Spring 2-1-1998

PSC 195.01: Introduction to Comparative Politics

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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 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
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, focusing 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