Political Science 242  
Comparative Politics Core Course  
Winter 2016  
Thursdays 3:10-6pm (593 Kerr Hall)

Instructor: Ethan Scheiner  
http://polisci.ucdavis.edu/people/scheiner/escheiner  
581 Kerr Hall  
escheiner@ucdavis.edu  
Phone (530) 207-3205  
Fax (530) 752-8666  
Office Hours: TBD  
http://polisci.ucdavis.edu/people/scheiner/escheiner/office-hours.html


***Please note that there is reading for the first day. Given the large amount of reading and how quickly we get rolling, I would recommend preparing for the first two weeks prior to the start of the quarter.

Course Summary:
This course is not an introduction to the entire subfield of comparative politics – that is just too much to do in a single quarter. Rather, this course is an introduction to how to do comparative politics social science research. The aim here is not to be comprehensive. The brevity of the quarter prevents that. Also, much of the key work in comparative politics is covered in other classes.

Ultimately, this course is important for three main reasons. First, the principles here will apply to all political science classes you take. Second, what we cover here is critical to you becoming a good comparative political scientist. Third, it is the most important course for preparing everyone who will be taking the comparative politics exam in their third year.

There are three main sections to the course, with a take-home exam at the end of parts 2 and 3. 1) The Evolution and Debates within Comparative Politics, 2) Research Design and Methodology, and 3) Examples of Different Approaches to Comparative Politics.
Additional Comments for Grad Students:

1. A major aim of this class is to help professionalize students within the political science discipline. For this reason, we will regularly have brief discussions of “professionalization” in class. Please see the listing for each week and please come to class with questions about that week’s professionalization topic.

2. The most common characteristic I have noticed among students who are not doing well in graduate school is lack of communication. If you need/plan to turn in something late for my class, that is fine – just please just let me know so I’m not wondering if I’ve missed it. And if you are having problems with the program or with class, please come talk with me. There is no shame in any of that!
Required Texts:


• “Coursepack” – see Smartsite

• Also, the journal articles will be available online at JSTOR/scholar.google.com/etc.

Assignments:

• Weekly reading assignments

• Class participation (10%). Keep this in mind: If the rest of your work is flawless, but you don’t participate in class, the highest grade you can get in the class is an A- (i.e., 90%). **If you are nervous about answering questions/engaging in discussion, I recommend bringing in questions to ask the class about the material.**

• Take-home (6 double-spaced pages) “exam” assigned after Session 5 and due (hardcopy) in my mailbox and (electronic) by email anytime by noon, Thursday, February 11 (35%)

• 24-hour (10 double-spaced pages) take-home exam, which you can take anytime after the last class meeting and is due (electronic copy by email) by 11:59pm, Wednesday, March 16 (55%)

Written Assignments: All written assignments must be double-spaced and typed in Times New Roman 12-point font, have 1-inch margins (not the MS Word default), and be carefully proofread. (I have little patience for typos/missing words/poorly constructed sentences, nouns-pronouns that don’t match, etc.)

• **On a separate title page only, please put your name, course, assignment, and the date. After the title page, please do not include your name anywhere.** (I don’t like to know whose papers I’m reading.)

• **Use page numbers** whenever you submit something longer than one page. (Papers without page numbers drive me insane.)

• Please do not include a page number for the title page. (To do this, create a “section” break between the title page and the first page of the text of the paper, rather than a page break.) And, finally, please stick closely to the prescribed lengths.
The Evolution and Debates within Comparative Politics

1. January 7: What is Comparative Political Science?
     Munck and Snyder, *Passion, Craft and Method in Comparative Politics*. Baltimore, MD:
     The Johns Hopkins University Press. **Coursepack**
     APSA-CP: Newsletter of the APSA Organized Section on Comparative Politics 7: 1-2.  
   • David Laitin, "Comparative Politics: The State of the Subdiscipline," in Ira Katznelson  
     and Helen Milner, eds., *Political Science: The State of the Discipline* (New York: W.W.  
     Norton, 2002), pp. 630-59. **Coursepack**
     o Just skim this article to get a sense of what a formal model within political science is.
   • Interview with David Laitin (pp. 601-48) in Munck and Snyder, *Passion, Craft and  
     **Coursepack**

Please consider:
   • What is the “main point” of comparative politics?
   • What was (were) the traditional approach(es) to comparative politics?
   • What is tripartite method? Why important?
   • The importance of theory in political science and the shifts in approaches over time.

