

Summer I, 2009
GVPT 280: Introduction to Comparative Politics

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Office Hours:

Tuesday 10:30am – 11:30am

Thursday 4pm – 5pm.

The Course

This is an introductory seminar to comparative politics – to one of the fields within political science, perhaps the most important and certainly the most expansive. This course should be a critical stepping stone for students to progress toward more advanced and specific political science courses.

What is politics all about, really? How do political systems in individual countries differ from each other, on the one hand, and are there any essential elements that they all share, on the other? What do the participants of political processes pursue? How do they come to define themselves politically? What are the structural conditions of the making of politics? These are some big questions that one may ask and attempt to answer in a course of introduction to comparative politics. There is little guarantee that satisfactory answers will be achieved, however in making the effort to answer, we will have explored some very important and interesting things about politics around the world.

What this course requires, besides the specific assignments listed below, is an initial interest in the subject of politics, an open and curious mind about the world, and a commitment to actively engage in learning. It will be a difficult and unfruitful experience, both for the student and for the instructor, if there is no interest in and commitment to the course. Just consider... *In Britain, Speaker of the House of Commons Michael Martin had to resign on May 19 over budget use scandal, the first such resignation since 1695... Iran will hold presidential elections on June 12, and amazingly, elections appear to actually matter in this outcast state, once dubbed part of the "axis of evil"... South Africa has just elected a new parliament and got its own controversial president, Jacob Zuma... Whereas in Japan, Prime Minister Taro Aso's approval ratings have been near or at single digits for several months, however he somehow still remains in office... And no one quite knows who actually is leading Russia – Putin or Medvedev...* These and many other events and news in politics cannot be uninteresting, in themselves and for their implications for the rest of the world. This is the stuff of comparative politics; we will aim to understand these and similar events, their surrounding institutional and preceding historical backgrounds, ideas and ideologies that accompany them, and the stakes involved for their participants.

The objectives put forth in this course are for students to:

- get a sense and some knowledge of how politics in countries other than the US operate, and what their defining features are;
- be able to think critically about democracy, authoritarianism, and questions of political change and transition;
- become familiar with key concepts and terms of political science, and apply them in understanding specific political systems;
- get an exposure to the method and practice of comparative politics;
- gain prerequisite knowledge and skills to take more advanced courses in comparative politics and other fields in political science.

Course Grade Requirements

The overall grade for the course will consist of the following components:

Participation - 20%: this means, it is important to be present and to participate;

Early short essay – 5%: an exercise to get us thinking about the subject of the course;

Group Report – 25%: detailed instructions will be given separately;

“Best Four” Quizzes – 20% (5% each): 6 quizzes will be given, best 4 scores will count;

Final Exam or Paper – 30%: either a 2-hour in-class exam, or a 7-10 page course paper.

The rough distribution of grades is: A = 90%<; B = 80%<; C = 70%<; D = 60%<; F=60%>. Here, A stands for “Excellent/Outstanding”, B – “Good/Very Good”, C – “Average/Satisfactory”, D – “Poor/Unsatisfactory”, and F – “Failing”.

A student must assume that at the beginning of the course he/she has earned 0% (which is true), and will need to earn everything up. It is misleading to assume that everyone has 100% at the start, and loses (or the instructor takes away) some of it by the end.

Readings:

The required textbook for the course is *Comparative Politics: Interests, Identities, and Institutions in a Changing Global Order*, edited by Jeffrey Kopstein and Mark Lichbach (2009); it has been ordered and must be available for purchase at University Book Center.

There will be some additional readings; I will hand them out in class.

All reading assignments must be read in advance of the class for which they were assigned. Without prior reading, you will not be able to participate in the discussions, and thus make a disservice both to yourself and to the class.

