Ph.D. Seminar in Comparative Politics
SIS 802, Fall 2016
School of International Service
American University

COURSE INFORMATION
Professor: Matthew M. Taylor
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Classes will be held on Tuesdays, 2:35-5:15pm
Office hours: Wednesdays (11:30pm-3:30pm) and by appointment. In the case of appointments, please email me at least two days in advance to schedule.
Office: SIS 350

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Comparative political science is one of the four traditional subfields of political science. It differs from international relations in its focus on individual countries and regions, and its comparison across units – national, subnational, actors, and substantive themes. Yet it is vital to scholars of international relations, not least because of its ability to explain differences in the basic postures of national and subnational actors, as well as in its focus on key variables of interest to international relations, such as democratization, the organization of state decision-making, and state capacity. Both subfields have benefited historically from considerable methodological and theoretical cross-fertilization which has shaped the study of international affairs significantly.

The first section of the course focuses on the epistemology of comparative political science, seeking to understand how we know what we know, the accumulation of knowledge, and the objectivity of the social sciences. The remainder of the course addresses substantive debates in the field, although students are encouraged to critically address the theoretical and methodological approaches that are used to explore these substantive issues.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
This course will introduce students to the field, analyzing many of the essential components of comparative political science: themes, debates, and concepts, as well as different theoretical and methodological approaches. The course is designed for Ph.D. students who are preparing to take comprehensive exams at the School of International Service. By the end of the semester, students should be able to critically describe the main theoretical and methodological veins of comparative political science. They should also be conversant with the main substantive debates in the field, and be prepared to undertake basic tasks of research design.
LEARNING OUTCOMES
By the end of this course, students should be able to:
1. Utilize and demonstrate familiarity with common tools of comparative analysis;
2. Critique different theoretical traditions and empirical orientations in comparative politics;
3. Demonstrate the skills needed to identify topics worthy of original research and situate them within the extant scholarly literature;
4. Evaluate concepts critically, and develop practical operationalization of conceptual measures;
5. Successfully develop a plan of study for the Ph.D. comprehensive examination.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
1. Informed participation (15% of final grade): Both the quality of the course and your ability to do well on assignments depend on understanding the texts and on critical reflection of class discussion. You are expected to take notes on the main themes of the reading, so that they can be discussed in class, and referenced in your position papers. It goes without saying that a lack of participation will redound in a low participation grade.
   a. Needless to say at the doctoral level, but worth saying once: texting, emailing, use of social media, etc., are considered inappropriate behaviors in a professional setting and will be heavily penalized. I discourage the use of computers and other electronic instruments during our seminars, except in exceptional cases (to be approved by me prior to class).
   b. Also worth saying: the success of the course relies entirely on student involvement. Students are expected to critically explore the readings planned here, which are designed to cover core theories and questions of comparative political science. But further reading and discussion outside of class is heavily encouraged.
2. Intriguing questions and devastating critiques (20% of final grade): At least five times during the semester, students will be asked to bring in a single sheet of paper containing two intriguing questions that arose in the course of preparing for the day’s class, as well as a single sharp criticism of one of the main academic readings for that day’s class. Each IQDC assignment should address more than one distinct reading. You are welcome to criticize the substance, empirical evidence, or methodological approach the authors use; you might also raise questions about their assumptions or the ethical foundations of their arguments. The key to these assignments is concision: while I will not be as strict as Twitter about word counts, you are encouraged to keep each question and your critiques as brief and sharp as possible. You will be graded on the substance of your questions and the depth of your critique; do not let brevity undermine your creativity. I reserve the right to assign further IQDCs over the course of the semester if I sense that students are not engaging the readings in sufficient depth.
3. Position Papers (40%): These short papers (3-5 pages, double-spaced) are used to encourage students to critically appraise of recent classes’ themes, to point to potential drawbacks and shortcomings in the approaches developed in the
literature, and to consider how the various readings dialogue with each other. Do not let the brevity of the page limit fool you: these essays are best built up from a longer outline, so as to ensure that the few pages you do turn in are as concise, well-written, and insightful as possible.

4. Final exam (25%): The exam will be similar in format to the position papers, requesting critical appraisal of key themes and discussions presented over the course of the semester. The exam will be timed, and will be designed to replicate the conditions under of an actual comprehensive examination.

Assignment deadlines (please bring printed assignments to class on due date):
- IQDC 1: due in class 2
- IQDC 2: due in class 5
- IQDC 3: due in class 7
- IQDC 4: due in class 10
- IQDC 5: due in class 12
- IQDC 6: due in class 13
- Position paper 1: assignment handed out in class 1; due class 3.
- Position paper 2: assignment handed out class 4; due class 6.
- Position paper 3: assignment handed out class 7; due class 9.
- Position paper 4: assignment handed out class 11; due class 14.
- Final exam: due on registrar’s exam date.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the University's Academic Integrity Code. By registering, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Academic Integrity Code, and you are obliged to become familiar with your rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will not be treated lightly, and disciplinary actions will be taken should such violations occur. Please see me if you have any questions about the academic violations described in the Code in general or as they relate to particular requirements for this course.