**Homework:** Prior to Session #2: Go to the websites of your “dream jobs” – (a) a highly ranked Political  
Science department and (b) a less highly ranked one that for various reasons (e.g., the approach of the  
department, approach to teaching, or is located somewhere that you really want to live) that would be the  
ideal job for you. Look over the CVs and type of work being done by people in comparative politics (and  
your own area if different from comparative politics). Next time, we’ll talk a bit about what each of you  
find.

**Professionalization - Stress**
   • General part of grad school
     − Especially in place where not a lot of positive feedback
   • None of this is THAT important!
   • Keep things in perspective

**Professionalization - What kind of job to go for?**
   • Important to know actually what you want from a job
     − Prestige?
     − Research?
     − Teaching?
     − Non-academic?
     − Location?
   • Don’t be swayed by others’ influence on this
2. January 14: Culture, Rationality, and Institutions


*For today, please focus on being able to explain each of the key approaches and the differences between them. Here, I mean especially: culture, rational choice, and rational choice institutionalism, and historical institutionalism.*

*At the start of this session, we will talk about what you learned about your dream jobs.*

*At the end of this session, we will also divide up the class. Prior to the next class, each of you will look at a number of political science journals – American Political Science Review, American Journal of Political Science, Journal of Politics, Comparative Politics, and Comparative Political Studies – over the past 10 years. How many articles in these journals cover a single country? A small number of countries? Large numbers of countries? Countries other than the U.S.? How many develop a theory? How many are purely empirical? How many based on field work? Experimental work? Qualitative design? Quantitative design? Based on survey of citizens? Please do not spend more than 1 hour on this task.*

*Professionalization – Job Talks*

*See next page*
Professionalization – Job Talks

Job Talks - Most Important Part of Interview
• What is the format?
• Keys to good job talk
  – Puzzle
  – Theory
  – Empirics
  – Implications
  – Hummable Tune
  – Good Q&A

More on Job Talks
• Good Q&A
  – Alternative explanations
  – Endogeneity
  – Your tone
    • Confident and firm – willing to reject
    • Great willingness to accept suggestions of others
      – Incorporate them into the analysis
      – Likeability – you want them to want to have you around
• 35 minutes
  – ABSOLUTELY NO LONGER THAN 45 MINUTES!!!
• Practice talk (out loud!) until it is basically memorized

Final point on Job Talks
• Fit for the job?
Research Design and Methodology


- KKV, Ch1-3 (pp. 3-114).

*We will give considerable attention here to mechanisms, implications, hypotheses, unit of analysis.*

*Will not have time to discuss today, but for your own research and studying for exams, I recommend the following:*


*Please also give your “reports” on the types of articles appearing in the journals.*

What to do when “skimming” the reading? Look for:
- What is the question that the author is trying to answer?
- For our class, how does that question relate to electoral rules?
- How does the author look to answer that question?
  - What is the dependent variable?
  - What are the independent variables?
  - What is the authors’ theory?
  - What are the main hypotheses?
  - How do the hypotheses help address the theory?
  - What is the unit of analysis & what type of data/from where (e.g., what countries) does the author use?
- What are the findings of the study?
- What do the findings mean for what we can say about the impact of electoral rules?
- Is the author saying something very different from previous work or largely just adding on to previous work?

*Professionalization – What happens in an academic job interview (aside from the job talk)?*

- One on one meetings with faculty
  - YOUR chance to ask them questions!
    - About program
    - But also ask about individuals’ research!
  - What are you working on?
  - Your general research program
  - Personal too…
- Meetings with students - These can be important
4. January 28: Comparative Research Design

- KKV, Ch4-5 (pp. 115-207).

