

Introduction to Comparative Politics

POL 202 S

T, Th 3:30-4:45 pm
LC 192

Spring Semester 2010
Professor Merike Blofield
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Course objectives

“Politics is who gets what, when, and how” – Harold Laswell

Some of the most fundamental struggles that take place in any country are over the boundaries between politics and economics and between state and society. What role should the state play in the economy and in society? Who should be able to decide this and other issues? What effects do the political and economic systems of a given country have on people’s everyday lives? This course introduces students to the study of comparative politics by examining how conflicts over these issues have played out in several different countries around the world.

This course is divided into two broad sections. First, we cover some of the key issues in comparative politics, including the state, regimes, political institutions, political economy, and gender and politics. This provides students with a background with which to then proceed to the second section of this course: case studies of advanced industrialized countries (Germany, Sweden, and the United States), communist and post-communist countries (Russia and China), and developing countries (Mexico, Brazil and Nigeria). In this section, we will see various combinations of authoritarian and democratic governance, as well as widely divergent types of government involvement in the economy. From these cases we will seek to develop an understanding of what factors cause (or prevent) democratization and economic development. We will also apply ideas from class to current events.

Readings

The vast majority of the readings come from the two textbooks for this course. A few additional required readings are available on blackboard or as hand-outs, and are indicated as such in the syllabus.

1. Books

Mark Kesselman, Joel Kriger and William A. Joseph. 2009. *Introduction to Comparative Politics: Political Challenges and Changing Agendas*, 5th Edition. Wadsworth.

Mark Kesselman. *Readings in Comparative Politics: Political Challenges and Changing Agendas*, 2nd edition. Wadsworth.

2. Blackboard readings. These readings are available on blackboard (BB).

3. During the semester, I *highly recommend* that you keep up with current events by regularly reading the best english-language newspapers. Here are some recommended sources:

BBC

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/>

New York Times

www.nyt.com

Washington Post

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/>

The Economist

<http://www.economist.com>

The readings have been selected with care. In the unlikely case that I find particularly suitable readings for this course *during* the semester, I do however reserve the right to change, eliminate and/or add readings. Should this happen, I will notify you of this well in advance in class and on blackboard.

Requirements

1. Class participation 10%
2. Thought essay 20%
3. Mid-term exam I 20%
4. Mid-term exam II 25%
5. Final exam 25%

1. Class participation. 10%.

My goal is to provide the best possible learning environment for students. Therefore, there are three non-negotiable rules for the classroom.

1. Cell phones must be turned off and stowed during class. If you have an emergency situation on a particular day that requires communicating with others outside the class you should stay away from class that day. If you use your cell phone during class you will be asked to leave immediately. If this happens more than once, you will be asked to withdraw from the course.
2. Do not come to class late. It is disruptive to the professor and to the students, and you miss important information. If you cannot come to class on time on a particular day you should stay away from class that day.
3. I prefer for you to take notes without a laptop. If, however, you choose to use a laptop I expect you to refrain from all activities unrelated to the class (eg. emailing, instant messaging, surfing the internet). If you engage in such activities you will be asked to leave as it is disruptive to others.

Lack of adherence to any of these three rules will reduce your participation grade by 20% each time (eg. down from a B to a D).

Beyond this, your participation grade will be based upon the quality of your contributions to class discussion. I will not be taking attendance during class; whether you attend class is up to you. However, **if you do not come to class you will be responsible for all information that you miss, including information regarding exams.**

I do understand that some students prefer participating in less public ways, and participation also includes coming to my office hours and talking about class material. In sum, the participation grade is designed to tap into your level of engagement with the course material throughout the semester.

We will be dealing with many controversial issues in class, and I expect us to have very lively and fun debates. This is of essence in a political science class. The key to remember is to treat others who disagree with you with respect, and argue against their ideas, not against them personally.

