Political Science 120, Comparative Political Regimes

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SYLLABUS

Course Description

This course serves as an introduction to the basic concepts, methods, primary empirical materials, theoretical approaches, and current challenges of comparative politics. Students will be trained to think and write critically on substantive issues in the politics of different countries. Although comparative politics is often defined as "the study of all countries excluding the United States," this course will not abide by that rather perfunctory definition. The U. S. will be included at different points in the course as a baseline for comparison.

As a primer for newcomers to this subdiscipline of political science, the course has been organized with an increasing level of difficulty. Students begin with an introduction to the most basic tools of political science; then they are trained to analyze complex empirical materials. Later, they must make their way up the "ladder of abstraction" to the tricky world of theory-building and hypothesis-testing.

In the first section of the course (Session 1), students will examine the methods, concepts, and epistemology of comparative politics. Learning how to use these tools to study politics is similar to "basic training." I prefer: a "bootcamp for the mind" - not very pleasurable, but very necessary.

The second section of the course (Sessions 2 - 4) introduces students to five empirical cases: Britain, Germany, Russia, China, and Brazil. This survey will provide students with a basic lay of the political land. Students will learn about the crucial moments, institutions, processes, and individuals that shaped the political experiences of these five major countries. The surveys will also present several "mid-range propositions" - causal statements about particular sets of countries that come in handy when attempting to understand complex empirical materials.

As students use these empirical cases and mid-range propositions, class lectures will introduce students to some of the theoretical arguments that have been built on the comparative study of these countries. The study of Britain and Germany will inform our on-going discussion about diverse routes to democracy; Russia and China will provide empirical material for the application of theories about state-building and revolution that are taken from the study of Western Europe; and finally, the study of Brazil will highlight the problems of forming democratic governance in the context of "late late" development.

Thus empowered with a solid methodological and empirical background, section 3 of the course (Sessions 5 - 7) will challenge students to think about a central question in comparative politics: How is democracy built and why it endures in some countries and erodes in others? In this section, students will read Robert Putnam's seminal contribution to the debate regarding this question, Making Democracy Work. Students will also read short, contrasting theoretical approaches to the question and compare these with Putnam's treatment and his more recent application of these ideas to the United States.

What is Expected of Students

Students will be expected to read, think, criticize, and form arguments. That means that students must keep up in their reading assignments and attend class regularly. Students must be fully prepared at all times to discuss the readings and concepts from previous lectures. The best students will be critical but balanced in their assessments, and will develop coherent arguments that they can defend in their writing and their in-class discussion.

Reading Materials

https://acad.carleton.edu/curricular/POSC/classes/Posc120/S00/index.html
This course requires your purchase of three books. These materials have been ordered and are presently on sale at the college bookstore. The texts are:


In addition to these texts, this course requires your study of a number of other readings from diverse sources. Students are advised to make readable copies of these materials early during the course. Also, in order to reduce your costs, I have placed multiple copies of the required materials, including books and photocopied essays, on closed reserve.

I will occasionally distribute handouts and clippings from *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Economist*, *Current History*, the Minneapolis/St. Paul newspapers, and the internet at the beginning of class. Students are also invited to check out links to course relevant web pages on the professor's web page. Materials on the course's web page will be updated during the semester and will supplement rather than duplicate the substance of the lectures and the readings. Students will be invited to reference these resources during the term.

**Grading**

Assessment of the students in this course will be based on their performance on one exam, three writing assignments, and in-class participation. The grade breakdown follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Comprehensive Exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Writing Assignment</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second Writing Assignment</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Third Writing Assignment</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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**The Comprehensive Exam**

Format: take-home essay exam. Students will select two of four questions for analysis.

This exam will test the ability of the student to (1) become familiar with particular empirical cases, (2) build and apply simple causal arguments about issues and problems specific to these cases, and (3) identify similarities and differences in the politics of addressing these questions across national cases.

**Writing Assignments**

Paper assignments in this course are of varying lengths. Yet they must all be typed, paginated, and double-spaced with 12cpi font size and one-inch margins. These assignments must be turned in before or on the due date specified below. Late work will receive no credit. Proper use of spelling, punctuation, and grammar is expected. Since ability to edit your own work and produce concise argument is a touchstone for assessing and developing your critical skills, students will not be allowed to surpass the required number of pages.

**Paper #1 (Methods Exercise):**

Students will be asked to select a single article from a list of citations and make a photocopy of the selection. Once acquired, students will evaluate the article by identifying the main argument, the key variables, indicators
for variance, and main concepts. Students must specify if the concepts are clear to them or not. If not, they must explain why. This paper must be four to five pages in length. Additional requirements of this Methods Exercise will be made available in a handout.

**Paper #2 (Mid-Range Proposition Building Exercise):**

Based on their study of Britain, Germany, and Russia, students will prepare a five to six page paper proposing a causal argument about the formation and maintenance of democracy. They will support their argument with a brief comparison of two of the three countries listed above.

**Paper #3 (Theory Application Exercise):**

Using alternative theoretical approaches to building democracy, students will critique Robert Putnam's Making Democracy Work. Students will be asked to evaluate the consistency and usefulness of Putnam's main arguments by pointing out strengths and weaknesses. The essay must make a case for an alternative approach among those discussed in the course. This paper will be five to six pages in length.

