**Introduction to Comparative Politics**

PS 240A-B is a two-course sequence designed to introduce graduate students to comparative politics. We survey a broad range of different literatures. Sometimes topics flow naturally from one week to the next, but not always. Comparative politics is a vast field. In some ways, it touches on every aspect of political science, and it overlaps with economics, sociology, and anthropology, as well as other disciplines. We cannot make this course comprehensive, and even our coverage of the topics we have chosen to address leaves out important and/or influential readings. We hope that these short introductions will whet your appetites for deeper study.

This will be a demanding course. The reading list for each week is formidable and we will expect every student to be prepared to discuss any reading when called upon, so some items might need to be read more than once. Your goal should be to come to class prepared to summarize the main point of each item assigned as well as to be able to present a brief and accurate review of the approach, argument, and evidence — all in two to three minutes. If it takes you longer than that, you haven’t properly mastered the material. We have uploaded all required readings to a dropbox folder to which we will provide access to all enrolled students. We reserve the right to make some last-minute changes, in which case we will of course upload the new readings at least a week before they are required.

**Before** approaching each reading think about what the key questions are for the week and about how the questions from this week relate to what you know from previous weeks. \(^1\) **Then** skim over the reading to get a sense of the themes it covers, and, before reading further, jot down what questions you hope the reading will be able to answer for you. **Next**, read the introduction and conclusion. This is normally enough to get a sense of the big picture. Are the claims surprising? Do you believe them? Can you think of examples of places that do not seem consistent with the logic of the argument? … **Next** ask yourself: What types of evidence or arguments would you need to see in order to be convinced of the results? **Now** read through the whole text, checking as you go through how the arguments used support the claims of the author. It is rare to find a piece of writing that you agree with entirely. So, as you come across issues that you are not convinced by, **write** them down and bring them along to class for discussion. Also note when you are pleasantly surprised, when the author produced a convincing argument that you had not thought of. In all cases when it is possible you are encouraged to **download** this data, **replicate** results and use it to probe and test the arguments you bring to class…Try to articulate succinctly what you know now that you didn't know before you read the piece. Often a quick summary can draw attention to strong features you were not conscious of, or make you realize that what you were impressed by is not so impressive after all. Is the theory internally consistent? Is it consistent with past literature and findings? Is it novel or surprising? Are elements that are excluded or simplified plausibly unimportant for the outcomes? Is the theory general or specific? Are there more general theories on which this theory could draw or contribute?

Evaluation for the course will consist of two parts. First, all students will be expected to participate actively in every meeting, including but not limited to the “cold-call” oral summaries of the readings described above. In-class performance will count for 25 percent of your grade. The other 75 percent will be based on your performance on an end-of-quarter, day-long written examination. In most other graduate programs in Political Science, students must sit comprehensive exams in two or more fields before they are permitted to move on to dissertation work. The final exams for PS240A and for PS240B will be along the same lines, although we will hold you responsible only for the topics covered in the course that quarter and, within each topic, only for the readings that were assigned. We plan to give you a handful of “big questions” from the literature that was covered during the quarter. You will be asked to choose two questions to answer in an 8-hour take-home exam.

Finally, we expect PS 240 students to attend the Comparative Politics Workshop (speaker series), which will host 3-4 visiting scholars each quarter on alternating Mondays (12:30-2:00pm). We may discuss these presentations in class on the Tuesdays that follow each session. As always, your active engagement in these discussions will factor into your class participation grade.

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\(^1\)This paragraph cribbed from the syllabus for a similar course taught by Macartan Humphries at Columbia.
Fall Quarter PS240A

**Week 1. Methods and Inference in Comparative Politics (Sep 29) (Posner, Ross, and Thies)**


**Week 2. Fundamental Sources of Economic Growth (Oct 6) (Posner and Ross)**


**Week 3. The State and Nation Building (Oct 13) (Ross and Posner)**


Week 4. Democracy and its Origins (Oct 20) (Ross and Thies)


Week 5. Delegation, Accountability, and Responsiveness (Oct 27) (Thies and Posner)


Week 6. Electoral Systems and Voting (Nov 3) (Thies and Posner)


Week 7. Institutions, Informal Institutions, and Policy Making (Nov 10) (Thies and Ross)


Week 8. Authoritarian Regimes and Partial Democracies (Nov 17) (Thies and Posner)


Week 9. Corruption (Nov 24) (Posner and Ross)


Week 10. Inequality and Democratization (Dec 1) (Ross and Thies)

Winter Quarter PS240B

Week 1. Social Movements and Protests (Jan 5) (Ross and Thies)


Week 2. Civil Wars (Jan 12) (Ross and Thies)


Week 3. Interest Groups and Representation (Jan 19) (Thies and Posner)


Week 4. Distributive Politics (Jan 26) (Posner and Ross)


Week 5. Patronage and Clientelism (Feb 2) (Thies and Posner)


Week 6. Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism (Feb 9) (Posner and Ross)


Week 7. Governance (Feb 16) (Posner and Ross)


-Other papers to be added...
**Week 8. Ethnic Politics and Conflict (Feb 23) (Posner and Thies)**


**Week 9. Gender and Political Economy (March 1) (Ross and Thies)**


**Week 10. Open (Mar 8) (Ross, Posner, and Thies)**

TBA