

University of Aberdeen

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Spring 2013

Introduction to Comparative Politics - Syllabus

Jon D. Carlson, *University of California, Merced*



Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/jondcarlson/15/>

University of California, Merced
School of Social Sciences, Humanities & Arts

POLI 3: Intro to Comparative Politics

Fall 2013

Description: “Introduction to the cross-national study of political institutions and behavior. Formal and informal aspects of politics in selected countries are covered, as are comparative research methods.”

MWF 1:30 – 2:20; COB 116

Course Instructor – Dr. Jon D. Carlson
jcarlson3@ucmerced.edu

Contact: Office – SSM 250b
Hours – MWF 11-12:30, & app’t

**THIS IS AN IMPORTANT DOCUMENT, DO NOT LOSE IT
REFER TO THIS SYLLABUS OFTEN DURING THE SEMESTER**

The following quotations may have application to this course:

I have come to the conclusion that politics are too serious a matter to be left to the politicians.

Charles De Gaulle (1890 - 1970)

Politics is war without bloodshed, while war is politics with bloodshed. **Mao Tse-Tung (1893 - 1976)**

Democracy is the theory that the common people know what they want, and deserve to get it good and hard.

H. L. Mencken (1880 - 1956)

Introduction

This course is an introduction to the study of comparative politics. While not required, it is *highly recommended* that you will have completed an introductory course on American Politics, or at the very least be knowledgeable about the workings of the American political system. This will give you a foundation for comparison to the governmental systems of other countries. Comparative Politics is a distinct branch of political science whose purpose is the systematic study of political systems, institutions and behaviors. Thus, we strive to increase our substantive knowledge of single countries so that we may then use this knowledge to generate theory for a better understanding of all political systems. The study of comparative politics describes the varying ways that nations organize political institutions, the ways in which ties are established between governments and citizens, and the relationship between a country’s unique history and culture and the emergence of its political system.

One of the closely watched patterns in comparative politics today – and a recurring theme in this class – is a process called **democratization**, or how and why countries transition to a democratic form of governance. In the course of the semester, students will discover that democracy comes in several forms and that the process of firmly establishing democracy is a complex process which depends on a country’s particular history, culture, economic and social situation. Transitions to democracy, in other words, have uncertain outcomes. And “democracy” often means quite different things to different peoples. Thus, the problem facing any nation is the question of how to *best* govern its people given its own unique situation. The choices are at the heart of understanding comparative politics.

Course Description

This course is organized along the following lines. The **first** part is concerned with introducing you to the basic concepts and methodology of comparative politics, such as the state, governing regimes, legitimacy, civil society, political culture, fundamentalism, modernization and democratization. These

concepts allow for general discussions into which all societies and governments will fall, regardless of their own cultural and historical peculiarities. The **second** part of the course will be devoted to a closer inspection of specific country cases, which serve as illustrations of broader patterns of politics. The countries to be discussed are: Britain, France, Russia, China, Mexico, and Iran, with approximately 2 weeks devoted to each.

In the end, the purpose of the course is to stimulate interest in the affairs of nations beyond the United States. Additionally, you should develop an appreciation for the many different ways that human communities come to terms with the basic questions of determining the “proper” relationship between citizen and state, and how different nations deal with the challenges of ongoing social, cultural and economic changes in the world. At the conclusion of the course, students should be able to begin to speak in an informed manner about the pillars of politics (freedom, power, and well-being) and how they are arranged differently among the spectrum of the world’s nations.

PROGRAM LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

The **Program Learning Objectives** (PLOs) for Political Science are for students to develop:

1. An understanding of the processes, theories, and empirical regularities of political institutions and political behavior in the student’s chosen emphasis area: American politics, comparative politics, or international relations. 2. An ability to employ critical thinking and demonstrate social scientific literacy, including basic quantitative literacy. 3. A capacity to utilize contemporary social science research methods to conduct rigorous research on political phenomena. 4. Effective written communication skills, especially the ability to convey complex concepts and information in a clear and concise manner. 5. An ability to apply abstract theory and research methods to understand contemporary political events and public policies.

POLI 003: Student Learning Objectives (SLOs)

1. Understand and identify variety of institutions and structures different nations use to govern themselves (Per PLO #1). 2. Use scientific methods and comparative politics methodology to analyze the institutional or behavioral aspects of at least 2 countries (Per PLO # 2, 3). 3. Develop concise argumentation and writing skills, while displaying critical thinking in discussion (written and verbal) of complex and contentious issues related to course material (Per PLO #4). 4. Be able to speak in an informed manner about the pillars of politics (freedom, power, and well-being) and how they are arranged differently among the spectrum of the world’s nations (Per PLO #5).

