PS120 – Politics Around the World (Introduction to Comparative Politics)

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Lectures: Tue, Thu 9:30-10:45
Biochem 1120

Teaching Assistants:
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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. Two midterm exam and one final exam, each worth 22 percent of your final grade, for a total of 66 percent. Exam days are February 28, April 11, and May 9.
3. 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. Note the following about your discussion sections:
   - Your discussions will take place both online (on our Canvas course website) and in person. During weeks when you have an online discussion activity scheduled, your sections do not meet in person. The schedule is as follows (please add this information into your calendars right away so that there is no confusion):
     - Week of Jan 29 & 31 (State & Democracy): Online
     - Week of Feb 5 & 7 (Research Design): In-class
     - Week of Feb 12 & 14 (Comparison, UK): Online
     - Week of Feb 19 & 21 (UK): In-class
     - Week of Feb 26 & 28 (UK, Midterm 1): In-class
     - Week of Mar 5 & 7 (Germany): In-class
     - Week of Mar 12 & 14 (Germany, SA): Online
     - Week of Mar 19 & 21: None (spring break)
     - Week of March 26 & 28 (SA): Online
     - Week of Apr 2 & 4 (Russia): In-class
     - Week of Apr 9 & 11 (Russia, Midterm): In-class
     - Week of Apr 16 & 18 (China): Online
     - Week of Apr 23 & 25 (China, Mexico): Online
     - Week of Apr 30 & May 2 (Mex, Midterm): In-class
   - The online discussion activities become available at 12:01am on the Monday of the relevant week. Your first posts are then due on Wednesday at 11:59pm and the second posts on Friday at 11:59pm. Additional instructions are available online.
   - In-class discussion section meetings take place according to your official class schedule, but only during the weeks indicated above.
   - You will also complete six online case activities covering the history of each of our country cases. The case activities are not the same as the online discussion activities, but they are also available on our Canvas course website. To receive full credit, you must complete the case activity by 9:30am on the day of my first lecture covering the relevant country case (failure to do so will negatively affect your participation grade). Note that you can only access the online discussion activity if you completed the preceding online case activity first, by gaining a perfect score on the last knowledge check.
   - Each online discussion activity is worth 3 points, for a total of 18 points. In-class participation is worth 16 points.

Office hours:

My drop-in office hours are on Tuesday from 11-12 in Aldo’s Café in the Wisconsin Institutes of Discovery (corner of University and Orchard) and on Thursday from 2:45 and 3:45 near the coffee shop in the lobby of the Education Building (1000 Bascom Mall). If you are not available during those times, please email me to make an appointment.
A few important notes (please read very carefully):

- You should make it a habit (if you have not already) to read 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 may reference current events in the countries we are studying, so it is in your best interest to stay on top of things. Online subscriptions to the New York Times are available for as little as $1 per week.
- 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!
- The 4-credit standard for this course is met by an expectation of a total of 180 hours of student engagement with the course learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit), which include reading, lectures, in-class discussion sections, online discussion activities, online case activities, and other student work as described in this syllabus.
- 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 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 “120” 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.
- Unless explicitly stated otherwise, I deduct one full letter grade for each 24 hour period that an assignment is late.
- 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. Please note that I put a few resources on our Canvas course website with strategies for successful note-taking and studying.
- 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.

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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, as I outline in the ‘Plagiarism Statement’ I put up on our Canvas course website (which I hereby require you to review carefully). 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:


The textbook is available for purchase at the University Bookstore and online. There are three different versions of the same book, which differ in price from most to least expensive:

- E-Book (available on the publisher's website only, https://digital.wwnorton.com/casesconcepts)

*All other readings listed in this syllabus are also required and available for download on our Learn@UW course website.*

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**January 22, 24: Introduction, The State and Democracy**

O’Neil: Introduction, States


**January 29, 31: The State and Democracy (continued)**

O’Neil: Nations and Society; Political Economy


Recommended:

**REMINDER:** *Online discussion activity posts due Wednesday and Friday*

**February 5, 7: Research Design**


**REMINDER:** *In-class discussion sections this week*

**February 12, 14: The Logic of Comparison, The United Kingdom**


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

O’Neil: Democratic Regimes

**REMINDER:** *Online discussion activity posts due Wednesday and Friday, online case activity due Thursday*

**February 19, 21: The United Kingdom (continued)**

O’Neil: United Kingdom


**REMINDER:** *In-class discussion sections this week*
February 26: The United Kingdom (continued) – Special Brexit Edition

Readings: TBA

REMINDER: In-class discussion sections this week

February 28: MIDTERM EXAM #1

March 5, 7: Germany

O’Neil: Developed Democracies; Germany


Levine, Sam. 2018. “Maine is about to try out a new way of electing politicians.” Huffington Post

REMINDER: In-class discussion sections this week, online case activity due Tuesday

March 12, 14: Germany (continued), South Africa

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.

“Rough Road Ahead for the Merkel Dynasty,” Der Spiegel, December 10, 2018,


Gray, Alex. 2016. “4 maps that will change how you see migration to Europe.” World Economic Forum

O’Neil: South Africa


REMINDER: Online discussion activity posts due Wednesday and Friday, online case activity due Thursday,

March 19, 21: No lecture, discussion, or online activity (spring break)

March 26, 28: South Africa (continued)

O’Neil: Developing Countries


REMINDER: Online discussion activity posts due Wednesday and Friday

April 2, 4: Russia

O’Neil: Communism and Postcommunism; Russia


REMINDER: In-class discussion sections this week, online case activity due Tuesday

April 9: Russia (continued)


REMINDER: In-class discussion sections this week

April 11: MIDTERM EXAM #2

April 16, 18: China

O’Neil: China, Nondemocratic Regimes


REMINDER: Online case activity due Tuesday, online discussion activity posts due Wednesday and Friday

April 23, 25: China (continued), Mexico


O’Neil: Mexico

*REMINDER: Online discussion activity posts due Wednesday and Friday, online case activity due Thursday.*

**April 30, May 2: Mexico (continued)**


2018 Mexican Presidential Election – Analysis

*REMINDER: In-class discussion sections this week*

**May 9, 10:05: Midterm #3 (exam room TBA)**