POLI 130: Introduction to Comparative Politics
Section 001 Fall 2010

Gardner 210, Tuesday and Thursday 3:30-4:45pm
Instructor: Sandi Chapman Osterkatz
Office Hours: 459 Hamilton, Thursday 2-3:30pm and Friday 10:00-11:30am
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Course Description

Comparative Politics is one of the major subfields of Political Science and is well described by its name. Political comparisons are generally between countries, groups of countries, or even between states and regions. The goal of this course is to provide you with an overview of the field and familiarize you with some of the most important theoretical and empirical work. We will not be taking an in-depth look at particular countries but will explore the broader themes of political institutions, political economy, globalization, and democracy using country examples from around the globe. We will also explore these dimensions by taking a comparative look at climate change and social policy.

Principal Objectives

This is an introductory course that requires no prior knowledge of comparative politics. We will meet each Tuesday and Thursday to use lecture, discussion, and student presentations to explore the core concepts and theories of comparative politics while engaging current events and contemporary world problems. The course will give you the opportunity to explore a diverse literature on democracy, globalization, political economy, parties and institutions, and the comparative method. A premium is placed on critical thought, participation in lively group discussion, and careful reading. Participation requires doing the reading, understanding it, coming to class, and taking part in our discussions through active engagement of the material.

I want to stress the importance of communication about any problem, doubt, or question that you may have. Solutions can always be found to issues that arise over the course of the semester as long as they are addressed in a timely fashion. Do not hesitate to communicate with me about the requirements of the course, your participation and coursework, or the material, but do not wait until the last minute to do so.

This is your education, so take ownership of it. Assignments are designed to help you think about the major problems and challenges facing our world through a comparative lens. Think about what you want to get out of this class and feel free to offer topics for discussion that you find particularly engaging and to ask questions at any time.
Grades and Assignments

The emphasis on critical thought and engaged reading means that written assignments and participation will be more heavily weighted than exams. Research, writing, and careful reading require a different set of study skills than exam preparation. In this class you will need both to excel.

There will be two papers of 1300-1500 words each (approximately 5 pages), one in-class presentation, one midterm, and one final exam. The midterm takes place during the normal time and in our regular classroom. The final is scheduled by the university and cannot be changed and will also be held in Gardner 210. Papers will only be accepted electronically, by email, written in Microsoft Word, and will be considered late if they are received after 3:30pm on the due date. There will be a penalty of 10% (one full letter grade) off the final paper grade for each full 24 hours of lateness, beginning at 3:30pm on the due date.

October 12: Paper I due (15%)
October 19: Midterm Exam (20%)
November 23: Paper II due (20%)
December 17, 4:00-7:00pm: Final Exam (20%)
Attendance: 10%
Participation: 10%
Presentation: 5%

Attendance and participation are required. After the first, each unexcused absence will result in the loss of 1% from your overall final grade, as will more than 2 excused absences (not counting university related absences). Participation and attendance each represent 10% of your final grade and the one in-class presentation is worth 5%. Adequate class participation includes pertinent and regular speaking in class, attentive listening to your classmates, and respectful and constructive interaction with the group.

Sign up for the presentation assignment will take place on the first day of class. These are informal, with no powerpoint, handouts, or posters, and will be related to the topic in that day’s lecture. A separate document on paper formatting and requirements will be posted on Blackboard and part of a class will be dedicated to discussing the papers in early September. The first paper carries less weight because it will be your first opportunity to receive feedback on your essay writing and research. These papers will receive a more detailed critique in order to give you resources for improvement in the second paper. I will not review drafts but will be happy to discuss your papers during office hours if you want to bring a one page outline in at least a week before the due date. I am happy to fix errors in grading and to discuss your grade with you in office hours if you have any concerns.
Class Norms

- Laptops tend to distract and remove us from group discussion in a seminar setting, so they may not be utilized in class. I will provide outlines of each class in advance to facilitate note-taking by hand.

- Protecting academic freedom of speech requires that we both tolerate differences and express our own views respectfully in order to ensure that we do not silence others. We should all do our best to ensure a safe and open environment for discussion.

- I am generally quick to respond to emails, but I should receive emails at least 24 hours before you must have a reply, especially when we get close to paper due dates and exams.

- If you are sick, I must receive an email before the beginning of class or you will need a doctor’s note to get an excused absence.

- If you have a legitimate excuse for missing the midterm or final exam, you should present it at least 2 weeks in advance with all appropriate paperwork completed and expect to schedule the make-up before the scheduled exam. For exams, illness and family obligations that come up at the last minute require documentation in order to schedule make ups after the fact.

- The Honor Code is always in effect. Turning in exams or papers that intentionally contain work that is not yours and is not cited will result in a failing grade.

Readings and Class Schedule

Throughout the course I will update the Blackboard “Course Documents” section with readings from the syllabus. There is no text book for this course. Readings are listed under the day for which they should be completed. Although text books are necessarily more general and often less engaging than books and articles, they can be more efficient ways of conveying information. One of the things you will learn as a college student is the art of reading efficiently in order to maximize a scarce resource (your time). I will assist you by always going over the reading assignment for the next class at the end of the class before. I have tried to minimize reading assignments before papers are due and to balance out weeks with heavier reading assignments.

24 August: Intro to Comparative Politics
Bring a copy of the syllabus with you to class

26 August: Comparative Method

31 August: A Sample of Theorizing From Sociology and Introduction to Comparative Democratization


2 September: Theory on Origins of Democracy and Conceptualization


7 September: Reconciling Divergent Theories on the Relationship Between Democracy and Capitalism

9 September: Modernization Theory and Its Critics


14 September: Path Dependency and The Natural Resource Curse


16 September: Comparative Democratization in Eastern Europe

21 September: Introduction to Political Institutions, Federalism and Unitary States
23 September: Federalism Continued


28 September: Presidential and Parliamentary Systems


30 September: Proportional Representation v. Majoritarian Electoral Systems and Informal Institutions


7 October: NO CLASS I will be at the Latin American Studies Association Conference in Toronto

12 October: FIRST PAPER DUE ELECTRONICALLY BY 3:30 PM.
Political Parties Continued


14 October: Midterm Review and Institutions Continued


19 October: MIDTERM EXAM Bring loose leaf paper and pen

21 October: FALL BREAK No class
26 October: The European Union

28 October: The EU Continued


2 November: Globalization


4 November: Globalization of Trade and Finance


9 November: Trade and Finance Continued

11 November: Globalization and the Case of Climate Change


16 November: Introduction to Comparative Political Economy

18 November: Comparative Welfare States
State. pp1-32 and 337-345.

23 November: SECOND PAPER DUE ELECTRONICALLY BY 3:30 PM
Comparative Health Systems
PBS Documentary “Sick Around the World” IN CLASS.

25 November: THANKSGIVING No class

30 November: Comparative Health Systems Continued

2 December: New Social Risks
Esping-Andersen, Gosta, ed. 2002. Why We Need a New Welfare State. Forward and
Chapter 1.

ing Parenthood and Employment. Chapter 3.

7 December: REVIEW FOR FINAL EXAM Last day of class

17 December 4pm: FINAL EXAM bring loose leaf paper and pens