Teaching Philosophy

Heterodox: Do not fear to dissent from the taken-for-granted or assumed “best” path. Question yourself; defend your point of view, without being dismissive of alternative positions or disrespectful of others. Use new perspectives and competing viewpoints to improve your understanding of the topic at hand. Recognize that learning is a process of cooperative conflict: ultimately, we argue with texts, distant authors, and each other in order to advance a dialogue, not to defend a dogma. Human beings are all imperfect creatures – do not let fear of being imperfect get in the way of your learning experience!

Intellectualism: If you are in college or university, odds are good that you believe in the value of education. Indeed, knowledge is power. However, having an opinion or a belief is not the same as having accurate knowledge. In fact, many of human kind’s most enduring conflicts are based on beliefs (religious or otherwise) that do not coincide with what others believe. In this class I will ask you to develop the following skills:

1. **Embrace your ignorance**, and then strive to overcome it. We learn by first recognizing there is a skill or body of knowledge that we do not have, then taking steps to rectify this. Many students have their academic progress stunted because they are afraid of “looking stupid” in front of their peers; we are all here to learn, act accordingly and overcome this fear!

2. **Question assumptions:** Part of being in college is to challenge belief systems and to think new, often scary thoughts. Question yourself and ask WHY you believe things that you believe. It is acceptable to have opinions, but the instructor will often ask you why you hold them; have a reason *why* you think what you think! Part of being human is our ability to recognize when we have been wrong, and change our viewpoint in light of new information. This can be incredibly powerful, even though ‘existential crises’ are often a disturbing aspect of being in university.

3. **Opposing views:** Part of being truly educated is the ability to hold two opposite viewpoints in your mind at the same time, understand both fully, and then be able to decide which is most favorable. This does *not* require

you to agree with one, both, or either, but rather to understand it in an objective (not reactionary) manner. For example, in American politics we have a system dominated by two parties, which often leads to emotionally heated debates. One way to cut through the emotion of such situations is to mentally “switch” the labels associated with each position, and ask yourself if you would feel the same way if a Democrat (or Republican) was taking the position being contested. This can be especially fruitful in situations dominated by personality (such as a Presidential election!). Be able to take personal views and emotions out of a debate and evaluate all sides fairly.

Most of us, if not all, know how to ride a bicycle. Think about how you learned to ride a bike. I’m sure you did not attend lectures on bike riding. Rather, with the assistance of a parent, sibling or friend you got on the bike and started riding. You may have had learning wheels, you may have fallen off the bike many times, ***but in the end you learned how to ride the bike*** and you can still do that today! This is a good example of all learning. First, it was ***active***, not passive. You did things rather than taking lecture notes. Second, you were ***motivated*** to learn bike riding because your friends did it, or it gave you greater mobility, or for any other good reason.

Another way to think about learning at a College or University is that it is like taking out a membership in a Health and Fitness Club. Your tuition at UC Merced gives you the *right* to attend a certain number of classes each semester. It also gives you the right to use the Library system, the computer commons and other University facilities. Similarly, your Club membership fee allows you to use the exercise machines, swimming pool and other Club facilities. ***However***, if you never visit the Club and work out, your membership money is wasted. In the same fashion, if you just come to class most of the time without preparing and without participating, ***without being active in class***, your tuition money is wasted, too. So, as your teacher I am like a personal fitness trainer. It’s my job to exercise your mind. And please remember – ***no pain, no gain!***¹ Life IS a participatory activity.

Grades and Requirements

Grades will be based on the student’s performance on exams, essays, attendance and performance in discussion section. There will be a midterm and final exam. Finally, performance in your discussion section will also be used to calculate a significant portion of your final grade.

The relative weight of each component of your grade is as follows:

Midterm	20 %	Papers	20%
Final	20 %	Discussion Section	30 %
Attendance	10 %		

Grades will follow the format:

93.3 – 100:	A	90 – 93.2 :	A-		
86.7 – 89.9:	B+;	83.3 – 86.6:	B	80 – 83.2:	B-
Etc.					

Under NO circumstances will so-called ‘extra credit’ work be granted. NO make up exams will be permitted; the only exception is for a documented medical emergency. I reserve the right to make updates and changes to the syllabus, with notice, during the semester.

