

comparative politics

Political Science 2380.1 Fall/Winter 2011

CLASS TIME:

TR 10:00 - 11:15

LOCATION:

ATRIUM 216



What can the comparative method allow us to uncover?

Course Description

This course is an introduction to the subfield of 'comparative politics' and comprises one of the four core courses for the political science major at SMU.

Rather than focus on a series of country case studies, or a binary 'developed world' and 'global south' paradigm, we will instead focus on mastering key concepts, methods, and theoretical approaches used in the study of comparative politics. By the end of the course you should be able to critically apply that knowledge to a variety of real-world cases and events.

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Course Texts



One University. One World. Yours.

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comparative politics 2nd edition

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how to take this course

This course is not structured around 'content', but rather on the application of a number of insights and arguments that are seen to be at the center of the discipline of political science - as seen by comparativists. Comparativists are simply political scientists who have adopted the 'comparative method'. Common across disciplines as well as in day-to-day discussions of the world around us, this 'method' is what distinguishes the field - rather than the subject-matter itself.

Thus, we will begin with the method and then work on applying it as rigorously as possible on case studies throughout the course.

Students take our core Political Science courses for lots of reasons, often variations on "it's required." However, think about why the Department and the profession of political science have decided that learning this material might be essential to your education, and what that means for you personally.

It is entirely possible to do well in the class without being transformed by your newfound knowledge and methodological skills - but it would be a shame to not walk away with a useful skill. I will assume that this course will operate on three levels ...

Walking

you need the basic outlines of comparative methods and knowledge produced by the field

There's nothing wrong with staying on the pathways. This approach may work for you if this is likely to be your only Poli course, or if you've never taken one before & it's all new

"Walkers" will tend to assume that the textbook, readings, and professor are mutually reinforcing, telling basically the same story. Walkers are mainly concerned with WHAT comprises comparative politics.

Trekking

you have a grasp of the basics and are ready to think comparatively and explore what's off the path

Perhaps you've taken a political science course before, or are a Poli major. You already know that the study of politics is a conversation among differing and/or contradictory perspectives.

"Trekks" notice inconsistencies in arguments and theories and they respectfully challenge assumptions through lively debate. Trekkers are interested in HOW and WHY things are presented as they are.

Mountaineering

you want to go deeper into both the social causation of political events as well as the analytical perceptions of observers using the cognitive equipment and tools of comparative politics as a focussed critical thinker

You are well aware of political controversy, the limitations and blind spots different ontological and epistemological vantages provide, and that political knowledge is constructed. You actively seek alternative sources, interpretations, and voices.

"Mountaineers" don't take any of the course's structure or content as natural or inevitable. They see (and then fill) the course's gaps. They are curious, passionate, and concerned with WHY politics matter.





Why have learning objectives?

To set goals as a way of identifying the reasons behind the activities you are engaged in ...

Your Instructor:

Dr. John Measor

Office:

404 McNally North Wing

E-mail: john.measor@smu.ca

Office Hours

M 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.
W 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
(or by appointment)

Learning Objectives:

- to introduce students to key theories, concepts, and methods used in the study of comparative politics;
- to introduce students to the key literature on comparative politics;
- to introduce students to the outline of core political institutions and forms of government;
- to develop a critical approach to understanding political institutions, constitutionalism and the impacts of political culture and historical evolution on political experience;
- to provide opportunities for students to speak using skills that present their ideas clearly, write using skills that present their ideas clearly, and to thereby compare and contrast political phenomena effectively;

Learning Outcomes – by the end of this course students will:

- have read and understood some of the key theoretical approaches, conceptual tools, and methods used in the literature on comparative politics;
- have grasped the rationale of comparative political analysis and different designs in comparative politics;
- evaluate different interpretations of political issues and events including being able to distinguish between and analyze divergent political systems;
- have demonstrated familiarity with key ideas used in the literature on comparative politics so as to carry them forward in future studies;
- be able to use these ideas to frame explanations of political outcomes;
- be able to integrate empirical evidence into conceptually- and theoretically- grounded arguments (i.e. link theoretical arguments, empirical evidence and political events); and
- discuss and compare states according to their historical evolution, political culture, political participation, state institutions and form of government;

Assignments

This course will be assessed through four components:

Quizzes (20%)

There will be a series of five (5) quizzes, both individual and as part of the group projects.