2. Thought essay. 20%. This essay is based on class readings and lectures/discussion as well as any hand-outs, and requires no outside research. It will be between 800 and 1000 words, and you will receive a style sheet that you must follow. **You must write either Essay #1, Essay #2, OR Essay #3; you are required to hand in only ONE essay.** However, you must choose which essay you will write on by February 16th, and indicate this to me in class. You are then committed to this choice. If you do not communicate your choice to me, you will be expected to write on Essay #1. No exceptions.

Essay #1, due at the beginning of class on March 11, will address Germany, Sweden and the United States.

Essay #2, due at the beginning of class on April 8, will address Russia and China.

Essay #3, due at the beginning of class on April 29, will address Brazil, Mexico and Nigeria.

The specific question for each essay will be handed out in class prior to the beginning of each section of countries as well as posted on blackboard. Late essays will be down-graded by half a grade per day, including holidays and weekends.

3,4,5. The mid-term exams (20% and 25%) and final exam (25%) will all be multiple-choice exams. They will cover material from the readings as well as class lectures (including hand-outs), with approximately half from each.

Written work and plagiarism

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. At best, you will receive an F grade for the entire course when you hand in plagiarized work. Plagiarism, very briefly, refers to the “stealing” of other peoples’ written work (from books, articles, newspapers, web sources, etc.) or verbal ideas. You must cite all material that is not your own. If you have doubts of what constitutes plagiarism, consult the student code, and/or talk to me. “I did not know” is not an acceptable defense after a work has been handed in. Finally, all in-class exams are to be taken without the assistance of books, notes, or other people.

Additional Comments

For any additional concerns, please do not hesitate to ask me. Moreover, my office hours are set up for you, and I encourage you to use them.

Class schedule

- Jan 19 Introduction
*Syllabus
- Jan 21 What is comparative politics
*Kesselman, Krieger and Joseph (hereafter KKJ), Chapter 1
*Kesselman (the reader), Chapter 1, “introduction”, pp.1-9
- Jan 26 The state
*Tilly (Blackboard)
- Jan 28 Regimes: democracy
*Kesselman, 4.3, Schmitter and Karl
* Kesselman, 4.1, Sen, “Democracy as a Universal Value”
- Feb 2 Regimes: non-democracies
* Kesselman, 2.4, Levitsky and Way
- Feb 4 Types of democracies
*Lijphart, “Democracies”, chs.1-2, (Blackboard)
- Feb 9 Political economy I
*Marx, “The Communist Manifesto” (Blackboard)
- Feb 11 Political economy II
* Kesselman, 3.2, Coates
* Kesselman, 3.6, Stiglitz
- Feb 16 Gender and politics
* Kesselman, 5.1, Norris and Inglehart
* Kesselman, 6.6, Weldon
- Feb 18 **Mid-term exam I**

Advanced industrialized democracies

- Feb 23 Germany I
*KKJ, Chapter 4
- Feb 25 Germany II
- Mar 2 Sweden I
*Hancock, “Sweden”, ch.5 (Blackboard)
- Mar 4 Sweden II
*TBA (Blackboard)
- Mar 9 The United States I
*KKJ, Chapter 7

Mar 11 The United States II
Essay #1 due

Spring break

Communist/post-Communist countries

Mar 23 Russia I
*KKJ, Chapter 11

Mar 25 Russia II

Mar 30 China I
*KKJ, Chapter 13

Apr 1 China II

Apr 6 **Mid-term exam II**

Developing countries

Apr 8 Brazil I
*KKJ, Chapter 9
Essay #2 due

Apr 13 Brazil II

Apr 15 Mexico I
*KKJ, Chapter 10

Apr 20 Mexico II

Apr 22 Nigeria I
*KKJ, Chapter 8

Apr 27 Nigeria II

Apr 29 Failed states
* Kesselman, 2.5, Rotberg
Essay #3 due

FINAL EXAM

Wed May 12, 2-4.30 pm