Texts

The following texts will be used in this course. Optionally, used copies are often available online through various textbook retailers or used book sites.

1. **Roskin**, Michael G., Countries and Concepts: Politics, Geography, Culture, 12th Edition; (2012) ISBN 10: 0205854656
2. Yap, Fiona, Annual Editions: Comparative Politics 13/14;
3. Almond, Gabriel, et al Comparative Politics Today: A Theoretical Framework (chapters online through CROPS)

Class Etiquette and Academic Honesty (or, stuff I shouldn’t have to tell you):

All students are expected to be on time and attend class, not disrupt class by talking, using cell phones, leaving in the middle of discussion or lecture, and be prepared to help discuss the day’s material if called upon. I do not care if you

¹ Learning metaphors courtesy Dr. Patrick McGowan

have food or drink in class, as long as it is quiet and unobtrusive. Finally, it is expected that students will adhere to UC Merced's policies on academic honesty (including plagiarism, proper citation of sources, and misrepresenting others' work as your own); violation of these policies will be pursued to the fullest extent, up to and including dismissal from the University. Plagiarism will be taken *very* seriously and all cases will be referred to the Dean for administrative action, in addition to any action deemed appropriate by the instructor.
<http://studentlife.ucmerced.edu/what-we-do/student-judicial-affairs/academicy-honesty-policy>

Course Outline

Week 1: *Introduction*

Presentation of syllabus, readings, assignments
Introduction into the subject field

Readings:

- Roskin, Ch. 1, Almond Ch1

Discussion: AE – Intro to Unit 1, overview of semester

Week 2: *Introduction (No Class Monday – Labor Day Holiday)*

Readings:

- Samuel Huntington, “Clash of Civilizations”; (online)

See Also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Clash_of_Civilizations

- Almond, Ch. 2, 3

Discussion: Annual Editions, **Article # 8**, *What Democracy Is...and Is Not*, Schmitter & Karl; **Article #38**, *True Clash of Civilizations*

Week 3: *Britain I – History & Institutions*

Readings:

- Roskin, Ch. 2 - start
- Almond, Ch. 4

Discussion: Annual Editions, **Article #9, 11**

Week 4: *Britain II – Culture, Interaction & Issues*

Readings:

- Roskin, Ch. 2 - finish
- Almond, Ch. 5

Discussion: Annual Editions, **Article #15**

Week 5: *France I – History & Institutions*

Readings:

- Roskin, Ch 3 - start

Discussion: Annual Editions, **Article #2,13**

Week 6: *France II – Culture, Interaction & Issues*

Readings:

- Roskin, Ch 3 - finish

Discussion: Annual Editions, **Article # 17**

Week 7: *The European Union –*

Readings:

- Roskin, Ch. 17 (online in CROPS)

Discussion: Annual Editions, **Article # 37**

Paper #1 Due Friday

Week 8: *Russia I -- History & Institutions*

Readings:

- Roskin, Ch. 6

Discussion:

Annual Editions, **Article #33, 20**

Week 9: *Russia II – Culture, Interaction & Issues*

Readings:

MONDAY 10/14: MIDTERM EXAM

- Roskin, Ch. 6 finish

Discussion:

Annual Editions, **Article #39, 23**

Week 10: *China I -- History & Institutions*

Readings:

- Roskin, Ch. 7 start

Discussion:

Annual Editions, **Article #19, 22**

Week 11: *China II – Culture, Interaction & Issues*

Readings:

- Roskin, Ch. 7 finish

Discussion:

Annual Editions, **Article #41**

Week 12: *Mexico I* (No Class Monday 11/11)

Readings:

- Roskin, Ch. 9

Discussion:

Annual Editions, **Article # 40, 27**

Week 13: *Mexico & Latin America II*

Readings: TBA

Discussion:

Annual Editions, **Article # 31**

Week 14: *Iran* (No Class Friday 11/29)

Readings:

- Roskin, Ch. 12

Discussion:

Annual Editions, **Article #1,**

Week 15: *Iran II & Social Value Change*

Readings: (TBD)

- Democratization & Value Change (TBA)

Discussion: **AE #10**

Paper #2 Due Friday

Week 16: Conclusion & Review

Readings:

- Roskin, Epilogue (5 pages)
- AE – **#42, 43**

Discussion:

Review for Final Exam

Final Exam: Saturday 12/14, 11:30-2:30 pm. NO EARLY EXAMS.