Proseminar in Comparative Politics
Winter Term 2006:
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This survey of major topics in comparative politics is intended for Ph.D. students. Its purpose is to introduce some of the major theoretical and conceptual building blocks in the sub-field. The course proceeds thematically. Each week participants discuss a subset of the pertinent scholarly literature, usually focusing on a major theoretical controversy. Key methodological issues are addressed in context.

1 (Jan 10) Introduction
2 (Jan 17) Theory, Method, and their Application in Comparative Politics
3 (Jan 24) States & Nations, Nationalities & Ethnicities
4 (Jan 31) Political Development & Modernization
5 (Feb 7) Violence, Rebellion, & Revolution
6 (Feb 14) Political Culture & Political Attitudes
7 (Feb 21) Institutions & Institutional Analysis
8 (Mar 7) Participation, Collective Action, Interests, & Interest-Intermediation
9 (Mar 14) Elections, Electoral Systems, & Representation
10 (Mar 21) Parties, Party Systems, & Representation
11 (March 28) Presidents & Assemblies
12 (Apr 4) States, Markets, & Development
13 (Apr 11) Political Regimes & Democratization
14 (Apr 18) Government, Governance, & Policy

About the Course

PS 641 is basic training for comparative politics graduate students. It is not a “fact” course and should not be taken by masters’ students who seek an introduction to the politics of a region.

- The course focuses on the task of causal (positive) explanation. We compare and contrast answers to important questions and ask what makes an explanation “good.”

- Although this course stresses positive political analysis, normative concerns do inform the questions to which we seek answers. For example, two of the major normative challenges of political systems are to improve the representation of popular interests in policy and to enhance governmental accountability and performance. This course will survey some of what we know or what has been argued regarding how the configuration of polities, societies, and economies affect the pursuit and achievement of these normative goals. Other normative aims exist as well. For example, although we usually normatively privilege democratic participation, representation, and accountability over order, in many parts of the world lack of personal security effectively debars improvement of life and expansion of choice. Again, you will observe this normative interest in the background motivation of some of the positive selections you read. We do not engage in normative debate in this class, but the imprint of these “political theory” conversations is clear.

- Careful attention to research design and theoretical and empirical method is important for ensuring that our normative predilections do not bias the answers we offer to questions, among other reasons. A number of methodological issues will arise throughout the course, although research design is not a principal focus. Appropriate research designs and theoretical and empirical methods do not vary across substantive subfields; comparative politics does not have separate methodology from the rest of social science. However, opportunities and relative efficacy of different strategies can vary across substantive applications, and we will occasionally address some of these considerations.
Requirements:
The course has two main requirements. First, active participation is essential. We expect each student to have read the assigned selections each week and to be ready to contribute to the conversation. Second, each student will prepare three discussion papers of about 10 pages each, explained in detail in the accompanying memo. In the calculation of grades, participation counts 25% and papers count for 75%.

Office Hours:
Inglehart: Tuesday, 4-6pm, ISR 4255
Franzese: Tuesdays 12:15-1:45, 6658 Haven Hall (and by appointment: 4256 ISR)

Shaman Drum has ordered the following books, and we have also placed them on reserve:

1. **Introduction (January 10).** [39pp.]

   The first class introduces the enterprise of comparative politics and the intellectual history of the field.


2. **Theory, Method, and their Application in Comparative Politics (January 17).** [295pp.]

   *Theory Building: Microfoundations and Models of Actor Choice*


   *Empirical Evaluation:*


3. **States & Nations, Nationalities & Ethnicities (January 24).** [440pp.]


4. **Theories of Political Development and Modernization (January 31).** [449pp.]


5. **Violence, Rebellion, and Revolution (February 7)** [438pp.]


6. **Political Culture and Political Attitudes (February 14).** [483pp.]


7. **Institutions & Institutional Analysis (February 21).** [218pp.]


8. **Participation, Collective Action, Interest-Intermediation (March 7) [477pp.]**

*Participation:*


*Collective Action:*


*Interest-Intermediation:*


Presidents & Parliaments:


Presidential Systems

**Parliamentary Systems**


12. **States, Markets, and Development (April 4).** [444pp.]


Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Hilton Root, eds. 2000. *Governing for Prosperity*. New Haven: Yale UP. Chs. 1-3, 6, 8:

- Bueno de Mesquita and Root, “When Bad Economics is Good Politics,” pp. 1-16;


13. **Political Regimes and Democratization (April 11).** [404pp. read+244pp. skimmed]


Political Science 641 Survival Skills

Overview
This course provides an overview of some of the core concepts and works in comparative politics. The syllabus is the product of a close review of related courses at comparable universities, along with the instructors’ and our colleagues’ thinking about what basic training in Comparative Politics entails. The main objective is to introduce key questions, classics, and modern approaches. The focus is on “the canon” and best current practices and not on any particular set of facts.

Schedule
This class meets for 2 hours (not enough, but the maximum allowed); please arrive promptly so that we may utilize our time fully.

Reading
The books listed near the start of the syllabus are available at Shaman Drum. Those and all other materials are (also) on electronic (if legally permissible) and/or physical reserve at the library.

