonable price, they will print and bind the readings for you as you see fit.
September 2: Introduction

No readings.

September 4, 9, 11: The State and Democracy

O’Neil, chs. 1, 2, 3, 5


The Failed States Index 2013, Foreign Policy, available at: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/06/24/2013_failed_states_interactive_map

→ Explore content of website carefully.

September 16: Research Design


September 18: class cancelled.

September 23: Research Design (cont.)


September 25: The Logic of Comparison

“The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index 2012: Democracy at a standstill”


“‘The Consensus Model of Democracy,’” pp. 31-47.

**September 30, October 2, 7: The United Kingdom**

Kesselman, “Britain”

O’Neil, ch. 8


*United Kingdom, selected news articles* (available as *one single file* on our Learn@UW website)

**October 9: MIDTERM EXAM #1**

**October 14, 16, 21: Germany**

Kesselman, “Germany”


*Germany, selected news articles* (available as *one single file* on our Learn@UW website)
October 23, 28, 30: Russia

Kesselman, “The Russian Federation”

O’Neil, ch. 9 – pp. 256-273 only

O’Neil, ch. 4


Russia, selected news articles (available as one single file on our Learn@UW website)

November 4, 6, 11: East-Central Europe / Poland

Kesselman, "East-Central Europe" (chapters 4-8)

O’Neil, ch. 9 – pp. 273-end


Poland, selected news articles (available as one single file on our Learn@UW website)

November 13: MIDTERM EXAM #2

November 18, 20, 25: China

Kesselman, “China”

O’Neil, ch. 6


Michel Oksenberg. 2001. “Will China Democratize?” In: Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner: The


China, selected news articles (available as one single file on our Learn@UW website)

December 2, 4, 9: Mexico

Kesselman, “Mexico”

O’Neil, ch. 10


Mexico, selected news articles (available as one single file on our Learn@UW website)

December 11: MIDTERM EXAM #3