APPROPRIATE CLASS BEHAVIOR
Class attendance is mandatory, and all absences must be explained and documented ahead of time, preferably well in advance to avoid the unfortunate docking of class participation points. Cell phones must be turned off during class. Laptops and other electronic devices are not allowed except with explicit prior permission from the professor. Social networking, texting, or instant messaging are all unacceptable behaviors and will adversely affect your grade. I take these rules very seriously, given my strong belief that these behaviors are deeply damaging to the classroom experience.
STANDARDS FOR PERFORMANCE
Grades will be assigned by merit, according to the following scale:

➢ A: Excellent. Student shows clear mastery of the material; has exceeded the basic course requirements; shows insight, innovation, and creativity that go beyond basic assimilation of the course material.

➢ B: Well prepared. Student has completed the basic course requirements, shows understanding of the material and is prepared to contribute knowledgeably.

➢ C: Prepared. Student may have done the reading, shows basic mastery of the material, and can contribute at a basic level, but may show little organization of key arguments or understanding of how key concepts interact.

➢ D: Poor. Student has not completed the basic course requirements, is unable to discuss the material cogently, fails to posit arguments in a clear and knowledgeable fashion.

Grades in this course will be commensurate with your performance. Please do not expect that your presence alone will justify a passing participation grade. Responsibility for any email or document glitches will be the student’s. To the extent permitted by the University calendar, late papers will be accepted with up to three days’ delay. However, each 24 hours of delay beyond the due date will imply a reduction of the maximum possible grade by one-third letter grade (i.e., an A paper that is one day late will receive an A-, an A- will receive a B+, etc.). You should seek help throughout the semester when you have questions, fail to submit an assignment, fail to attend class, or receive an unsatisfactory grade.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS FOR DISRUPTION OF CLASSES
In the event of an emergency, American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of an emergency, students should refer to the AU Student Portal, the AU Web site (www.prepared.american.edu) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean’s office for course and school/college-specific information.
BOOKS
The following books are recommended for purchase:


All other readings are available via course reserves on Blackboard or via the library catalog.

CLASS SCHEDULE (BY WEEK)

1. August 30: What is comparative politics, and why is it done?

2. September 6: Inference, concepts, and cases

3. September 13: Measurement and method

4. September 20: The state

5. September 27: Culture

6. October 4: Collective action and mobilization

7. October 11: Institutions

8. October 18: Political regimes

9. October 25: Civil society and social capital

10. November 1: Formal democratic institutions

11. November 8: Informal democratic institutions

12. November 15: Political economy of development, inequality, and welfare

November 22: NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING BREAK

13. November 29: Bureaucracy and state capacity

14. December 6: Summary and review
CLASS READING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Comparative Politics: What is it, and why is it done?

Recommended:
   - Lichbach and Zuckerman, “Paradigms and Pragmatism,” Chapter 1 in L&Z.

2. Inference, concepts, and cases

Recommended:
   - Bennett, Andrew and Alexander L. George, Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005).


• Mahoney, James. “Strategies of Causal Assessment in Comparative Historical Analysis” in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds., Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences (Cambridge University Press, 2003).


3. Measurement and method


Recommended:


4. The state: origins and conceptualization

• Migdal, Joel, “Researching the State,” Chapter 7 in L&Z.

• Skocpol, “Introduction,” in Evans, Peter, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol, eds. 1985. Bringing the State Back In. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pages 3-43.


Recommended:


5. Culture

- Ross, Marc Howard. “Culture in Comparative Political Analysis,” Chapter 6 in L&Z.
- Geertz, skim Chapter 1 and read Chapter 15

Recommended:


6. Collective action and mobilization


• Tarrow, Sidney. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, Chapter 1 (Chapter 5 also recommended).


Recommended:


• Bowels, Samuel. 2011. "Economic incentives and social preferences: substitutes or complements?" *Journal of Economic Literature*.


7. Institutions

• Hall, Peter A. and Rosemary Taylor, “Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms.” *Political Studies* 44 (December 1996).


Recommended:


• Carey, John M. 2000. "Parchment, Equilibria, and Institutions" *Comparative Political Studies* 33: 735-61


• Glaeser, Edward, Rafael La Porta, Florencio Lopez-de-Silanes, and Andrei Shleifer. 2004. “Do Institutions Cause Growth?” *Journal of Economic Growth*, September,


8. Political regimes, democratization, and the politics of authoritarian rule


Recommended:


9. Civil society and social capital


Recommended:

10. Formal democratic institutions: the architecture of government


Recommended:

- Cheibub, José. 2002. ‘Minority governments, deadlock situations, and the survival of presidential democracies.’ *Comparative Political Studies* 35: 284;


11. Informal democratic institutions


Recommended:


12. Political Economy of Development, Inequality, and Welfare


Recommended:


13. Bureaucracies, the state as an actor, state capacity


Recommended:


Class 14:
Summary and review: please review your notes for the semester and come to class prepared to discuss what comparative politics is, what the key themes of comparative politics are, and how they intersect with the study of international affairs.