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PSC 195.01: Introduction to Comparative Politics

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University of Montana
PSC 195 - Introduction to Comparative Politics
Spring Term 1998

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Course Description

Introduction to why and how we compare nations and to concepts, theories, and perspectives in the field. Emphasis on similarities within and differences across regions. Explanations of similarities and differences. Focus on selected major countries for comparison and contrast within and across regions.

Course Purposes

1. Provide students opportunity to increase their knowledge of patterns of governance across continents and regions and their ability to explain these patterns.
2. Give students knowledge and applications of concepts, theories, and perspectives using political science discipline.
3. Sharpen students' ability to analyze and compare political systems.

Course Objectives

- At the end of the course, the successful student should:
1. be familiar with patterns of governance in the world, be able to explain similarities and differences among key political systems, and be able to compare and contrast institutions and processes within and across global regions;
 2. be able to put current events into larger interregional and international political contexts;
 3. be able to apply the new concepts and tools of analysis s/he acquired to the study of any political system, especially those outside his or her own.

Course Format and Requirements

Essentially this is a reading/discussion course, with the instructor as facilitator and guide. For most of the sessions the instructor will make introductory remarks on the topic, outlining the key issues, themes and concepts. Group discussions of the previously assigned readings then take place at which students draw out materials that illustrate or challenge the concepts and theories underlined in the introductory lecture. Apart from identifying important areas of controversy, the groups will also be expected to discuss other relevant issues arising from the readings and relate them to the broader themes in the course. Group leaders then present to the entire class a summary of their respective readings, what the group got out of it, and what issues and questions have been raised and discussed in the group. Notes are compared, areas of agreement are noted, and questions

and issues of controversy are further discussed with a view to resolving them.

Students are expected to do the readings on schedule, to attend classes regularly and to participate in class discussions. To ensure adequate preparation for, and quality contribution to class discussions, students will be required periodically to write short (no more than three pages) papers that summarize and react to some to some of the reading assignments. These will constitute a major part of the course grading (40%). There will also be a mid-term examination (20%) and a final(30%) The balance of the course grade(10%) will be for class attendance.

The Text

Thomas M. Magstadt, Nations and Governments - Comparative Politics in Regional Perspective (3rd ed), New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.

Course Outline

Unit I: Conceptual Issues

Readings for this unit: Magstadt, chapters 1-3

- Jan. 26 Introduction
- Jan. 28 Comparing nations - a conceptual framework
- Jan. 30 Forms of government: Democracy
- Feb. 2 Normative and evolutionary theories of democracy
- Feb. 4 "Shadows of Hate": a video
- Feb. 6* Authoritarianism: Ubiquity and forms
*Paper 1 due. The question: Would the world be safer and more economically prosperous if regional organizations replaced nation-states as the major vessels of government?

Unit II: Western Europe

Readings: Magstadt, chapters 4-6

- Feb. 9 The political setting of Europe's constitutional democracy
- Feb. 11 Small group discussions of patterns of government in Britain, France and Germany
- Feb. 13 Large group discussion of the findings of the small groups
- Feb. 16 Presidents' Day (no classes)
- Feb. 18 Rethinking the problems of post-industrial society
- Feb. 20* Discussions of selected study questions
*Paper 2 due. Should the US adopt proportional representation in its electoral system?

Unit III: Eastern Europe

Readings: Magstadt, chapters 7-9

- Feb. 23 The political setting of authoritarianism in Russia and Eastern Europe
- Feb. 25 Comparing Soviet and US federalism
- Feb. 27 The collapse of the Soviet Union: Problems in transition to democracy
- Mar. 2 Small group discussions of the break-up of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia
- Mar. 4 Large group discussion of the break-up, focussing on whether joining the European Union would help
- Mar. 6 Test 1

Unit IV: The Middle East

Readings: Magstadt, chapters 10-12

- Mar. 9 The socio-political and religious setting of authoritarian political systems in the Middle East
- Mar. 11 The pattern of rule: case studies of Egypt, Saudi, Iran, Iraq and Israel
- Mar. 13 Discussion of selected study questions
- Mar. 16-20 Spring Break
- Mar. 23 Israel and the Palestinian question
- Mar. 25 Discussion: What if peace breaks out in the Arab-Israeli conflict? Would that mean peace in the Middle East?
- Mar. 27 Discussion of selected study questions

Unit V: Asia

Readings: Magstadt, chapters 13-15

- Mar. 30 Introducing Asia via India. Video: "Of Snakes and Software."
- Apr. 1 India's political system
- Apr. 3 Small group discussions: Chinese and Japanese governments and their political settings
- Apr. 6 Large group discussion of the findings of small groups
- Apr. 8 Poverty trap and perils of success; discussion of video, "Poverty Complex"
- Apr. 10* Discussion of selected study questions
*Paper 3 due: Would the rest of the Third World become prosperous and stable if they emulate the newly-exporting countries of ASEAN and the Asian Tigers?

Unit VI: Sub-Saharan Africa

Readings: Magstadt, chapters 16-18

- Apr. 13 The political setting of African authoritarianism
- Apr. 15 What is the problem with African democracy? The crisis of legitimacy in a post-colonial state.
- Apr. 17 Civilian autocracy or democracy? Small group discussions of institutions and processes in Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa
- Apr. 20 Large group discussion of the small group findings
- Apr. 22 Will Africa develop? Internal and external theories of African underdevelopment
- Apr. 24 Test 2

Unit VII: Latin America

Readings: Magstadt, chapters 17-21

- Apr. 27 Legacy of authoritarian political culture: Force and Legitimacy in Post-colonial LA
- Apr. 29 Transition to democratic governance: Institutions and processes in Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina
- May 1 Democracy under siege: Debt, SAP, and domestic distress
- May 4 Video, "Life and Debt"
- May 6 Review of final exam questions
- May 13 Final Exam 3:20-5:20