Field Seminar in Comparative Politics
Boston University
Political Science 751
Spring 2020

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Office hours: Wednesday 10:45 a.m.–12:15 p.m. and by appointment

Class location: 226 Bay State Rd., rm. 504 (History seminar room)
Class time: Wednesday 8:00–10:45 a.m.

Course Description

This course is an seminar-style introduction to comparative politics for graduate students. It provides an overview of the major theoretical approaches and areas of research in the subfield, covering both classic works and more recent contributions. Topics include the origins of states, nations, and political regimes such as democracy and authoritarianism; the role of political institutions, including electoral systems, party systems, and systems of government; and political economy issues such as development, business politics, and the welfare state. For each topic, the focus is on comparing distinct theoretical approaches and/or countries and regions that present empirical contrasts. We examine works that employ a variety of methodological tools, including case studies, statistical analysis, and formal modeling or game theory. For Ph.D. students in political science, this course should form the core of your preparation for the qualifying exam in comparative politics.

Grade Breakdown

Class Participation: 10%
Final Exam: 40%
Term Paper: 50%

Class Participation

Students are expected to participate actively in class discussion of the assigned readings. In addition to speaking up during the weekly seminar meeting when you have relevant insights to share, there are several more formal ways that everyone will participate:

Reading comments/questions: Prior to every class (except the first week and the day you are doing a short presentation), each student should post to the Blackboard Discussion Board one comment or question about that day’s reading. You can focus on one of the readings or several.
Comments/questions do not need to be extensive; a couple sentences will suffice. I will call on some students during class, asking them to expand on their comment/question and use that as a springboard for discussion. Please submit your comment/question by the night before class. Individual comments/questions are not graded, but I keep track of whether you do them.

**Short presentations:** Once during the semester, each student will give a short (approximately 5 minutes) presentation related to the readings. A sign-up sheet will be circulated early in the semester; we will generally have two students each day. Presentations should briefly raise several analytic questions related to the readings you are assigned. Presentations should NOT simply summarize the arguments. Assume that everyone has completed the reading and needs no summary; your task is to lay out topics that the class might discuss. Short presentations are graded on a check, check-plus, check-minus basis.

**Final Exam**

The final exam is intended to mimic the format of the Ph.D. qualifying exam, albeit shorter overall. It will be a closed-book, closed-note exam consisting of several essay questions that you will answer using a laptop computer (if you don’t have your own, please let me know so I can arrange for a loaner). Each essay question will cover one or more big themes in the course and will require you to demonstrate broad knowledge of the literature.

**Term Paper**

The term paper should be approximately 25 pages in length and is due at the end of the semester. For Ph.D. students, the major objective of the term paper is to provide a potential base to build upon for the second-year paper requirement or for a dissertation prospectus. The paper can be on any topic in comparative politics, regardless of whether it is covered in the course, but it should involve substantial outside research; no more than one-third of the sources should be drawn from this syllabus. The paper can compare multiple countries/regions or examine one in a broader comparative context. If relevant, you are encouraged to draw upon outside data sources, such as electoral results, economic development indicators, or quantitative measures of democracy. I am open to students building upon prior or concurrent research, such as an undergraduate honors thesis or M.A. thesis, as long as your paper for this course is clearly distinct from the other piece of writing. For example, a BA/MA student whose thesis is about race/ethnicity and voting behavior in the United States might choose to write a paper for this course that looks at race/ethnicity and voting behavior in another country (either on its own or in comparison with the U.S.), with overlaps in terms of the relevant theoretical literature.

Prior to Spring Break, students are required to submit a paper proposal by email, which consists of a paragraph or so describing the intended topic. I will follow up with feedback and suggestions to be sure you are on the right track before you start researching and writing.

**Readings**

In a seminar such as this one, students are expected to do all of the required readings prior to class and come prepared to discuss them. Towards that end, you should take notes as you read
and come prepared with questions, arguments, and points to raise. Depending on your learning style, you may want to coordinate with other students to divide up responsibility for preparing summaries or outlines of the readings and to study for the final exam. Summaries or outlines, along with your own notes, can also be an invaluable resource when it comes time to study for the Ph.D. qualifying exam. That said, group study and summaries or outlines should not substitute for carefully reading the material on your own.

For each week of the course, there are approximately 250 pages of reading assigned (the number of pages for each week/reading is listed below). All readings are available online. For journal articles, search on the title through the library website or [http://scholar.google.com](http://scholar.google.com) for links to PDFs. For readings drawn from books, the form of access varies. Check the boldface letter after the entry in the schedule of readings:

**O:** The book is available online in its entirety through the BU library; search on the title to find it. *NOTE: in a few cases, the number of pages each person can download as a PDF is limited; team up with colleagues to get all the pages that are assigned.*

**M:** The assigned reading is scanned and available through Mugar Library e-reserves; see [https://www.bu.edu/library/services/reserves/](https://www.bu.edu/library/services/reserves/).

**B:** The assigned reading is scanned and available through Blackboard at [http://learn.bu.edu](http://learn.bu.edu).

Please let me know ASAP if you have any difficulty obtaining online readings. If you prefer print copies of books, you always have the option of purchasing a copy (potentially of interest to Ph.D. students building their professional libraries) or obtaining it from the BU library.

**Schedule**

NOTE: the number of pages for each reading, and the total for the week, are listed in parentheses.

**Week 1 (1/22), Introduction (~192)**


**Week 2 (1/29), Approaches to Comparative Politics (252)**


Recommended:

Week 3 (2/5). Origins of States and Nations (226)


Recommended:

Week 4 (2/12). Democracy and Democratization (259)


Week 5 (2/19). Authoritarianism (249)


Week 6 (2/26). Revolution and Violence (264)


Skocpol, Theda. 1979. States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chs. 1–3 (155)


Week 7 (3/4). Culture and Identity (261)

Culture), 6 (The Sense of Civic Competence), 13 (The Civic Culture and Democratic Stability). NOTE: these are chapters 1, 7, and 15 in 1963 hardback edition. (114) B


Friday, 3/6: Term paper proposal due to instructor by email

Week 8 (3/18). Electoral Systems (236)


Recommended


Recommended:


Week 10 (4/1). Systems of Government (254)


Week 11 (4/8). Development (257)


*Recommended:*

**Week 12 (4/15). Industrial Organization and Business Politics (243)**


*Recommended:*

4/22: NO CLASS (Instructor out of town)
Week 13 (4/29): The Welfare State and Social Protection (267)


Wednesday, 5/6: Final paper due

Thursday, 5/7: Final exam