PS 200B: Major Themes in Comparative Analysis

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Spring 2023
Wednesdays 12-2 PM
202 Social Sciences Building

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Office Hours: Thursdays 4-5:30

This course provides an introduction to research design in comparative politics; it is the second semester of the two-semester introductory graduate sequence for the comparative sub-field. We will focus on various topics relevant to doing research, such as how to formulate research questions; develop concepts and measures; improve the validity of descriptive and causal inferences; and use various qualitative and quantitative methods in the service of a diverse substantive agenda. Most of the major approaches currently used in the subfield of comparative politics are represented. The course has three objectives: to develop your ability to critique research, to provide a foundation for your dissertation and beyond, and to introduce you to ideas you might not otherwise encounter in your political science training.

There are five main requirements/components for the course beyond doing the readings:

(1) Respond to weekly readings for at least 8 sessions in a written statement of between two and three double-spaced pages. These responses should go beyond summarizing individual articles. In what ways do the articles agree or disagree with one another? What are their strengths and weaknesses? How can those be addressed? How might the ideas be relevant for your research question? (See also (4) below.) Reading responses should be uploaded in PDF format to bCourses no later than Tuesday evening at 6pm. (20% of grade)

(2) Participation in class discussion. Our discussions will undoubtedly touch on themes raised in the response papers, but will usually go beyond them. I realize that class participation can be highly gendered, so I may also call on people who have not had the opportunity to speak. (20% of grade)

(3) Read the paper to be presented at each week’s Comparative Politics Colloquium (and attend the workshop if you can, Thursdays at 12:30-2pm in 202 SSB). Consider the argument, research design, and data analysis. Are you convinced by the argument? Why or why not? We will devote some class time to discussing the CPC papers. (10% of grade)

(4) Write a research proposal in which you present a research question and devise a strategy for investigating that question. While you will not actually carry out the
proposed research this semester, you should anticipate the steps that would be involved in doing so. This proposal can provide a foundation for 2nd year M.A. essays or, if you already have a dissertation topic, help you prepare for your dissertation prospectus. The proposal should be 15-20 double-spaced pages, and include a literature review, theory, research design, and some empirical implications. (If your theory holds, what should be observe in the world?) These proposals are due Friday, May 5 by 4pm, in PDF format. Please consult with me before moving forward with your proposal. (30% of grade)

(5) Our last two sessions (April 19 and 26) will be devoted to student presentations of their proposals. Each student will be allotted 15 minutes. You should take 5-10 minutes to present your research question, theory, and research design. The remainder of the 15 minutes will be devoted to Q & A. (20% of grade).

Most of the readings can be googled but for convenience I have made them available on bCourses. In some cases you will access the UCB library electronic version. These include:


I reserve the right to amend the syllabus without prior warning.

Schedule of Topics

PART I - FUNDAMENTALS

January 18: What is the Comparative Method?


**January 25: Ontology: What Entities Do We Study When We Study Comparative Politics?**


**February 1: Models and Explanations: How Can/Do/Should We Theorize About the Entities We Study?**


February 8: Concepts and Measurement: What links “The Entities We Study” to “How/Can/Should We Theorize About the Entities We Study?”


February 15 (12-1:30): Description: What Do We Need to Know About the Entities We Study?


February 22: Case Selection and Descriptive Inference: Among the Entities We Study in Comparative Politics, How Do We Choose Which Ones to Focus On?


March 1: Causal Inference: When Do We Say That One Thing We Study Causes Another Thing That We Study?


**PART II - METHODS**

**March 8: Field Experiments**


**March 15: “Natural Experiments”: As if Randomization, Regression Discontinuity, and Instrumental Variables**


**March 22: Office Hours in 732 SSB**

**March 29: Spring Break**

**April 5: Quantitative Observational Designs: Regression, Difference in Difference, Matching**


**April 12: Qualitative Observational Designs: Process Tracing, Comparative Historical Analysis, and Mixed Methods**


**April 19: Discussion of Research Proposals**

**April 26: Discussion of Research Proposals**