**Class Participation**

Communicating your insight into the subjects analyzed in this course is an integral part of the learning experience. In no way do I consider class participation a residual category for subjectively determining the final grade. In this course, I will evaluate your performance in both formal, scheduled presentations and informal class discussion. The following are structured presentation formats that will be used in this course:

1. A simulation on Russian democracy and state capacity.
3. A mock United Nations "democracy monitoring group" focused on Brazil.

**Discussion Section**

I offer an informal and voluntary occasional discussion section for this course. The section will begin to meet during the second or third week and will function throughout the term depending on scheduling. These sessions are usually held at Goodbye Blue Mondays (GBMs) or the Political Science Department lounge.

**The Grading Scale**

I will be using the following grading scale in this course:

- 98-100 A+
- 94-97 A
- 91-93 A-
- 88-90 B+
- 83-87 B
- 79-82 B-
- 76-78 C+
- 72-75 C
- 68-71 C-
- 67/below D/F

**Academic Misconduct**

Given the fact that academe relies upon the ethical conduct of scholars, students are held to the same standards in their own work. Any act of academic dishonesty or misconduct will be referred to the Office of the Dean. For further information, see Carleton College's *Academic Honesty in the Writing of Essays and Other Papers* and the
section on "academic honesty" in *Academic Regulations and Procedures, 1999-00*. Both are available in Laird 140.

**Special Needs**

Students requiring access to learning tools/special schedules approved by Student Support Services should contact me at the beginning of the course.

**NOTE:** Readings must be completed for the dates assigned below.

**SECTION I**

**THE TOOLS OF STUDYING COMPARATIVE POLITICS**

**Session 1: Science! Assumptions, Causal Relationships, Concepts, Method, and Variables**

**Toward a Science of Politics** (March 27, Monday)

Handout: The Truth About the Piltdown Man (A Cautionary Tale About The Importance of Verification in Scientific Inquiry).

**Epistemology: The Assumption of Rationality in Political Science** (March 29, Wednesday)


**Theory and Comparative Method: How Do We Know a Good Causal Argument When We See One?** (March 31, Friday; April 3, Monday)


Video: "Junk Science." (Will be shown in the Dept. Lounge at 7 p.m., April 3. Informal discussion will follow).

**Library Session** (April 5, Wednesday)

**Definitions and Conceptualization** (April 7, Friday)

Larry Diamond, "Is the Third Wave Over?" in Søe, article 45.


**SECTION II**

**DIFFERENT ROUTES TO MODERNITY AND DEMOCRACY**

**Session 2: The Advanced Capitalist States: Class Alliances and Democracy**

**Britain**

KKJ, Chapter 2, Sections 1-2 (April 10, Monday)

KKJ, Chapter 2, Sections 3-4 (April 12, Wednesday)

KKJ, Chapter 2, Sections 5; Søe articles 1 & 4 (April 14, Friday)

**SHORT PAPER #1: METHODS EXERCISE DUE** (April 17, Monday)
The European Union

Søe articles 25 & 26 (April 17, Monday)

Søe articles 27, 28, and 29 handout of Economist articles (April 19, Wednesday)

The EU Debate (April 21, Friday)

Germany

KKJ, Chapter 4, Sections 1-2 (April 24, Monday)

KKJ, Chapter 4, Sections 3-4; Søe article 9 (April 26, Wednesday)

KKJ, Chapter 4, Section 5; Søe articles 5 & 6 (April 28, Friday)

No class on May 1, Monday (Mid-term break)

Session 3: Communist and Post-Communist States: States and Social Revolutions

Russia

KKJ, Chapter 10, Sections 1-2 (May 3, Wednesday)

KKJ, Chapter 10, Sections 3-4 (May 5, Friday)

KKJ, Chapter 10, Section 5; Søe articles 31 & 32; The Russia Simulation (May 8, Monday)

China

KKJ, Chapter 11, Section 1 (May 10, Wednesday)

SHORT PAPER #2: PROPOSITION-BUILDING EXERCISE DUE (May 10, Wednesday)

KKJ, Chapter 11, Sections 2-4 (May 12, Friday)

KKJ, Chapter 11, Section 5; Søe articles 40 & 41; The China Debate (May 15, Monday)

Session 4: 'Third World' States: Development and Democracy

Brazil

KKJ, Chapter 8, Sections 1-2 (May 17, Wednesday)

KKJ, Chapter 8, Sections 3-5 (May 19, Friday)

Mock U.N. Democracy Monitoring Group: The Case of Brazil (May 22, Monday)

Film: "Central Station." (Will be shown at 7 p.m., place TBA. Informal discussion will follow).

SECTION III

TOWARD A GRAND THEORY OF DEMOCRACY

Session 5: Culturalist Approaches to Democracy (May 24, Wednesday)


David L. Kirp, "Tocqueville in Italy," in Søe, article 14.


**Session 6: Social Structural Approaches (May 26, Friday)**


**Session 7: Institutionalist Approaches (May 29, Monday)**


**Final Assessment (May 31, Wednesday)**

**SHORT PAPER #3: THEORY APPLICATION EXERCISE DUE (May 31, Wednesday)**

**THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAM (Handout on May 31, Wednesday; Due June 5, Monday).**