This course provides a comprehensive introduction to the sub-field of comparative politics. The course explores leading theoretical and methodological approaches to comparative politics. Students will also learn about the development and evolution of the field. The course will help students to think and write theoretically and critically about the study of comparative politics.

By the close of this course, students should be able to:

- Have a firm grasp of the key topics and debates covered by the field of comparative politics
- Identify, summarize, and evaluate the fundamental questions and discussions in the field
- Concisely summarize, connect, and evaluate the research by discussing a variety of topics, writing memos and short reaction papers, and serving as a resident expert
- Analyze and critique applications of the comparative method

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1) **Class Attendance and Participation (10%)**:
   -- Students are required to attend all classes. Absence from more than one class—unless a student has a documented emergency—will result in the reduction of ten points from the “class attendance and participation” grade for each missed session. Employer extra-hour demands, vacation, and travel do not constitute documented emergencies.

   -- Students are expected to have completed the assigned readings prior to class and to be prepared for seminar discussion. Students should arrive to class with extensive notes and prepared questions for the week’s readings.

   -- This is a participant-driven, discussion-based seminar. Therefore, students are expected to actively participate in class discussion. Your final grade will suffer if you do not participate in class.

2) **Discussant (8%)**:
   Once this semester you will be responsible for opening or concluding the session. You will have 5 minutes to introduce a topic (e.g., main questions, key debates and concepts), or 5 minutes to conclude the session (e.g., what have we learned? What should we take away from our discussion?)

   Note that the introduction should not include a detailed summary of each of the readings; rather, the discussant should think about the “big picture”—you should pose main subjects, questions, and topics covered by the readings.

3) **Multi-step Assignment**:
   3.1) **Memos (7% * 3 = 21%)**:
   -- Students are required to write 3 memos (2-3 pages, 12 font, single-space). The memos should present a concise summary of the week’s readings.
The final paragraph should be more critical and/or analytical by taking up specific arguments, comparing the positions of different authors, raising questions of evidence or content, or drawing attention to particular strengths and weaknesses in the texts.

Finally, the memo should pose 4-6 questions. These questions should address core concepts, debates, and issues put forward by the week’s readings, and in relation to previous readings during the course of the semester.

Your grade will suffer if you do not cover: 1) every reading assigned that week, and 2) every step explained above (i.e., summaries, analytical/critical paragraph and discussion questions).

Memos are due by 3 pm on the Wednesday prior to class (e-mail your memo to the class list). Late memos (i.e., those received after 3 pm) will not be graded.

3.2) Resident Experts (6% * 2=12%):

Having selected the 3 dates for your memos, then (from those 3 dates) select 2 classes to complete steps 3.2 (resident expert) and 3.3 (reaction papers).

During these 2 classes you will be our resident expert. As a resident expert you should be actively involved in the discussion. More specifically, you should be prepared to: 1) identify and summarize the key aspects of each section (i.e., main questions or puzzles motivating the work, hypotheses/theories, research designs, evidence), 2) relate the different works to each other (e.g., comparisons of focus or methodology, relevance to the historical development of the discipline, key definitions and concepts), and 3) present your arguments and questions.

If you are not active as a resident expert, you will receive a score of zero.

3.3) Short paper (14 * 2=28%)

After completing step 3.2, you will have to write a short paper (a total of two). Format: 5-7 pages, double spaced, 12 font.

The paper will be due in-class the week after you are a resident expert. Please bring a hard copy to class and e-mail me a copy.

For guidelines on how write a reaction paper for this class, refer to the last section of the syllabus.

4) Final (21%)

Students will complete a final exam. Format: take-home exam.

COURSE READINGS AND SCHEDULE

Assigned readings are intended to provide students with the broadest possible coverage of the subfield. However, given the breadth and depth of comparative research, assigned readings can only cover a small sample of the relevant literature (for additional readings, refer to the Comparative Politics Reading List).

The reading may prove overwhelming at times. Remember-- skimming is an important professional skill. If you are writing on the topic in question, you are well advised to read all of the required readings.

If you are unable to keep up, be sure to (at least) identify for each reading: 1) the main research question(s), 2) the DV, the IVs and the causal argument, 3) how the authors go about answering the question (methodology, data, etc.), and 4) conclusion. Useful resources to expand your knowledge are
book reviews which are published by most academic journals (search JSTOR). Finally, you should take advantage of your peers' memos.

**Books:** Some books are available on the GMU bookstore. In addition, the readings are available on: 1) 2 hour reserve-- (Reserved: JC), 2) online (GMU library online books), OR 3) on blackboard (BB).