Besides the course readings, I will highly recommend that you regularly follow world political news – often, ongoing actual politics will happen to provide the best illustrations of the concepts that we discuss in the class. In particular, you can conveniently read for free The Economist Daily News cast, at <http://www.economist.com/daily/news/> ; watch “Newshour with Jim Lehrer” on PBS from 7pm to 8pm daily; listen to NPR radio (especially, catch their *Morning Edition*, *Talk of the Nation*, *Marketplace* and *the World*.)

Class Format

Every meeting is about 3 hours: we will divide it into two halves, where the first part will be predominantly a seminar-style participatory discussion, and the second half will be more of a lecture. However, at all times, participation by the students is encouraged and preferred. In some of the classes, we will watch a film or documentary. When we discuss individual countries (six of the classes), there will be short quizzes at the end of each class for 10 minutes or so.

Attendance, etc

We have only about six weeks, two meetings per week, to cover a broad discipline. Attendance of class meetings is mandatory in this course; try not to miss any, unless a serious reason exists (which must be duly documented). Likewise, being late to classes is not welcome; systematic lateness may amount to being counted as absent. Being present in one half of a day’s class and missing in another won’t count as full attendance.

Our class runs from 12:30 to 3:45 – please plan your lunch around this time, or use the 15 minute break in the middle. You can have drinks, but eating during the discussions is unwelcome, unless unavoidable.

Cell-phones must be either turned off or silenced. Answering a call is not permitted.

Laptops can only be used for taking notes and occasionally looking up information relevant for class. Being in Facebook, Gmail, and other entertainment and irrelevant places is extremely disrespectful to class; please kindly refrain from them.

Academic Integrity

Needless to say, that any violation of academic honesty and integrity is impermissible. The University's Code of Academic Integrity is available at: http://www.inform.umd.edu/campusinfo/department/jpo.code_acinteg.html.

The Code prohibits students from cheating on exams, plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper for credit in two classes without authorization, buying papers, submitting fraudulent documents, and forging signatures. Consequences for a violation clearly outweigh the "benefits" of venturing one.

Accommodating Student Needs

The University has a legal obligation to provide appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities should inform the instructor of their needs at the beginning of the course. The instructor will then consult with the department chair and Disability Support Services (314-7682). DSS will help to determine and implement appropriate academic accommodations.

Students will not be penalized because of observances of their religious beliefs and will be given the opportunity to make up within a reasonable time any academic assignment that is missed due to participation in religious observances. *It is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor of any intended absences for religious observances **in advance**.*

Schedule of Classes:

June 2

Introduction(s).

The subject and objectives of the course.

What is Comparative Politics?

Face the map (of political world).

June 4

What is politics? What is state? What is government and governance?

Readings: Short excerpts from Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Politics*, and Max Weber's *Politics as a Vocation* (Handed out).

June 9

Studying politics: How do we organize such a vast subject? What are some of its key elements and what do they constitute together? What do we wish to achieve as students of politics?

Reading: Chapters 1 and 2 of Kopstein and Lichbach.

-Short essay due: "Why should I be interested in politics of the rest of the world?"

June 11

Britain; and Parliamentarism and Political Parties

Reading: Chapter 3 in Kopstein and Lichbach

June 16

France; and Presidentialism and Politics of Protests and Mobilization

Reading: Chapter 4 in Kopstein and Lichbach

June 18

Japan; and Militarism, Dominant Party, and Economic Miracle(?)

Reading: Chapter 6 of Kopstein and Lichbach

June 23

Russia; and Communism and Post-communist Transition

Reading: Chapter 7 of Kopstein and Lichbach

June 25

Iran; and Revolution and Theocracy

Reading: Chapter 11 of Kopstein and Lichbach

June 30

South Africa; and Apartheid, Reconciliation, and Leadership

Reading: Chapter 12 of Kopstein and Lichbach

July 2

New states of Central Asia: Where do they go?

Readings: to be handed out.

Key themes for presentations identified.

July 7

Country Reports: Group Presentations

Presentation briefs are due at the beginning of class

July 9

“Were I to constitute a country...”

Conclusion and Review

Final Exam: TBA (either July 10 or 11).