Political Science 120, Comparative Political Regimes

SYLLABUS

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Office Hours

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 does it endure in some countries and erode in others? In this section, students will read Robert Putnam's seminal contribution to the debate around this question, Making Democracy Work. Students will also read short, contrasting theoretical approaches to the question and compare these with Putnam's treatment.

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**

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. In order to facilitate your access to these materials, I have prepared a compendium of these readings. You are free to borrow this compendium for photocopying. It is available at my office during the day. Students are advised to make readable copies of these materials early during the course. Also, in order to reduce your costs, I have placed 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 course.

**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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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Late Midterm Exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Writing Assignment</td>
<td>10%</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>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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**The Late Midterm 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 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 entitled, "Building Democracy in Brazil: Applied Perspectives from Other Countries." Students will negotiate a common position within the group and then present their argument in class as a prescription for the problems of democracy in Brazil.
2. Scheduled debates on contentious resolutions based on the readings.
3. Small group discussion sections.

**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, 1998-99. 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

BOOTCAMP FOR THE MIND:
THE TOOLS OF STUDYING COMPARATIVE POLITICS

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

Toward a Science of Politics (March 29, 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 31, Wednesday)


Theory and Comparative Method: How Do We Know a Good Causal Argument When We See One? (April 2, Friday; April 5, Monday)


Video: "Junk Science."

Definitions and Conceptualization (April 7, Wednesday)


SECTION II

THE COUNTRY SURVEYS:
DIFFERENT ROUTES TO MODERNITY AND DEMOCRACY

Session 2: The Advanced Capitalist States: Class Alliances and Democracy
Britain
KKJ, Chapter 2, Section 1 (April 9, Friday)
KKJ, Chapter 2, Sections 2-3 (April 12, Monday)
KKJ, Chapter 2, Section 4 (April 14, Wednesday)
SHORT PAPER #1: METHODS EXERCISE DUE (April 14, Wednesday)
KKJ, Chapter 2, Section 5; Soe articles 2, 3, & 4 (April 16, Friday)

The European Union
Soe articles 34, 35, & 36 (April 19, Monday)
Handout of Economist articles (April 21, Wednesday)
The EU Debate (April 23, Friday)

Germany
KKJ, Chapter 4, Sections 1-2; Soe articles 12 & 13 (April 26, Monday)
KKJ, Chapter 4, Section 3; Handout of Economist articles (April 28, Wednesday)
KKJ, Chapter 4, Sections 4-5; (April 30, Friday)
No class on April 3, midterm break.

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

Russia
KKJ, Chapter 6, Sections 1-2 (May 5, Wednesday)
KKJ, Chapter 6, Sections 3-4 (May 7, Friday)
KKJ, Chapter 6, Section 5; Soe articles 37 & 38; The Russia Debate (May 10, Monday)
SHORT PAPER #2: PROPOSITION-BUILDING EXERCISE DUE (May 14, Friday)

China
KKJ, Chapter 7, Sections 1-2 (May 12, Wednesday)
KKJ, Chapter 7, Sections 3-4 (May 14, Friday)
KKJ, Chapter 7, Section 5; Soe articles 45 & 46; The China Debate (May 17, Monday)

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

Brazil
KKJ, Chapter 10, Sections 1-2 (May 19, Wednesday)
KKJ, Chapter 10, Sections 3-4 (May 21, Friday)

THE LATE MIDTERM EXAM (Handout on May 17, Monday; Due May 21).

Transnational Task Force on Democracy Simulation (May 24)
"Building Democracy in Brazil: Applied Perspectives from Other Countries."

SECTION III

TOWARD A GRAND THEORY OF DEMOCRACY

Session 5: Culturalist Approaches (May 26, Wednesday)


Putnam, Making Democracy Work, Chapters 1-2.

Session 6: Social Structural Approaches (May 28, Friday)


Putnam, Making Democracy Work, Chapters 3-4.

Session 7: Institutionalist Approaches (May 31, Monday)


Putnam, Making Democracy Work, Chapters 5-6.

SHORT PAPER #3: THEORY APPLICATION EXERCISE DUE (June 2, Wednesday)