Political Science 440A:
Theories of Comparative Politics

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Autumn 2017

Class time: Mondays, 1:30-4:20 pm
Class location: Encina West, Graham Stuart Lounge

Course Overview

This seminar is designed to serve the following goals:

1. To acquaint students with many of the leading theories within the field of comparative politics. PS 440A focuses on the state, the regime, and the quality of government. PS 440B addresses political economy. In both quarters, students will be made aware of the relevant literatures so that they will be able to connect their own research work to broad disciplinary concerns. For PS 440A, the weekly themes center on dependent variables, and the readings are oriented toward leading theories (or proposed independent variables) that account for the variation in these crucial explananda. This course seeks to balance traditional macro-sociological and contemporary micro-analytic approaches. Students will be exposed both to classic texts and to the state-of-the-art books and articles. However, we will not address some major areas of comparative politics, including comparative electoral behavior, voting rules, and legislatures. These topics, which are fundamental to comparative politics, are addressed in other graduate coursework offered by the department.

2. To provide examples of how best to prepare papers for their future submissions to field journals. Papers from the leading journals in the field, including the American Political Science Review, will be included in the readings. Students will be expected to read these journals on a regular basis not only to keep up with trends in the field, but also to learn the styles and forms of contributions to comparative politics.

3. To sensitize students to the question of research strategies. The seminar will expose students to diverse methodological tools, in preparation for PS 400C in which students will be asked to use a diverse set of tools to answer a well-specified and theoretically-interesting question whose answer is worth knowing.

4. To develop seminar skills. Students will be asked to write short papers to be delivered to the seminar group, and to engage in critical discussions of the presented papers. Much of the time within the seminar will be devoted to the presentation and defense of these papers.

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Course Requirements

1. Reading

- Required Reading: students are expected to read all items listed for common reading that immediately follow the topic of the week. Optional readings will also be suggested. For books, specific pages will rarely be assigned. But students should attempt to extract as much as possible from the book in a few hours of reading. The purpose is to capture the broad contribution of these works rather than their specifics;
- Optional Reading: students are expected to read beyond the common readings for their papers, if they are writing one for that week. Here the reading should be more careful, with specifics provided on data and arguments; if they are not writing a paper, they should read selectively from the optional texts.
- Reading Fellow Students’ Papers: All students should read the papers of the other students before the seminar meets.

2. Writing

- For four of the weekly sessions, students will write a paper, to be completed by 8 PM on the Friday before the seminar, with copies posted on the class website. These papers should be from 1,000 to 1,500 words. The criteria for an exemplary paper are ones that:
  - Propose and defend a thesis that relates to the topic of the week;
  - Address anticipated objections to the thesis; and
  - Synthesize, in the course of the thesis defense, some of the relevant literature for that week such that students who read the paper but who have not read the pieces under discussion would be able to grasp their principal arguments and data employed in supporting them.

3. Examination

- In the 10th week, a take-home exam will be handed out for submission during final exam week. If a student chooses to enroll in the course for 3 units (rather than 5 units), a final exam will not be required.

Seminar Agenda

1:30-3:00 – Open discussion of required readings
3:15-3:30 – Break
3:30-4:15 – Discussion of selected papers
4:15-4:20 – Preview of session to follow

Agenda of Topics and Readings

Week 1: Origins of the Modern State


Optional


Week 2: State Strength and Capacities

• Alexander Gerschenkron, Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective (Harvard University Press, 1962), ch. 1 and postscript.
• Jeffrey Herbst, States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control (Princeton University Press, 2000), chs. 2 and 5.
• Samuel Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (Yale University Press, 2006), ch. 1.
• James Scott, Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed (Yale University Press, 1998), Introduction, ch. 2.

Optional


Week 3: Mass Resistance and Revolution

• James Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (Yale University Press, 1990), chs. 3-4 and 6.
• Theda Skocpol, States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China (Cambridge University Press, 1979), chs. 2-3.

Optional

**Week 4: Identity and Political Cleavage Structure**


**Optional**


**Week 5: Cooperation and Conflict**


**Optional**


**Week 6: Regime Type I, History and Structure**

• David Stasavage, “When Distance Mattered: Geographic Scale and the Development of European Representative Assemblies,” American Political Science Review 104.4 (November 2010), pp. 625-643.

Optional

• Jared Diamond, Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies, (Norton, 1997).

Week 7: Regime Type II, Elites and the Economy

• Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy (Cambridge University Press, 2006), ch. 2.
• Ben Ansell and David Samuels, Inequality and Democratization, (Cambridge University Press, 2014), chs. 1 and 5.

Optional

• Carles Boix, Democracy and Redistribution (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Week 8: Institutional Change and Stasis

• Barbara Geddes, “What do we know about Democratization after Twenty Years?,” Annual Review of Political Science 2.1 (June 1999), pp. 115-144.

Optional


Week 9: Parties, Patronage and Representation


Optional


Week 10: Accountability

Optional


Note for Students with Documented Disabilities

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) located within the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). SDRC staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the SDRC as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk, (650) 723-1066.