

**Course Description**

This pro-seminar is a graduate-level introduction to comparative politics. As the core seminar in the field of comparative politics, this course is designed to introduce students to the central methodological, theoretical, and empirical controversies in the field. To prepare students in the use of the comparative method, the primary focus is on contemporary approaches and issues, even though students will also become familiar with long-standing paradigms and theoretical concepts that have shaped the development of the field. Through a broad introduction of a diverse body of literature, students are expected to develop a critical appreciation of key debates and the main conceptual tools commonly employed in the cross-national analysis of political phenomena. To this end a variety of debates highlighting divergent comparative techniques and theories will be examined.

The course begins by introducing the central theoretical concepts in comparative politics, which highlights the importance of theory building in the scientific study of political behavior and institutions across countries. Then we will spend two weeks examining the diverse methodological approaches employed by researchers in the field. The remainder of the course will investigate the key substantive topics in comparative politics ranging from the development of the state and the institutions that compose it to political culture and mass behavior. By the end of the course, you should have a solid understanding of the major theories and methods in comparative politics, comprehend how scholars apply them to various research debates within the field, and be able to apply those theories and methods (at least conceptually) in your own comparative research. For those students pursuing a doctoral degree and selecting comparative politics as a field, this course will serve as the foundation for preparing for your comprehensive exams.

Students are expected to come to class each week prepared to discuss the readings. You should complete the assigned readings prior to each class session, taking notes on the central theoretical arguments and empirical findings in each piece, recording your critical comments, and reflecting on the scholarly connections among the readings. The class meetings will be run as seminars where the students are expected to actively participate in the discussion.

Attendance and participation in class discussions will count for 15% of the course grade. Writing assignments and in-class presentations will constitute the remainder of the course grade. These assignments are designed to develop a mastery of the readings and a critical understanding of the comparative method. The class discussions will be built around "talking points" submitted by students on the day prior to each class meeting (15%). Students will also be required to prepare (and briefly summarize in class) an annotated bibliography that extends one of the week's readings (20%). At the end of the semester, each student will prepare a research proposal that considers a research question stemming from the literature covered in the course (25%). Students will also have to present their proposal to the class. Finally, there will be a take-home final exam composed of essay questions designed to test for...
comprehensive understanding of the course readings (25%). This exam will be completed during finals week and will be open-note and open-book.

**Weekly talking points**: After the first week, each student will be required to submit three “talking points” on each week’s readings. These are due by email (send them to hpalmer@buffalo.edu) by Monday at 9:00 AM prior to the class session in which the readings will be discussed. These talking points should be the three most interesting questions or arguments identified by the student in the week’s readings. They should be written in the form of a short paragraph summarizing the question or argument. No more or less than three distinct talking points should be submitted each week. Each talking point should refer to one or more specific sections of the weekly readings (with appropriate page references). Each talking point should refer to a different chapter or article from the weekly readings. Talking points in excess of 160 words will not be accepted. Talking points that arrive late will also not be accepted.

**Annotated bibliography**: Each student will be required to prepare an annotated bibliography that extends the readings for one of the weeks from September 25th to November 13th (inclusive). This is a bibliographic listing of 8-12 journal articles and book chapters addressing a specific topic or research question relating to the week’s readings. It should be relatively obvious how these articles and chapters are connected theoretically and methodologically. The annotations should be about 3-5 sentences, summarizing as concisely as possible the main point(s) of the work. For books, the annotation should focus on the section that is most relevant to the research topic or question, and if the relevant section includes multiple chapters, a separate annotation should be written for each chapter. Students will be required to summarize their annotated bibliography in a 5-8 minute presentation to the class as well as to distribute hard copies of their bibliography to the other students. **No more than three students will be allowed to prepare a bibliography for any particular week. Weeks can be claimed on a first-come, first-serve basis by email until 4:00 PM on September 14th. After that time, any students who have not claimed a week will be assigned one.**

**Research proposal**: Each student will be required to write a research proposal focusing on an original scientific question relating (at least indirectly) to the comparative politics literature covered in the course. A research proposal is essentially a “data-light” or preliminary version of a research design that focuses on the theory and provides only a conceptual discussion of the empirical analysis. The research proposal should discuss the theoretical motivation for the proposed research, citing the relevant literature to which the research seeks to contribute. It should clearly explain the original theoretical argument made and explicitly posit the key testable hypotheses derived from this theory. The proposal should also discuss the dependent variable(s) and central explanatory variables that would be employed in an empirical investigation of these hypotheses. In addition to submitting a written version, students will make an 8-12 minute presentation of their research proposal to the class.

**Required Texts**


These texts should be available for purchase at the campus bookstore. You can also purchase them from on-line retailers.

Most of the other required readings can be downloaded using the UB library’s Electronic Journals archive. Books included in the readings will be placed on reserve in the library. If you cannot find a reading, let me know ASAP.

Course Schedule and Readings

August 28: Introduction and Review of Scientific Method

September 4: Theoretical Foundations

September 11: Quantitative vs. Qualitative Approaches to Comparative Politics

September 18: Research Design in Comparative Politics

**September 25: Political Institutions and the State**

**October 2: Politics of Economic Development**

**October 9: Regime Change and Democratization**

**October 16: Political Culture and Mass Attitudes**


**October 23: Social Movements and Revolutions**


Skocpol, Theda. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1 (pp. 3-43).


**October 30: Elections and Voting**


**November 6: Party Systems**


**November 13: Executives, Legislatures, and Representation**


**November 20: Work on Research Proposals**

NO CLASS.

**November 27: Research Proposal Presentations**

**December 4: Is Comparative Politics Research Scientific?**


**December 12: Answers to take-home final exam questions are due by 4:00 PM**