PS106 Introduction to Comparative Politics: Politics Around the World

Spring 2016
Lectures: Tue, Thu 4:00-5:15
Ingraham B10

Professor Ringe
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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, South Africa, 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 82.5 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 a very large number of students in my two classes this semester, so getting in touch with me is not the quickest or most straightforward way to get an answer. For that you want to contact your section TA, who will forward your inquiry to me if need be. If you do want 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 some time 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.
- Research shows that actively taking notes during class time is an important skill and learning tool. I will therefore not make my PowerPoint slides available before our class meetings. I will, instead, post them on our Learn@UW website each week *after* the Thursday lecture. Since this means that you will have a full set of slides to study for the exams, I put quite a bit of material on the slides. This means that you do not need – and are unlikely to be able – to take “transcript notes” (i.e., to copy everything on the slides), which is an ineffective learning strategy anyway (as, again, research shows). Your best strategy is to listen carefully to the lectures and take selective notes on things mentioned that are important but not necessarily on the slides already. Then, go back to review the printed slides later on as needed. Please note, also, that the slides alone are not a substitute for attending lecture and doing the readings. Much of the material is unlikely to make complete sense if you do not attend class, but will be required knowledge for the exams.

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• My policy on re-evaluating grades is the following (please read very carefully!):
  o You must wait for 48 hours after the assignment has been returned before issuing any complaints.
  o 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.
  o 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.
  o 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)
iliness 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.

Required readings:


NOTE: This is a custom textbook prepared specifically for our class. You must purchase this
exact book, using the ISBN number listed. Other editions are not the required text for the course.
The only exception is if you instead wanted to use two separate textbooks (O’Neil's “Essentials of
Comparative Politics” and “Cases in Comparative Politics,” both 5th Edition, 2015) that include
the chapters I am assigning below, plus several others.

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.

January 19: Introduction

No readings.
January 21, 26: The State and Democracy

O’Neil: 1 Introduction; 2 States; 3 Nations and Society; 4 Political Economy


Recommended:
- “The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index 2014: Democracy and its discontents”

January 28: no class

February 2: The State and Democracy (cont.)

Readings: see above.

February 4, 9: Research Design


February 11: The Logic of Comparison


John Carey. 2015. “Strong presidencies may threaten democracy. Luckily, we don’t have one.” Washington Post, January 14.

February 16, 18, 23: The United Kingdom

O’Neil: 5 Democratic Regimes; 11 United Kingdom


**February 25: MIDTERM EXAM #1**

**March 1, 3, 8: Germany**

O’Neil: 8 Developed Democracies; 12 Germany

George Packer. 2014. “The Quiet German: The astonishing rise of Angela Merkel, the most powerful woman in the world” (abridged). The New Yorker, December 1, 2014.


**March 10, 15, 17: South Africa**

O’Neil: 10 Developing Countries; 16 South Africa


**March 29, 31, April 5: Russia**

O’Neil: 9 Communism and Postcommunism; 13 Russia


April 7: *MIDTERM EXAM #2*

April 12, 14, 19: *China*

O’Neil: 6 Nondemocratic Regimes; 14 China


April 21, 26, 28: *Mexico*

O’Neil: 15 Mexico


May 3: *Review Session*

May 5: *MIDTERM EXAM #3*