Among other things, we will consider important differences between small-N and large-N cross-national designs. Also, in the past students have been too accepting of the strengths of large-N cross-national design. Be sensitive to the fact that there are advantages and disadvantages in all kinds of research designs.

**HOW to read a book given our scarce time? This will be important in your reading in the second half of the course.**

What should do first?
- Hit the puzzle
- Hit the theory in the early chapter – this is the most important thing!
  - Why?
- See what is being argued against in literature review chapter
- See the conclusion

Next?
- Figure out why they test what they do – i.e., what is the point of the empirical chapters?
- Look at the key empirical tests
  - Focus first on intro and conclusion of empirical chpts
  - But also how well do they test what the authors say they do?
    - What should you be doing here?
    - First look at measures of independent and dep variables
5. February 4: Small Numbers of Country Cases

- KKV, Ch6 (208-230).

Among other things, we will consider potential advantages and pitfalls of using a small number of cases. Also, what are good approaches to using a small number of cases? What are the following and what are their advantages and disadvantages?

Field work, cases studies, area studies, field and natural experiments?

We will also consider qualitative and quantitative research designs. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each?

How does the study of Comparative Politics differ from the study of American Politics?

At the end of class #5, I will assign a take-home midterm (no more than 6 double-spaced pages). It is due by noon, Thursday, February 11.

Professionalization – Conferences

- What happens?
- The big ones
- Smaller ones
- Invited conferences
- How you might approach them

Professionalization – Grants

- Go get them!
- Start applying as soon as possible!
  – Especially useful for dissertation time
Examples of Different Approaches to Comparative Politics

6. February 11: No class so that you can work on your essay

FYI: We might end up changing the order of the final 3 classes (including the day we don’t hold class) around. Stay tuned.

7. February 18: Exemplars of Terrific Comparative Political Science


Professionalization – Writing/Submitting Articles
- How submission process works
  - What happens
  - Length of time
  - Possible outcomes
- Which journal to submit to?
  - Shoot a bit high but be reasonable
  - Pecking order of journals?

Professionalization – Books
- How’s that work?
- Top presses?
- Value of edited volumes?

*Professionalization – Tenure*
   • How do you get tenure?
   • What’s the process?

*Professionalization – Postdocs*
   • What are they?
   • How are they useful?
   • Look for postdocs in your area!

9. March 3: No class – but there is a ton of reading for next time so start now and create notes so that you can easily recall what each piece does.
10. March 10 – combining 2 weeks of reading

a. Large-ish and Actually Large N Studies


b. Small Numbers of Countries


c. Please also read:


*Will also discuss career strategies within comparative politics. That is, what kinds of research programs are advantageous/disadvantageous within comparative politics? Focus on specific counties? Large N? Quantitative? Value of doing fieldwork?*

*Also, what is endogeneity? And why is it a problem?*

*Professionalization (Dissertations) on the next page*
Professionalization – Dissertations

Dissertation Thinking
• Never too early to start thinking about it
  – Present early ideas at conferences
• If possible, write a “book style” diss
  – And try to address genuinely important issue in your field

Identifying an interesting topic
• “Contrary to the advice about looking for holes in the literature, good research in the comparative field often begins either with an intense but unfocused curiosity about why some event or process has happened or with a sense of sputtering indignation at the patent idiocy of some particular argument advanced in the literature” (Geddes 2003).

Dissertation Doing
• “Write 1 page per day”
• Set strict date deadlines for each chapter
  – Present at conferences!
• Make clear, generalizable argument
  – Make the argument of each ch clear as ch opens
  – Make clear in opening of each ch how it relates back to overall argument
• Try to use all kinds of methods
  – Case study
  – Experimental
  – Formal
  – Large-n quantitative
  • But ultimately use just what is appropriate to get a the larger problem
• Remember, it’s what you are doing, but not who you are
  – Get out and have fun too!

24 Hour Take-Home Final Exam Due by 11:59pm, Wednesday, March 16
10 pages maximum (double-spaced)