Exams (30%)

There will be two exams over the course of the semester - one in-class and the other during the exam period.

Proposal & Essay (40%)

The major project of the term, where you will construct an essay allowing for the exhibition of all the skills and a sound engagement with the materials of the course. There will be two stages - a essay proposal and the finished product.

Participation / Attendance (10%)

Demonstrating your preparedness and engaged 'active learning'

Note: this is an all-year course and you should ensure that you have registered in both Fall and Winter terms sections' of the class

Accommodations

If you have a documented disability (learning or otherwise), please consult with me immediately at the outset of the course so we can design a solution that will help you be successful in the class.



Course Requirements

This course involves reading, writing, and group discussion. It is fast-paced - so you will need to absorb textbook materials on your own outside of class (so as to be able to then apply them in class). You will need to put in consistent effort throughout the whole semester. You'll need to have (or learn) basic library and outline research skills. You will need to participate in the group projects and demonstrate active learning, not passive absorption. Learning is not a spectator sport.

Attendance and Participation

You should be on time and ready for discussion each day. I expect class discussion will be lively, respectful, substantive, and that you will have done that day's assigned reading prior to class. There's no such thing as an "excused absence" - you're either in class, or you're not - and I will respect your choices. Illness' and injury require the time to heal and please approach me privately to address any such impacts on your learning in this course. That being said, busy schedules, over commitment to other aspects of your education and extra-curricular lives, and the escalating workload as the semester progresses are all part of your responsibility. Daily work in the class periods of this course will include quizzes, discussion questions, in-class small-group assignments, and class participation. These cannot be 'made up', since they depend on being present in class.

Quizzes (20% of final grade)

There will be a total of four quizzes through the term. They will be scheduled (see Reading Schedule below) and based on the assigned readings and class materials engaged over the previous week of the course.

The class period prior (always a Thursday) to the date of each Quiz (always a Tuesday) everyone will be supplied with a 'Learning Guide' (to take home). This handout will allow you to prepare for the Quiz by:

- filling in materials from the text readings and class sessions
- as well as from data found through quick research efforts online

When you return the next class session (always a Tuesday) the 'Learning Guide' is allowed to be used to answer the questions posed on the Quiz itself – i.e. the Quiz is 'open book' if you are prepared and have done the homework.

Following the Quiz the class will review the answers for the Quiz prior to dividing into small breakout groups to engage in the assigned in-class exercise – all information for which (again) will appear on your 'Learning Guide' handout.

Following the end of the class session each group will submit a joint copy of the "Learning Guide" to be assessed – thus, both your individual Quiz as well as the submitted group exercise will count towards your final grade. However, all efforts – aside from the preparation of the Learning Guide itself – will be done in class.

To sum up:

1. 'Learning Guide' distributed at the end of a Tuesday class session (see Course outline below for the dates involved);
2. at the beginning of the next class a short Quiz on the materials will be taken by everyone individually – and while textbooks or notes are not allowed to be open you may use the Learning Guide itself to help you answer the questions;
3. the entire class will go over the correct answers;
4. the entire class will break out into smaller groups to complete the assigned exercise as a group with individual responsibilities assigned;
5. at the end of class each group will submit a joint (and now completed) exercise which will be graded prior to the next class;

Assignments should be submitted by electronic means – as an attached document in .doc, .docx, or .rtf formats – to John.Measor@smu.ca prior to 11:59 p.m. (Halifax time!) on the due date.

Please approach me as soon as possible if you are unsure how to submit email attachments.



Exams (30% of final grade)

Each exam will consist of multiple choice, matching (term, concept, theory with short definition) and essay questions. Do note – that in terms of composition (i.e. the material to be 'tested') the first three midterm exams (remember this is an all-year course) will explore the required reading and class materials covered for set periods of the course while the Final Exam in April will be cumulative (i.e. questions will cover not just the final quarter of the course but the entire course materials).

