PS106: Politics Around the World: An Introduction to Comparative Politics:

Fall 2016  
Lectures: Tue, Thu 9:30-10:45  
Education L196  

Professor Shelef  
Office: 414 North Hall  
Email: shelef@wisc.edu  
Office hours: Monday: 2-4

Coordinating TA:  
Ning Leng  
Nleng2@wisc.edu

Course Description:

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

During this semester, we will learn 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.

Our exploration of Comparative Politics will have three main components. The first will introduce you to the study of Comparative Politics, including its key concepts, theories, methods, issues, and language. The second component will examine five case studies (United Kingdom, Russia, China, South Africa, and India) in detail in order to provide both an understanding of politics in those countries and concrete applications of the concepts and theories developed in the first part of the course. The third component of the course will showcase the variety of topics and approaches in Comparative Politics through guest lectures by some of UW’s political science faculty in areas of their expertise.

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 15 percent of your final grade. Your participation grade is based equally on attendance in section, participation in section, and the completion of five online exercises covering some of the historical background of each of our country cases. These exercises will become available approximately one week before we start covering a country case in class on the course’s Learn@UW website. You may complete the exercises for full credit at any point prior to my first lecture on each country case. If you complete the exercise after the first lecture starts, you will only receive partial (50%) credit. For example, if you complete the exercise for the UK before 9:30am on March 7th, you will get full credit, and only partial credit after that date and time. Additional details are available on the course’s Learn@UW website.
3. Two midterm exams, each worth 25 percent of your final grade.
4. A comprehensive final exam, worth 35 percent of your grade.

Section information:

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<td>Thursday, 2:25-3:15</td>
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<td>Wednesday, 11:00-11:50</td>
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<td>Wednesday, 9:55-10:45</td>
<td>Ingraham 215</td>
<td>Kate Carter</td>
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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. Lectures and 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 (including guest lectures!), 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 that you contact 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. In general, you may want to contact your TA first. If you do want to contact me personally, please be sure that it says “106” in the subject header. Also be advised that it may take a couple of 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, please let your section TA know before that 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.¹ I will therefore not make my PowerPoint slides available before our class meetings. I will, instead, post a version of them on our Learn@UW website after we complete each topic. 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, research² 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.

- 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 contesting any grade.
  - 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 coordinating TA.
  - Your request to have a grade re-evaluated must contain 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 AND your section TA 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 failing 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:


All other readings listed in this syllabus are also required and available 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.

Course schedule

January 17: Organization and Introduction: What is Comparative politics?
No readings

January 19, 24, 26: States, Nations, and Ideologies
• O’Neil, Essentials of Comparative Politics, chapters 2 and 3.

January 31, February 2: Democracy, electoral institutions, and political parties
O’Neil, Essentials of Comparative Politics, chapter 5.
• James Madison, Federalist Papers #10, #51.

Recommended:
• “The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index 2015: Democracy and its discontents”

February 7, 9: The scientific method and comparative politics
• O’Neil, Essentials of Comparative Politics, chapter 1, pages 6-19.

February 14: Midterm I

February 16, 21: Political economy: Economic Policy, and Strategies of development
• O’Neil, Essentials of Comparative Politics, chapter 4

February 23: Social movements: Guest lecture: Professor Simmons

February 28: Political violence: Guest lecture by Prof. Straus
• O’Neil, Essentials of Comparative Politics, chapter 7.

March 2: Regime change and democratization
• O’Neil, Essentials of Comparative Politics, chapter 6.

March 7, 9, 14: Case study: United Kingdom
• O’Neil, Essentials of Comparative Politics, chapter 8.
• O’Neil, Cases in Comparative Politics, chapter 2.

March 16, 28: Case study: Russia
• O’Neil, Essentials of Comparative Politics, chapter 9.
• O’Neil, Cases in Comparative Politics, chapter 7.

March 30: Midterm II
April 4: Guest lecture: Professor Bhavnani on the politics of inequality

April 6: Case study: China
- O’Neil, Cases in Comparative Politics, chapter 8.

April 11: no class

April 13: Case Study: China, continued

April 18: Guest lecture: Professor Nils Ringe

April 20, 25: Case Study: South Africa

April 27, May 2: Case Study: India
- O’Neil, Essentials of Comparative Politics, chapter 11.
- O’Neil, Cases in Comparative Politics, chapter 9.

May 4: Conclusions and Review

May 8: FINAL EXAM: 12:25-2:25, Location TBD