COMPARATIVE POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS  
Political Science 7972

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Thursdays 9:00-12:00  
210 Stubbs Hall  
Fall 2013

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is dedicated to the comparative analysis of political institutions, which in comparative politics are viewed as either formal rules or organizations. The primary orientation of the course material lies in state governmental institutions, although some social institutions will also be examined. The course focuses on what has come to be called the "new institutionalism," which adopts a more decidedly structural or state-centric approach to politics. It emphasizes the relative autonomy of political institutions, and thus seeks to present a counterweight to the predominant view of politics as merely a reflection of the aggregation of individual preferences and behaviors. If it can be argued that individuals and institutions impact each other, the new institutionalism focuses primary attention on how relatively autonomous political institutions (i.e., rules and organizations) affect individual political behavior.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Each student’s semester grade will be determined on the basis of four tasks, detailed below.

[1] **Research paper**: weighted at 35% of the course grade. This paper is to be modeled on a typical conference paper. The paper should focus on the downstream consequence(s) of a national or sub-national institutional variable; that is, it should adopt an institutional factor (or factors) as the independent variable(s). It should focus on any country other than the USA, and may adopt any traditional form of institutional analysis. It must be fully cited and written to professional standards. Topics must be cleared by the instructor. This paper is due no later than **Friday, December 6**.

[2] **Weekly reaction papers**: weighted at a combined 35% of the course grade. In a maximum of three double-spaced typed pages each, these weekly papers should focus on issues of interest (problems, debates, inconsistencies, consequences, etc) that emerge from the week’s readings. Papers should be fully cited. Papers are due the morning of each seminar.

[3] **Discussion leadership**: weighted at 10% of the course grade. Each student will lead the class discussion on a particular week’s readings during the first half of the relevant weekly seminar. Students will be permitted to express their preferences for a topic to lead; the mechanism for matching student preferences with topic allocations will be explained during the first session.

[4] **In-class performance**: weighted at 20% of the course grade. Everyone is expected to come to class well prepared, and to have that preparation reflected in their contribution to seminar discussions. Attendance at each seminar is mandatory.
TEXTS

The following books are required for the course, and are available at the bookstore.


TOPICS AND SYLLABUS OF READINGS

(1) Aug 29  INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

(2) Sept 5  THE NEW INSTITUTIONALISM: AN INTRODUCTION


(3) Sept 12  STATES & DEMOCRACIES I


(4) Sept 19  STATES & DEMOCRACIES II


(5) Sept 26  CONSTITUTIONAL DESIGN


(6) Oct 3  PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEMS: CRITIQUES


(7) Oct 10 PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEMS: RESPONSES


(8) Oct 17 PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEMS: BASICS


(9) Oct 24 PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEMS: EXECUTIVES AND CABINETS


(10) Oct 31  **SEMI-PRESIDENTIALISM**


Nov 7  **Fall Holiday – No Class**

(11) Nov 14  **ELECTORAL SYSTEMS & THEIR CONSEQUENCES**


(12) Nov 21  **ELECTORAL SYSTEMS: ISSUES & DEBATES**


Nov 28  Thanksgiving Holiday – No Class

(13) Dec 5  INSTITUTIONS UNDER AUTHORITARIANISM