For a general background, I recommend this textbook: Clark, W.R., Golder, M. and Golder, S. *Principles of Comparative Politics* (CQ Press).

**Articles:** Students can download most of the readings from JSTOR and other electronic resources/databases.

**READINGS** (subject to revision; please pay attention to the order of the readings).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1. Aug. 30</th>
<th>NO CLASS as I have to attend APSA, but read: Kohli, Atul et al. 1995. “The Role of Theory in Comparative Politics: A Symposium.” <em>World Politics</em> 48 1-49.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 2 Sept. 6</td>
<td><strong>The Comparative Method</strong>—key notions and issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3 Sept. 13</td>
<td><strong>Institutions:</strong> A Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4 Sept. 20</td>
<td><strong>States and Society</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Week 5
#### Sept. 27
Institutions:
Federalism, Presidentialism & Parliamentarism

**TASK:** Research Tiebout's model (main assumptions, notions of voting with one's feet).

Winter Newsletter of the APSA Comparative Politics section (2000): Introduction (by Treisman), and Weingast's piece (AVAILABLE ON BLACKBOARD).

**Read in this order:**

Cheibub, José Antonio. 2007. *Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Democracy* (Cambridge UP); Chs. 1 and Conclusion.

### Week 6
#### Oct. 4
Institutions:
Political Parties and Electoral Institutions


In Mair, Peter (ed.). 1990. *The West European Party System* (Oxford UP) (MOST CHAPTERS ARE AVAILABLE ON BLACKBOARD); read the following chapters:


-- Otto Kircheimer, “The Catch-all Party” (p. 50-60).

-- Martin Lipset, Seymour & Rokkan, Stein. “Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignment.” (Note: focus on the argument about cleavages, skim the cases).


### Week 7
#### Oct. 11
Interest Groups and Mobilization

**TASK:** Research Hirschman’s thesis and contribution to these debates.


---

1 If you are not familiar with different types of electoral systems, this piece is helpful:
### Week 8
**Oct. 18**
**The Welfare State**


### Week 9
**Oct. 25**
**Political Regimes**


**TASK:** Research various indexes of democracy, namely Polity IV, Freedom House, and V-Dem Project. How do they conceptualize and measure different types of political regimes?

If you are not familiar with Huntington’s argument regarding Waves of Democratization, please do some research.


### Week 10
**Nov. 1**
**Development and Democracy**


Przeworski, Adam & Limongi, Fernando. 1997 “Modernization: Theory and Facts.” *World Politics* 49 (2): 155-183. (Note: might be helpful to refer to Pzerworski’s section on ‘The Role of Theory in Comparative Politics’ (see week one).


---

Week 11  
Nov. 8  
Political Attitudes, Culture, and Democracy


Week 12  
Nov. 15  
Authoritarianism and Regime Stability


Select one:


OR


THANKSGIVING

Week 14  
Nov. 29  
REVIEW SESSION

Week 15  
Dec. 6  
FINAL EXAM

POLICIES:

1) Assignment and topics: Make-up exams and paper extensions will be given only if students have proper documentation. In place of an email, please see me during office hours to discuss missed/late work.

-- Papers and exams received after the deadline will drop one-third of a grade per day (thus, an A becomes an A-, etc.).

2) Exam: If you miss the final exam, you will receive a score of zero. Make-up exams will be given only if students have proper documentation that can be verified. In place of an email, please see me during office hours to discuss this.


3) Grading: If you disagree with your grade you have the right to discuss it with me. With your original paper, you must submit a written statement (typed). Here you should make an ‘informed case’ for why I should reconsider your grade.

We will discuss your points and my expectations during office hours (I will not discuss grades over e-mail) and we will try to get a consensus. However, I reserve the right to change your grade.

4) Academic Integrity, Plagiarism and Cheating: Just one thought about it: it is unacceptable and I will report all alleged violations to the Honor Committee (and I have done in the past). GMU has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. If you fail to follow these principles I will not hesitate to report any alleged violation to the Honor Committee, “Cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing academic work and related material constitute Honor Code violation. To maintain an academic community according to these standards, students and faculty must report all alleged violations.”

Plagiarism includes copying assignments from fellow students (or other persons), buying papers on the Internet, borrowing papers from ‘secret archives,’ NOT CITING THE SOURCES OF IDEAS, QUOTES, ETC (pay attention to online resources) and copying and pasting from the internet or other sources. Three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students or websites, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. For more details, see: http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/pdfs/catalog_0809.pdf. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

5) Enrollment: Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. For more information and important date, see: http://registrar.gmu.edu/calendars/2011Fall.html. After the last day to drop, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons.

