 COURSE OVERVIEW

This course is designed to introduce students to the main theoretical and conceptual issues in the field of Comparative Politics. It offers students a broad view of the selected themes, concepts and approaches that characterize the field, as well as an appreciation of how the field has evolved over time. The scope of the material will range from comparative paradigms, dominant methodologies, theoretical approaches, key issues and debates in the understanding of politics and government in Western and non-Western, developed and developing areas.

This course is intended for MA and PhD political science students who plan to write comprehensive exams and/or a thesis in comparative politics. Each week we will discuss a subset of the pertinent scholarly literature, focusing on a major theme or theoretical debate. Key methodological issues are addressed in context of the substantive and theoretical works, as well as in the written assignments for the class. Students who plan to take the comprehensive exams are strongly encouraged to read the recommended readings.

*PhD students planning to take the comprehensive exam in Comparative Politics should note that this course does not contain the complete readings and need to consult a more detailed reading list for the comparative politics exam.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this course are to: 1) prepare doctoral students to write a comprehensive field examination in Comparative Politics; and 2) provide doctoral and MA students with the sense of the breadth of the field, its intellectual history, the theoretical and methodological approaches and debates and 3) equip students with the necessary skills to formulate own research questions and have the tools to answer those questions.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Class Discussions and Participation (15%)  
This is a reading intensive and discussion based seminar. All students are expected to complete the reading assignments for each week and contribute actively to class discussion. Your class attendance and participation is critical to your learning success in this class. Regardless of medical note/emergencies, your absence will affect your participation grade. I can’t grade your participation if you not present in class. All students should be prepared to talk and respond to the day’s required readings. Even
if you’re not the presenter, you should come prepared with three key points and have something meaningful to say about each reading. You will be evaluated based on 1) attendance, 2) quality of your participation, and 3) the degree to which your interventions advance the discussion. You are welcome to see me during office hour to discuss your interim class participation grade/progress.

2. Course Assignments
   
i. **10 X Weekly Responses (20%)**
   
   Each student will submit one response (about 1 paragraph) on at least one assigned reading or comment on the links between the readings for each week (Weeks 2-5 and 7-12). The weekly response should address these following questions:
   
   a. What are the key arguments/approach in the week’s readings?
   b. What are the central debates in the field on the issue under consideration?
   c. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the article/book under study?
   d. Have the disputes been resolved and what more needs be done or discovered?

   Your response is **not** a summary of the readings. Every response must include a thesis/key argument that is in reference to the week’s readings. You may like to refer to the questions each week to get the key arguments/debates of the readings for each week. Your response will be graded based on quality and depth of analysis. *All weekly responses must be uploaded onto the Avenue’s Dropbox by 12 pm the night before our lesson.*

   
   ii. **Two Reading Presentations (10% X 2 = 20%)**
   
   You will serve as a discussion leader for two weekly sessions. You will sign up for your two presentations on the first day of class. Each presentation should not last more than 25 minutes (including Q and A). You are welcome to use power point slides or any other presentation tools that facilitate understanding and class discussion. A projector will be available. If you decide to use power point, please bring your own laptop and set up in advance.

   **At the minimum, the presentation has to circulate a 1-page handout with a short summary of the article’s key argument (bullet points are acceptable) with 2-3 questions for discussion. Presenter can either print and circulate the handout in class OR circulate the handout on Avenue.**

   As a guide, the presentation ought to include the following:
   
   a. State key thesis/argument/theoretical approach of the article;
   b. Compare strengths and weaknesses of the piece;
   a. Offer new insights/contributions to /gaps in comparative politics;
   b. Make links between readings, as well as provide a critical assessment of those readings;
   c. List two to three questions for discussion.

   The in-class presentation provides an opportunity to act as an instructor of the course and lead discussions. As an instructor, you would want to review and highlight issues/concepts from the readings that they may not have noticed on their own and raise pertinent questions that lay the ground for further discussion. Being a presenter offers you an opportunity to practice your presentation skills and demonstrate your ability to use technology to present
your academic work. You will be assessed based on the content, quality, clarity and delivery of the presentation.

