“Without comparisons to make, the mind does not know how to proceed"
Alexis de Tocqueville

It is not a coincidence that Tocqueville’s search to better understand French politics produced one of the most insightful accounts of Democracy in America. Comparison lies at the heart of thorough and original political analyses as it links ideas to evidence, hypotheses to data, abstractions to substance from unique angles. Thinking theoretically about politics, one way or the other, involves comparative assessments. Comparative politics stands out as a field of political science with its explicit effort to elaborate on the principles of comparative analysis and to enhance our understanding of global issues. Therefore, the theories, research programs, and methods of comparative politics are not limited to this field. On the contrary, they navigate across the boundaries of other subfields.

This course surveys major topics and theoretical contributions in comparative politics. Its main objective is to provide students of various fields with a critical understanding of the theoretical and analytical approaches necessary for comparative research. To this end, the course is divided into four parts. The first part introduces the field in general, the second part explores some of the basic conceptual and methodological problems involved in comparative analysis; the third part examines prevailing theoretical approaches in the studies of comparative politics and the final part surveys basic themes in comparative inquiries.

Requirements:

Critical Reaction Papers: This course requires active contribution by each student. To facilitate discussion each student will write a concise up to two-page critical reaction paper which focuses on the analytical approaches presented in the assigned readings. Papers should be sent via e-mail by 3 pm the day before class. In these reaction papers students are expected to critically assess the assigned readings. This means you should move beyond the description of main arguments and identify and evaluate the assumptions behind them. Through this approach and papers you will not only become familiar with the main ideas shaping the theoretical debates in the field but will also develop your own research questions.
**Book Review:** To broaden the scope of readings covered in this course students are required to read one (or two depending on the class size) of the books listed under suggested readings. You will be given 20 minutes of class time to present a critical assessment of the book's contents, emphasizing those parts that relate to the general topic for the week. Basically, your review should identify the assumptions or arguments presented by the book, provide your assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the methods and conclusions and identify your position in relation to the author(s)’s.

**Final Paper:** Besides the reaction papers, students are expected to write a final paper at the end of the semester. This paper should reflect your assessment of the capacity of the competing conceptual approaches to solve political problems existing in a particular research area. This final work asks you to find the best fit (or lack of it) between theory and practice in a specific political context. This assignment is purposefully defined in broad terms to accommodate your personal research interests. In order to give you an early start all students are encouraged to provide their paper topic and a short bibliography by March 6. To give you some practice in sharing your work with others you will present your arguments on April 3rd and May 8th.

Your grade for this course will be based on your participation and book and research paper presentation (30%), reaction papers (35%) and your final paper (35%).

**Week 1 (January 16)  Road map of the course**


**I. Comparative Politics as an Approach, as a Method, as a Subfield? Defining the Field**

**Week 2 (January 23)**


**Suggested Readings:**


II. Methods of Comparative Political Inquiry

**Week 3 (January 30)**


Dogan, Mattei, and Dominique Pelassy; *How to Compare Nations: Strategies in Comparative Politics*, Chatham, 1990. (Available from UIC Library)


**Suggested Readings:**


**Week 4 (February 6)**


**Suggested Readings:**


**Week 5 (February 13)**


**Suggested Readings:**


**Week 6 (February 20)**


**Suggested Readings:**


Mayer, Lawrence C.; Redefining Comparative Politics: Promise versus Performance, Sage, 1989. (Available from UIC Library)

**Theories and Approaches in Comparative Inquiries**

**Week 7 (February 27)**

**Rational Choice**


**Suggested Reading:**


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**Week 8 (March 6) Culturalist Approaches:**


**Suggested Readings**

Lane, Jan-Erik; *Culture and Politics: A Comparative Approach*, Aldershot, 2002.


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**Week 9 (March 13) Institutionalism:**


Suggested Readings:


**Week 10 (March 20): Spring Break no class**

**Week 11 (April 3) Paper First Draft Due**
Presentations

**IV. Themes of Comparative Political Inquiry**

**Week 12 (April 10) Democratization**


Ian Shapiro, “The State of Democratic Theory”, *The state of the field III*, APSA.


Bunce, Valerie; “Comparative Democratization: Big and Bounded Generalizations,” *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol.33, No.6-7, August-September 2000, pp.703-734. (Available from UIC Library)

Suggested Readings:


**Week 13 (April 17) Transitions and Revolutions and Political Change**


Suggested Readings:


Linz, Juan and Albert Stepan; *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

**Week 14 (April 24) Social Movements**


**Suggested Readings:**


Giugni, Marco, Dough McAdam and Charles Tilly (eds); *How Social Movements Matter*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

**Week 15 (May 1) New Issues and Approaches in Comparative Politics**


**Suggested Readings:**
