Fall 2016
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This is a foundational course for the study of comparative politics to which you will return when you prepare for the comprehensive exam in this subfield. The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the main “approaches” to comparative politics, of which there have been many - but few “arrivals”. This course will train you in recognizing these central approaches, understanding their advantages and disadvantages and highlight the connections between a chosen approach and the resultant findings.

This class examines structuralism, functionalism, rational choice, culture, constructivism, the new institutionalism and the logic of path dependent arguments, among others. This course will provide you with a firm understanding of the concepts, powers and limits of various approaches outlined above.


In addition, you are required to read the articles mentioned in the detailed reading assignments below. These articles have been placed on electronic reserve in the main library (password: weber) where you may check them out or make your own copies. Better yet, many of these articles are available either on line from the reserve desk, or you can just find them on the internet using the multitude of library resources available and download them directly to your computer.

Course requirements: 1. Each student is required to write one short paper based on books, parts of books or articles provided in this syllabus (no longer than five pages) Do not just repeat the argument in the book or article! Briefly state the argument, but then go beyond it, placing it in the larger literature, and providing constructive criticism. Most likely, to make a convincing case you will have to quote or cite additional material. Of the five pages, do not spend more than one page on summarizing the article or book; in other words, not more than 20 % of your paper should be devoted to summarizing the argument – 80 % should be devoted to breaking new ground, coming up with original claims, ideas, concepts, typologies, theories, measures, implications, etc.
The paper should contain the following parts; a substantive part clearly indicating a) the substance of the argument in the book or article (dependent/independent variables, control variables etc. where applicable) b) its relevance to the field of comparative politics c) an original critique and possible modifications, amendments, etc. d) alternative hypotheses and additional original research questions, e) it should discuss what “approach” was used; how did you recognize this particular approach; what are its advantages, disadvantages, etc.

The short paper will count for 15% of the total grade. Hand out a one page summary (NOT MORE – POINTS WILL BE DEDUCTED FOR LONGER HANDOUTS) of the paper you present on the day you present it. Paper is due one week after it was given in class in hard copy form!

2. Each student is required to produce a two page summary of the required readings for every week. This short paper should summarize and compare and contrast the various readings. Send those short papers to me via e-mail at least one day before class. I will read all of them but will supply feedback only selectively, but so that each student will have at least received feedback on one of these assignments. This will count for 10 percent of your grade.

3. Each student will be a discussion leader for one class. This means that the student will take the initiative to briefly introduce the required readings, to raise questions and guide the ensuing class discussion. This will count for 10 percent of your grade. Summarize the main points of your discussion in a one page handout!

4. Each student is required to write an original, analytical research paper of around 15 pages in length. Refer to the “Edicts of Candler” at the end of the syllabus. The research paper will count for 50% of the total grade.

The research papers are due by Dec. 8, 2016 high noon, in HARD COPY FORM!

5. Seminar participation (will count for the remaining 15%). Participation will be measured not only in the frequency of comments but also their quality. Clarification questions, while certainly encouraged, will not count towards seminar participation. Only informed questions and statements about the readings or other pertinent sources which directly refer to the topic at hand or to specific books or articles will count as “seminar participation”. Solid preparation for each meeting is essential as you will be called upon to provide your own assessments of the various assignments.
Reading assignments:

Aug 16  General introduction to comparative politics and the nature of the “puzzle”.
Aug 23:  "In the final instance, the subject is dead" - Explorations into structuralism.

**Required readings:**


**Recommended readings:**

Theda Skocpol: *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. pp. 3-43.

Aug 30: The "needs" and "requirements" of social organisms - The debate over Functionalism.

Required Readings:


Wittfogel, Karl, A (1957). *Oriental Despotism*. Chapter 2: "Hydraulic Economy - a managerial and genuinely political economy" (pp. 22-42) and Chapter 3: "A state stronger than society" (pp. 49-54).


Recommended readings:


Sep 6: "The ties that bind" - The Power of Common Forms of Life. Culture as a mode of understanding human behavior.

Required Readings:

Clifford Geertz: "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture", in: *The Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 3-32.


**Recommended Readings:**


**Sep 13:** The cult of the "subject" - the radical subjectivism of rational choice.

**Required Readings:**


“More Kirk than Spock” Economist May 9, 2015.


“Poor Behaviour” Dec. 6, 2014 Economist.


Recommended Readings:


Margaret Levi: A Model, a Method, and a Map: Rational Choice in Comparative and Historical Analysis. In Lichbach and Zuckerman, pp. 19-42.

Sep. 20: Rational Choice revisited: The euphoria subsides….or: How "unencumbered" are you really?