*Plan ahead. Any last minute changes or absence on the day of your scheduled presentation will receive a zero grade.*

iii. **Mock Take Home Examination (15%): DUE 1 NOV**
You will prepare to write a short, mock examination. You will choose one of three research questions that will be circulated electronically on 18 Oct. Your answer should be around 4-5 pages long, single-spaced (about 2000 words without bibliography). A bibliography is required for all works cited. The questions will be similar to the ones used our weekly discussion in the reading list. You will submit your paper electronically onto the AVL’s Dropbox and in hardcopy to me on, at the beginning of class. **Only hardcopy submissions will be graded.**

iv. **Take Home Final Exam (30%): DUE 29 NOV**
The final exam will cover all the materials introduced through the term. You will choose two out of four research questions. The exam questions will be circulated electronically on **22 Nov 2016**. The exam questions will be based on the required readings and resemble questions ask in the comparative politics comprehensive field examinations.

Your answer for each question should be around 4-5 pages long, single-spaced (about 2000 words each). A bibliography is required for all works cited.

All students will submit their exams in hardcopy during class on 29 Nov. Only hardcopy submissions will be graded. Late submissions will not be entertained.

**Summary of Course Assignments and Requirements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Requirements</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Class attendance/participation</td>
<td>/15</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. 10 X Weekly Responses</td>
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<td>3. Reading presentation 1</td>
<td>/10</td>
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<td>4. Reading presentation 2</td>
<td>/10</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Mock Take Home Exam</td>
<td>/15</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Take Home Final Exam</td>
<td>/30</td>
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</tbody>
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**Final Grade** 100
COURSE SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wk</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Due Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6 Sep</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Sign up for presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>13 Sep</td>
<td>What is Comparative Politics?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>20 Sep</td>
<td>Comparative Method</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>27 Sep</td>
<td>Structural-Historical Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4 Oct</td>
<td>Institutionalism</td>
<td></td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>11 Oct</td>
<td>Mid-Term Recess</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>18 Oct</td>
<td>Rational Choice</td>
<td>Circulate Mock Exam questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>25 Oct</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1 Nov</td>
<td>States and Regimes</td>
<td>Mock Exam Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>8 Nov</td>
<td>Democratization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>15 Nov</td>
<td>Parties and Electoral Systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>22 Nov</td>
<td>Ethnicity and Gender</td>
<td>Circulate Final Take-Home Exam Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>29 Nov</td>
<td>Globalization and International Context</td>
<td>Submit Take-Home Exam in Hardcopy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>6 Dec</td>
<td>Course Review</td>
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RECOMMENDED TEXTS


*Most assigned book chapters are available on course reserves. Assigned journal articles can be downloaded via ProQuest at http://search.proquest.com.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/socialsciences?accountid=12347

COURSE READINGS

**Week 1: Course Introduction**


**Week 2: What is Comparative Politics?**

**Required Reading**

**Recommended Reading**


**Week 2 Questions**

- Is the comparative method an effective means of drawing inferences in social science?
- What is the role of comparative politics in empirical research? Use at least one of the readings to answer the question.

**Week 3: Comparative Methodology**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**Week 3 Questions**

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of comparative method?
- Comparativists are often accused of selection bias or selecting cases based on the dependent variable. Is this a problem? If so, what can be done about it?
- What is “many variables-small n” problem? What are the ways to overcome this problem in comparative analysis?
- Contrast small-n comparative analysis with case study, experimental or statistic model. What are the advantages and disadvantages of small n-comparative research?
**Week 4: Structural-Historical Analysis**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


*These books are available on course reserves.*

**Week 4 Questions**

- How is the comparative method used in these analyses?
- What do we learn about the causes of macro-political change?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of structural-historical explanations?
- What are the key strategies used by historical institutionalists to explain political developments? Do these analyses miss out anything important?

**Week 5: Institutionalism**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**Week 5 Questions**

- The new institutionalism has been criticized for being too narrow and static. Is this a fair criticism?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of institutionalism? How do institutions explain institutional change?

**Week 6: No Class (Mid-Term Recess)**

**Week 7: Rational Choice**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**Week 7 Questions**

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of rational choice approach in comparative studies? Choose two or three major rational choice contributions in comparative politics and assess whether they have micro-foundations.
• Rational choice has often been accused of oversimplifying human behaviour, ignoring the origins of institutions and overlooking culture that shape preferences and decision-making processes. Discuss.

Week 8: Culture and Constructivism

Required Reading

Recommended Reading

Week 8 Questions
• What is civic culture?
• What is political culture? How are they created?
• Do Almond and Verba provide a credible explanation?
• Is there a constructivist methodology? How does Constructivists propose to bridge the divide between international relations and comparative politics?
• Discuss the importance of ideas, norms and values in the study of comparative politics. Support your argument with empirical examples.