Assignment	Due Date	Weight
Quizzes	See Schedule	20% (5% each)
Midterm Exam #1	13 October 2011	10%
Essay Proposal	27 October 2011	10%
Essay	22 November 2011	30%
Midterm Exam #2	Scheduled by Registrar	20%

Double-sided Printing Encouraged

In recognition that members of the university community have a personal responsibility for the way their conduct impacts the local and global environment, students are encouraged that all reports and other documents, whenever possible, be printed on both sides of the paper.



Essay Proposal (10%)

The purpose of an essay proposal is so as to allow you to craft your project and to remove any concerns through consultation with me. Moreover, it ensures an early start on the semester's largest project in this course.

Expository Essay (30%)

The function of the expository essay is to explain, or to acquaint your reader with a body of knowledge. By explaining a topic to the reader, you are demonstrating your own knowledge. An essay becomes more complicated when a position has to be defended, as in a persuasive essay. In the Fall semester your expository essay project will therefore not be assessed on its persuasiveness, but rather on its 'completeness'. Moreover, it will have an assigned 'prompt' as well as a base-level of research sources from which to build.

In the Winter semester you will be asked to write a persuasive essay. In the persuasive essay, you must defend your side of an argument. You are no longer merely showing, you are convincing. The persuasive essay must choose a side, make a case for it, consider and refute alternative arguments, and prove to the undecided reader that the opinion it presents is the best one. You must be aware of other sides and be fair to them; dismissing them completely will weaken your own argument.

It is always best to take a side that you believe in, preferably with the most supporting evidence. However, it can often be educational to adopt a different position from what you might normally choose (debating requires this kind of flexibility) and therefore one shouldn't be terribly concerned - or distracted - by coming to a conclusion in the assignment that you be held to for the rest of time.

Separate handouts will be distributed outlining expectations and instructions for the essay project.

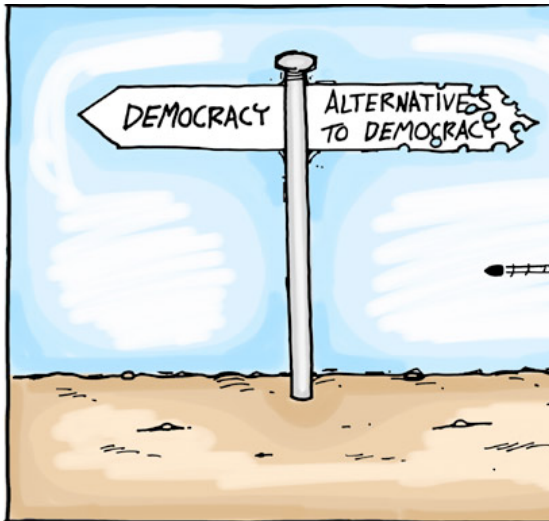
Blackboard

Our class time will be complemented with the use of Blackboard. Primarily the class site will be used as a location where you can find course materials (i.e. this syllabus, assignment handouts etc.), lecture notes, as well as required readings not found in the course textbooks.

Here are directions to help you access our course shell:

1. Log in to SMUport at <http://smuport.smu.ca/> using your S# and password.
2. Click on the 'Student Academics' tab.
3. Under 'My Courses', click on the link 'Click here to access your courses'.
4. In your list of courses, click on the name of this course to access our Blackboard site.

Contact the Centre for Academic Technologies (CAT) if you would like help with Blackboard or other technologies in your coursework (SMUport, MS Word, MS Excel, MS PowerPoint, document scanning, Web 2.0 tools, Photoshop, e-mail, etc.) Phone: 496-8168 | E-mail: CAT@smu.ca | Visit in person:



On Reading

For each class, you will have a reading assignment, usually a chapter of the textbook *Comparative Politics*. You need to keep up with the readings, not everything will be covered within class (either in lectures or discussions). The readings will be considered 'background' within the classroom - and required in terms of your responsibility in the course (i.e. on exams as well). Exams will be based on the text as well as class discussions. If you wish you may check out the 'Reading Skills' and 'Reading Worksheet' handouts found on the Blackboard site.

