COMPARATIVE POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS
Political Science 7972

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Thursdays 9:00-12:00
112 Prescott Hall
Spring 2010

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, April 30.

[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 15% 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 15% 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.


Recommended Text:


TOPICS AND SYLLABUS OF READINGS

1. Jan 21 INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

2: Jan 28 THE NEW INSTITUTIONALISM: AN INTRODUCTION


3: Feb 4  STATES & DEMOCRACIES I


4: Feb 11  STATES & DEMOCRACIES II


5: Feb 18  CONSTITUTIONAL DESIGN


6: Feb 25  PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEMS: CRITIQUES


7: Mar 4 PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEMS: RESPONSES


8: Mar 11 PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEMS: BASICS


9: Mar 18 PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEMS: EXECUTIVES AND CABINETS


10: Mar 25  **PRESIDENTIALISM & PARLIAMENTARISM COMPARED**


11: Apr 1  **SEMI-PRESIDENTIALISM**


12: Apr 15  **THE CONSEQUENCES OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS**

13: Apr 22  ELECTORAL SYSTEMS: ISSUES & DEBATES


14: Apr 29  LEGISLATIVE INSTITUTIONS

Lane and Ersson, Op. cit., chapter 7 ("Impact of Legislative Institutions").