6) GMU Email Accounts: Students must activate and use their GMU email account to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. In addition, students should keep track of their e-mail quota.

7) Religious Holidays: If you anticipate you will have a conflict due to religious holidays, please inform me within the first two weeks of class. This is especially important if you have to turn in an assignment the day you cannot attend the class.5

8) Special Needs: Please address any special needs or special accommodations with me at the beginning of the semester or as soon as you become aware of your needs. Those seeking accommodations based on disability, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (703)...

---

5 The official policy: “It is Mason’s policy to encourage its faculty to make a reasonable effort to allow students to observe their religious holidays or to participate in university-sponsored activities (e.g., intercollegiate athletics, forensics team, dance company, etc.) without academic penalty. Absence from classes or exams for these reasons does not relieve students from responsibility for any part of the course work required during the absence. Students who miss classes, exams, or other assignments as a consequence of their religious observance or for participation in a university activity will be provided a reasonable alternative opportunity, consistent with class attendance policies stated in the syllabus, to make up the missed work. It is the obligation of students to provide faculty, within the first two weeks of the semester, with the dates of major religious holidays on which they will be absent, and the dates for which they are requesting an excused absence for participation in any university-sponsored activity scheduled prior to the start of the semester, and as soon as possible otherwise. Students requesting an excused absence for participation in a university-sponsored activity must provide their instructor with a letter from a university official stating the dates and times that participation in the activity would result in the student missing class.”
Any student with documented learning disabilities or other conditions that may affect academic performance should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with the Office of Disability Services (SUB I, Rm. 222; 993-2474; www.gmu.edu/student/drc) to determine the accommodations you might need; and 2) talk with me to discuss reasonable accommodations.

9) Avoid disruptive activities in the classroom: Cellular phones, pagers, and other such electronic devices that could disrupt class must be turned off. Computer use in the classroom must be STRICTLY LIMITED to the course discussion and assignments. The professor reserves the right to take appropriate action to cease disruptive behaviour in order to maintain an environment that is conducive to learning for the rest of the class.

10) Food: If you are hungry, you can eat a snack (small things, preferably odorless). But, you cannot eat a whole meal in class.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES
** The University Catalog (http://catalog.gmu.edu) is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university affairs. Other policies are available at http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/.

Additional Resources:
http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/students.html
http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/landing.html (face-to-face appointments)
http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/owl.html (online tutoring)

AN ‘ATTACK PLAN’: ANALYZING THE READINGS AND WRITING YOUR SHORT PAPER

Completing the Reading: Pay attention to the key DV and IVs and how they relate to each other, as well as to the adequacy of the methods, methodology, and evidence. In addition, consider how one piece connects to another (compare and contrast answers and approaches to the question). Some of the questions that you might want to think about are: Are the variables adequately conceptualized? Are they adequately operationalized? Is the evidence adequate to sustain the argument? Are the concepts clear? What is the theory that links the variables? Is it a credible answer? Was the research design adequate (given the nature of the questions and the nature of the evidence)? Were the measures chosen to evaluate concepts adequate?

Addressing the Topic as a Whole: Identify and evaluate the key debates and how each piece relates to another. Explore why and how the debate/literature has evolved (e.g., methodologically, empirically, theoretically, conceptually), OR how the readings assess a topic from different perspectives.

Writing the Reaction Paper:
A good starting point to start thinking about the topic of your paper is to refer to the last paragraph of your memo.

Your paper should present a clear and concise question/thesis/puzzle; therefore, it is not a long literature review (i.e., a long memo), but a reaction/argumentative paper. Make sure you state your question, thesis, and objectives within the first two pages (I prefer the use of the first person, e.g., “In this paper, I will…”).

The paper should present the results (can include data and/or new readings) of your own assessment of the readings. The paper, for example, can focus on theories or research design, and you may present original alternatives to the theories. Feel free to discuss your thesis with the professor.

I expect sophisticated arguments and/or analytical/empirical solutions; thus, a good paper will move beyond “this is a bad argument because it does not address X factor” OR “this is a bad argument...”
because it is disorganized and too complicated.” In this way, you should develop an argument and/or offer precise solutions on how to solve this problem/question from an analytical, theoretical and/or empirical perspective.

“Less is more”: I encourage you to focus on a specific argument/thesis (vs. a paper that covers a bunch of topics).