Weekly Readings

Week Two (SEPT 13-15)

Introduction to comparative politics (pp. 1-19)
The evolution of comparative politics (pp. 23-36)

Week Three (SEPT 20-22)

Approaches in comparative politics (pp. 37-49)
Comparative Research methods (pp. 50-63)

Week Four (SEPT 27-29)

The nation-state (pp. 67-83)

Week Five (OCT 4-6)

Quiz #1
Democracies (pp. 84-101)

Week Six (OCT 11-13)

Democracies (pp. 84-101)
Midterm #1 (13th)

Week Seven (OCT 18-20)

Authoritarian Regimes (pp. 102-117)
Quiz #2

Week Eight (OCT 25-27)

Quiz #3
Legislatures (pp. 121-140)
Essay Proposal Due (27th)

Week Nine (NOV 1-3)

Governments and bureaucracies (pp. 141-161)

Week Ten (NOV 8-10)

Constitutions and judicial power (pp. 162-180)

Week Eleven (NOV 15-17)

Elections and referendums (pp. 181-197)
Quiz #4

Week Twelve (NOV 22-24)

Political Parties (pp. 219-236)
Essay Due (22nd)

Week Thirteen (NOV 29)

Party Systems (pp. 237-258)

Exams

What are you responsible for on each exam?

Midterm #1 (13 October 2011)

Chap. 0. Introduction to comparative politics (pp. 1-19)

Chap. 1. The evolution of comparative politics (pp. 23-36)

Chap. 2. Approaches in comparative politics (pp. 37-49)

Chap. 3. Comparative research methods (pp. 50-63)

Chap. 4. The Nation-State (pp. 67-83)

Chap. 5. Democracies (pp. 84-101)

Midterm #2 (scheduled by Registrar)

Chap. 6. Authoritarian Regimes (pp. 102-117)

Chap. 7. Legislatures (pp. 121-140)

Chap. 8. Governments and bureaucracies (pp. 141-161)

Chap. 9. Constitutions and judicial power (pp. 162-180)

Chap. 10. Elections and referendums (pp. 181-197)

Chap. 12. Political Parties (pp. 219-236)

Chap. 13. Party Systems (pp. 237-258)



Exam Content

Both Midterms will be structured the same with the sole difference being the number of essay questions (due to time constraints).

Midterm #1 - (10%) - 13 October 2011

- Twenty (20) multiple choice
- Eight (8) matching
- One (1) Essay (from a choice of three)

Midterm #2 - (20%) - Scheduled by Registrar

- Twenty (20) multiple choice
- Eight (8) matching
- Two (2) Essays (from a choice of five)

Course Assessment Scheme*

On all issues it is strongly encouraged for students to consult the Academic Regulations section of the Academic Calendar <http://www.smu.ca/registrar/calendar.html>

	Grade Points	Percentage	Rating
A+	4.30	90-100	Outstanding, Exceptional, Brilliant. Demonstrates mastery of the subject matter, is an insightful, original thinker/writer, connects theory and practice, understands context and interdisciplinary connections, outstanding research and writing (grammar, punctuation, spelling ...) skills.
A	4.00	85-89	Excellent – Student has mastered the material/course but lacks no more than one of the other qualities listed above for A+ work.
A-	3.70	80-84	Student has generally mastered the material/course but performance in two or more above-mentioned categories is less than superior. Minor proofreading problems.
B+	3.30	77-79	Very good. Well above average and critical understanding of essential material, well-organized thinker / writer / researcher.
B	3.00	73-76	Good - Focused. Clear pattern of argument. Good survey of essential research. Well-developed paragraphs.
B-	2.70	70-72	Interesting. Beyond obvious arguments and research, some critical thinking, grammatically sound.
C+	2.30	67-69	Above Average. Very good grasp of assigned / required material. Some critical skill.
C	2.00	63-66	Average, Satisfactory - Fairly good grasp of the assigned / required material. Basic research and writing skills. Little to no creative or original writing.
C-	1.70	60-62	Fair, Adequate. Noticeable pattern of argument. Few serious grammatical or substantive mistakes / gaps. Limited documentation, substantiation of argument.
D	1.00	50-59	Marginal - pass. Meets requirements but unlikely to succeed in or get into higher level course.
F	0.00	0-49	Failure or Withdrawal after deadline**

* As taken from: <http://www.smu.ca/academic/arts/pscience/grade.html>

** See: <http://www.smu.ca/registrar/dates.html>