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Comparative Politics 130

UIC, Fall 2009

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Introduction to Comparative Politics POLS 130

The most interesting way to study politics is to use a comparative approach; in fact, we usually compare “better” and “worse” political arrangements and outcomes when we talk about politics. This course will introduce you to the following: (1) the main concepts used in the political science subfield called comparative politics, (2) what it is comparativists try to explain and how they do the explaining, and (3) politics, institutions, and political culture in a number of foreign countries. You will become familiar with both the subject matter of comparative politics as a scholarly discipline and with aspects of political life in several countries. Additionally, this course serves as a gateway to more advanced courses in comparative politics and political science.

Class sessions on Mondays and Wednesdays will consist mostly of lectures based on the assigned readings; the seminar sessions on Friday will consist mostly of discussion. Discussion sessions will be held every Friday of the semester and roughly follow the outline of the lectures. It is the intent of these sessions to engage you in the process of discussing comparative politics. You are expected to actively participate in class discussion.

The work requirements for the course are two in-class exams, a final exam and a discussion paper. Attendance of discussion sessions will account for 10% of your final grade. The exams will be in the classroom and will consist of multiple-choice, short-answer, and short essay questions. The exams will cover material from both the required readings and the lectures. Therefore, coming regularly to class and taking notes is very important for doing well in the course. The students who will decide to write a response paper after watching a movie later in the semester will have an opportunity to earn 5 extra-credit points.

At a date chosen by him- or herself, each student will prepare a discussion paper on some aspect of the material covered during one particular full week of the course. Here is what the work entails: 1. Reading the assigned material at least one week ahead of the class and choosing one or two topics to be highlighted in the paper; when choosing topics it is important to focus on issues that do indeed lend themselves to discussion; 2. The student researches, prepares and writes a discussion paper (3-4 pages) covering the most

pertinent points and prepares presentation material for Friday's class; 3. The student presents his/her paper and its findings to the class during Friday's session; 4. After the presentation, the student submits the paper to the TA (no later than the end of the class). The paper and presentation should include references to relevant political events and should raise interesting questions for discussions. Remember, the discussion papers must be turned at the end of the class in printed copies; **e-mail copies will not be accepted.**

The grade for the course will be determined according to the following distribution:

1. First exam.....20 percent
2. Second exam.....20 percent
3. Discussion paper.....20 percent
4. Final exam30 percent
5. Class participation.....10 percent

The following text is required and can be purchased at the Circle Center Bookstore:
Michael J. Sodaro, Comparative Politics: A Global Introduction, 3d ed., 2008

Students are encouraged to do additional readings, especially for their discussion papers. Look at table of contents and indexes of the required text for additional material!

Attendance policy: Friday discussion session attendance is mandatory; if you fail to attend more than three sessions, your course grade will be lowered by one letter grade. There will be no make-up exams. In case of illness or another serious reason why you cannot attend class or take a scheduled exam, you need to document the circumstance and discuss alternative arrangements with the instructor. Students who miss a lecture will be responsible for all the material covered that day.

You are expected to observe all rules of proper classroom conduct. In order to ensure an appropriate environment conducive to learning by all: (1) please refrain from talking, eating or other disruptive activity during class; even one or two conversations quickly create distractions for other students; (2) no cell phone calls, incoming or outgoing, are allowed during the class; please turn off your cell phone or set it to silent; and (3) do not come to class late. Also, do not leave class early; if you must do so, tell me beforehand and arrange to sit near the door so that your exit is less disruptive.

Academic dishonesty is considered a serious offense subject to strong disciplinary actions, including being dropped from the course with a grade of "F." Therefore remember that cheating and plagiarism are strictly prohibited and will be dealt with according to UIC policy and procedures.

While I make an effort to stay on track with the reading schedule, it is likely we will get behind. In other words, the syllabus is subject to change at the Instructor's discretion.

Note: Students with Disabilities who require accommodation should register with the Office for Disability Services: 312-413-2183.

Weekly class topics and required reading assignments:

August 24 and 26: Introduction to Comparative Politics

Sodaro, 3-29

August 31 and September 2: Major Topics of Comparative Politics

Sodaro: pp. 31-58

September 7: Labor Day Holiday- no classes

September 9: Critical Thinking about Politics

Sodaro: pp. 60-96

September 14 and 16: The Concept of Power

Sodaro: pp. 98-121

September 21 and 23: The State and Its Institutions

Sodaro pp.124-144

September 28: In-Class Exam

September 30: States and Nations

Sodaro pp.147-169

October 5 and 7: Democracy: What Is It?

Sodaro pp. 171- 192

October 12 and 14: Democracy: How Does It Work?

Sodaro pp. 194- 219

October 19 and 21: Democracy: What Does It Take?

Sodaro pp. 221- 240

October 26: In-Class exam

October 28: People and Politics

Sodaro pp.270- 289

November 2 and 4: Political Culture

Sodaro pp. 293-309

November 9 and 11: Political Ideologies

Sodaro pp. 312- 339

November 16 and 18: The Political Institutions of France

Sodaro, pp. 444- 493

November 23: Country Survey: Russia
Sodaro pp. 593- 646

November 25: Movie

November 30: Country Survey: China
Sodaro pp. 652- 698

December 2: Review