The reading load for this course is necessarily heavy. The requirements include excerpts from many works to provide an introduction to the range of approaches offered to important topics, and to permit interesting comparisons and contrasts. Even so, the reading may prove overwhelming at times. Remember that skimming is an important professional skill. You need to read purposively or strategically, to identify:

- The main question the author wants to answer;
- The definition of the dependent variable, or what the author wants to explain;
- The main independent variables (causes, explanatory factors) the author thinks are important;
- The theory, or logical argument, that knits independent to dependent variables in causal explanations;
- The author’s research design: the main types of evidence the author uses to test his or her ideas and the way the evidence was obtained.

Also remember that this course is a “theory” course, not a “fact” course. You don’t have to memorize the histories or facts presented in what you read. If you are unable to keep pace even when reading strategically, we strongly encourage your forming peer discussion groups to assist each other.

Feeling Lost?
Depending on the kind of preparation you had as an undergraduate, some of the terms, methods, and basic facts assumed in the readings may be unfamiliar. Basic textbooks can help fill in gaps, as will we.

How to Write Papers for This Course
Three papers of about ten pages each are required. A paper may focus on a general question or cluster of questions from the handout or on a question of your own devising.

The papers should be literature reviews with a “spin.” That is, they present a sketch of the major theories (explanations) and the results of your own assessment, focused on a sub-question. In some weeks they may focus on research design. The “literature review” with a spin is a genre you will use extensively in the course of your life as a social scientist. Some of the best examples of this genre appear in World Politics and The Annual Review of Political Science. You may want to look at some of the review essays there as well as one or two sample past essays.

For the purposes of this course, you should first aim to distill the theory in each selection and grasp the research design, if any, and the adequacy of the evidence. To this end, you want to begin by identifying the question the author asks. The question almost always seeks to understand a variation in an outcome of social importance, such as participation or violence. Next draw out the independent variables (causes) and dependent variables (effects) and ask whether these are adequately conceptualized and operationalized. Are the concepts clear? What is the theoretical argument that links the variables? If the author tries to evaluate the
theory empirically, what does s/he do? Was the choice of design acceptable, or could you recommend a better way to test the theory? Were the measures chosen to evaluate concepts adequate?

Next you will want to consider two or a few theories for the week and contemplate which is most adequate and why, at least with respect to the question you have posed. Gut reactions may be good leads, although you will need to translate those into real reasons. Mature scholarship asks not so much whether someone is right or wrong but under what kinds of circumstances a theory is useful. Indeed, much theoretical advancement occurs when a third theory arrives to subsume previously conflicting or incompletely successful theories, explaining how both predecessors are special cases of a broader, context-conditional explanation.

In most cases, you can skim the empirical details. Papers should not be discussions of “who got the history right.” Specialized courses and cognate courses in other disciplines are the better forum for mastering “the data.” This course is about mastering the questions, arguments, and theories.

Writing quality counts. Clear, careful writing is vital professional skill. It is essential for effective communication, and it lowers the amount of time a reader has to spend to “get your message.” You should check syntax, grammar, word choice, spelling, and neatness in your papers.

Aim for a clear, concise, professional tone. Better to demonstrate that you can clarify a previously murky argument or to show that you can create new approaches when previous ones disappoint than to belittle previous attempts.

Papers are due no later than class time. The instructors will not grade late papers, because that would put those who complied with the deadline at a disadvantage. If you think you will fail to meet the deadline, then you should plan to submit a later paper. You have control over which papers you choose to write, and that flexibility should be sufficient to alleviate scheduling burdens. You should write at least one paper before February 15.

The Course and Preparation for the Field Examination

Students should find the course and its readings useful preparation for comprehensive or general examinations. The prelim exam reading list builds on the 641 syllabus, although both are in constant flux.

Keeping a Journal

During the term, some reading selections will capture your interest more than others. Questions and puzzles, and maybe even some ideas about possible theoretical advances or resolutions, will probably strike you repeatedly. You won’t have time to pursue most of these at the time, but keep a journal with a list of what you liked and did not and why, of questions you found interesting, and of any new ideas that arise. Such a journal could yield surprising guidance about directions you might pursue in your own research.

Grading

The three papers count for 75% of the final grade (25-25-25), and participation also counts 25%. Everyone is expected to be present and to participate in discussions. If you wish to be a member of the community of scholars, you incur obligations to listen to others and to help build on their ideas. Get into the habit of arriving on time and do not skip classes. Come prepared to join the conversation, even if that “just” means having a question ready to ask (often the most important form of engagement one can have in professional contexts). No one may decline to participate on cultural, shyness, or any other grounds. Public speaking is central to the working life of every academic, and you will find speaking throughout the course and in the future easier the earlier you start speaking regularly.

We will try to return papers within a week, but administrative and other emergencies occasionally render that deadline difficult to meet. Read the comments carefully. Most people find that they do less well on the first paper than they anticipate. That doesn’t preclude an A grade in the course, but it does mean you need to pay attention to the guidance the comments provide.