Required Readings:


Can be found here:
http://books.google.com/books?id=CBOcE5jvSz0C&pg=PA182&lpg=PA182&dq=Empathy+towards+strangers+triggers+oxytocin+release&source=bl&ots=WSpQKFXNOv&sig=lIV_wgt5ruC1LC3NNmhC6rKmtxQ&hl=en&ei=eU1FTqtTHD82lwfcKDrBQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=8&ved=0CEgQ6AEWBw#v=onepage&q&f=false

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9X68dm92HVJ (watch this video by Dan Ariely)

Jeremy Rifkin, The empathic civilization (watch this video)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7AWnfFRe7g

Recommended Readings:


http://phoenix.liunet.edu/~uroy/eco54/histlist/pol-sci-rational.htm


Sep 27: Fixing the cracks in the edifice of rational choice - using institutions for glue. On the priority of political institutions and the political economy of shirking, stealing and lying. Moral hazard, adverse selection and principal agent problems.

Required Readings:


watch this video: Barry Schwarz: the paradox of choice
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VO6XEQIsCoM&feature=relmfu

Recommended Readings:


Oct 4: Functional and Historical Institutionalism and the possibilities of "constitutional engineering".

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


G. Bingham Powell (2007). The ideological congruence controversy: the impact of alternative conceptualizations and data on the effects of election rules. Presented at the 2007 Meeting of the American Political Science Association Meeting. Can be found here: [http://cps.sagepub.com/content/early/2009/03/03/0010414009332147.full.pdf](http://cps.sagepub.com/content/early/2009/03/03/0010414009332147.full.pdf)

Anthony M. McGann and Michael Latner (2013). The Calculus of Consensus Democracy. *Comparative Political Studies*. Can be found here: [http://cps.sagepub.com/content/46/7/823.abstract](http://cps.sagepub.com/content/46/7/823.abstract)

**Oct 11:** Shaping ideas – making outcomes: constructivist approaches to comparative politics.

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


Oct 18: **The path you take matters: path dependency and punctuated equilibria:**


Down the Wrong Path: Path Dependence, Increasing Returns, and Historical Institutionalism:  Herman Schwartz: here: [http://people.virginia.edu/~hms2f/Path.pdf](http://people.virginia.edu/~hms2f/Path.pdf)


Oct 25: **Present preliminary projects, thoughts, puzzles, and general discussion**

Nov 1: **What is “the state”? Its causes and consequences**


Nov 8: The duality of State and Society: the challenge to the state from “below” and “above”.

Required Readings:


Theda Skocpol (1985) Bringing the State back in: strategies of Analysis in Current Research (pp. 3-37) In: Bringing the State Back In. Cambridge University Press.


Nov 15: Presentation of research papers

Nov 22: Thanksgiving Holiday

Nov. 29: Presentation of research papers

Dec. 8: Final Research Paper is due, at high noon in my office in hardcopy form.
Below you find the most crucial elements of a successful research paper. They should all be there to reduce the “B.S. factor”. Here are the steps you should follow in order to write a logically compelling research paper.

1) RESEARCH QUESTION or PREMISE: It’s what your research revolves around, it’s central argument.

2) LITERATURE REVIEW: Here you are taking stock – what is it that others have written about your subject. This is the place for showing off how much have you have read and understood about the material and drop names.

3) UNIT OF ANALYSIS: What is the “unit” that you are examining? Is it elections, individuals, countries, etc.? In the example below, the unit of analysis is “cat”.

4) HYPOTHESIS: What is your hypothesis? Remember a hypothesis contains three things: first it indicates the object of observation, the dependent an independent variables, and the direction of their relationship. For example: “the more I’m feeding my cat, the fatter she gets”. “Cat” is the object of observation, “food” is the cause, cat getting “fat” is the effect, and the direction of the relationship is positive.

5) THEORY: Why should the cat get fat if fed a lot? If more calories enter her body that she can burn, her body will on the basis of biological processes begin to store the energy contained in the food in terms of fat. Process tracing should in detail describe the various steps how things move from cause to effect.

6) TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL PARAMETERS: Over what time period and what location are you applying your theory? Are you making a CROSS-SECTIONAL or TIME SERIES argument, or BOTH?

7) DEPENDENT AND INDEPENDENT VARIABLES: Which ones are they? How much do they vary?

8) OPERATIONALIZATION OF CONCEPTS: Your hypotheses will contain concepts, i.e. names of things. You will have to translate these concepts into things that can be measured such as: how do we know that the cat is fat? We can weigh her. How do we know what “more feeding” means: well we could measure the amount of food in the number of teaspoons of fancy feast the cat gets. This is what is called, turning a concept into a measure, or more technically, operationalization.

9) CAUSAL MECHANISM: How do you know that your argument is causal rather than correlational?

10) CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS: After you have done your research and presented your evidence, are you accepting or rejecting your hypothesis? What do these findings mean? How do they affect the reigning theories? Do they question them, or confirm them? What new questions do arise? Where does future research go from here?