Week 9: State and Regime

Required Reading

**Recommended Reading**


**Week 9 Questions:**

- What is the difference between “state” and “regime”?
- Define and differentiate between two or three major political regimes (democracy, authoritarianism, electoral authoritarianism, totalitarianism, communism etc) in the articles.
- What is the best way to classify and assess hybrid regimes with both democratic and authoritarian features?
- What are the key problems of the post-cold war regime transitions?

**Week 10: Democratization and Regime Transitions**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**Week 10 Questions:**

- What are the causes of the “third wave” of democratizations?
• What are the key challenges of democratization in the post-third wave era?
• Do mass protests necessarily bring about regime change and stability?
• Why are authoritarian regimes persistent in the age of democracy?

Week 11: Electoral and Party Systems

Required Reading

Recommended Reading
   http://books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ywr0CcGDNHwC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=sartori+parties&ots=xRdcIPItgW&sig=nSL11s1SN2GX7kN4HXZhPROekJA&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=sartori%20parties&f=false (Scan selectively)

Week 11: Questions
• Why parties? Why interest groups?
• What functions should parties & interest groups perform in a representative democracy? Are either or both of these intermediaries necessary? If so, for what are they necessary?
• Are some electoral systems more democratic and representative than others?
Week 12: Ethnicity and Gender

Required Reading

Recommended Reading

Ethnic Conflict

Week 12: Questions
- What is “ethnicity” and why is it a main source of national conflicts?
- Theories of ethnic conflict are usually premised on opposite assumptions. Where the theory of cultural pluralism conceives ethnic conflict as the clash of incompatible values, modernization and economic-interest theories of conflict as the struggle of resources and opportunities; others have posited “ancient hatred” and elite persuasion as sources of conflict. Compare and discuss the different theoretical approaches with reference to at least one empirical example.
- Institutional remedies for the underrepresentation of women and ethnic minorities often assume distinct forms. Women tend to receive candidate quotas in political parties, whereas ethnic groups are granted reserved seats in legislatures. Discuss why there is a divergence between the modes of gender and ethnic representation in different countries.

Week 13: Globalization and International Context

Required Reading

**Recommended Reading**


**Week 13: Questions**

- How does globalization change the way we study comparative politics?
- Should Political Science do away with the artificial divide between Comparative Politics and International Relations?
- Why and how does the “international” factor matter in the understanding of Comparative Politics? Discuss using two or three empirical examples to explain why transnational factors matter and how we can incorporate the international context in our analysis.

**Week 14: Course Review**

**GENERAL COURSE POLICIES**

**MA and PhD students**

While the course requirements are identical for MA and PhD students, I expect a different level of understanding and engagement depending on a student’s level of graduate study. MA students are expected to focus primarily on the assigned readings read recommended literature only for the research papers. PhD students are expected to read the recommended readings each week, draw upon those readings and respond in greater depth in their written assignments and oral presentations.

**Citation and Style Guidelines**

All written work ought to follow the author-date citation style according to the Chicago Manual of Style available here: [https://library.mcmaster.ca/citation-and-style-guides](https://library.mcmaster.ca/citation-and-style-guides)

**In-class Behaviour**

All cell-phones must be turned off and stowed away during class.

**Late Assignments**

Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the due dates. Assignments turned in after the beginning of the class will not earn full credit. **20% will be deducted each day after the submission deadline. Late assignments will not be accepted 48 hours after the original due date.** If you anticipate having problems meeting these deadlines, please contact me before the assignment is due to discuss your situation. To avoid late penalties and ensure fairness, written documentation of your emergency may be required.

**Academic Dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic
dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3, located at [http://www.mcmaster.ca/senate/academic/ac_integrity.htm](http://www.mcmaster.ca/senate/academic/ac_integrity.htm)

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty: 1. Plagiarism, e.g. submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained. 2. Improper collaboration in group work. 3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**
Special arrangements can be made for students with disabilities. If you need assistance because of a disability please consult with the Student Accessibility Services (SAS), MUSC Room B107, ext. 29652. Information is available online, at [http://sas.mcmaster.ca/](http://sas.mcmaster.ca/). Once you have consulted with a program coordinator, you need to notify me as soon as possible with respect to your accommodation needs.

**McMaster statement on electronic resources.**
In this course, we will be using the Avenue2Learn site (avenue.mcmaster.ca). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with me.

**Course Modifications**
The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The student is responsible for keeping up with the changes, which will either be announced in class or via Avenue to Learn. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

**Faculty of Social Sciences E-Mail Communication Policy**
Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student’s own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.