

## Political Science 211 Comparative Politics

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**Meeting Time:** Mon, Wed, and Fri 10:00 am-10:50 am (MIKC107)

**Office Hours:** Wednesday 2:00 pm-3:00 pm (MSS 223)

### **Course Description:**

This course begins by exploring some fundamental issues surrounding governments, such as why we even need it in the first place. The course then explores the inner workings of democracies, dictatorships, and highly unstable regimes. Following that, the course explores how countries can move toward capitalist democracies and also how countries can slide backward toward authoritarianism. The final part of the course applies the basic concepts and analytical methods taught previously into regional studies.

**Prerequisite:** No prerequisite is required.

### **Course Objectives:**

1. To introduce students to the sub-field of Comparative Politics in the political science and to some of the scientific methods used in social sciences.
2. To expose students to some major comparative issues facing the global community today, such as democratization, nationalism, and different political institutions and cultural beliefs.
3. To instruct students on how to think critically and analytically and to develop communication skills of writing and speaking through in class (or take home) exams, class discussion, and group presentations.
4. To serve as an introductory course which is designed to build a theoretical and methodological foundation for students to apply upon any upper division political science course.

### **Teaching Methods:**

Lecture, class discussion, and student presentations are combined. Students should do the readings before coming to classes. The instructor will use multimedia tools to instruct students. Class participation is highly valued throughout the course, especially in the later part of the course. To foster your active learning and teamwork, you are required to form into research groups and conduct regional studies. At the end of the semester, nice, neat, and in-depth group presentations are expected.

### **Research Group, Regional Studies, and Group Presentations:**

At the beginning of the semester, you must choose a regional study group. I will set

up a discussion forum for each team on the WebCT. Sign on there! **Each team should include no more than 6 students.** To avoid research conflicts, I currently divide the world into ten regions including North America, Latin America, East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Former Communist countries (Eastern Europe), Western Europe (EU), Northern Europe (i.e. welfare states), Middle East, and Africa. Each research group will study **no more than two countries** in that region in depth and compare (roughly 3 persons per country). Any group larger than 3 (i.e. 4-6) students must study two countries. If you have a small group and only study one country, compare that country with a country that we have covered in the first part of the class. Countries not studied much during the first part of the lectures are encouraged to be chosen as the research subjects. You are also welcome to use the country examples in our textbooks. **You are expected to raise a hypothesis based on the countries and test your hypothesis in this project.**

Here are the guidelines and some tips for your group research: 1) figure out the central themes of this class, apply the concepts and analytical methods introduced in class as much as possible; 2) after learning about the basic political-economic systems of a country, focus on a few aspects of the countries to study further and compare the two countries in each aspect; 3) raise some major, meaningful, and innovative questions about the countries that you are interested in; 4) brainstorm and break the work evenly among team members.

Group presentations are mainly evaluated by the following standards: 1) Application of class knowledge. Please be aware, although you are doing regional studies, you are not expected to leave the course as an expert in the politics of a country or countries; but you should leave with a set of analytical tools and theoretical understandings that you can use to examine the political systems of any country anywhere. So application of the conceptual tools and approaches introduced in class is the core here. 2) The quality of the major questions, hypothesis, and answers, e.g. are they creative, insightful, inspiring, and adequate, etc? 3) The basic introduction of a country, such as its brief history, demography, and economy **relevant to your hypothesis and major argument**, the analysis of the political systems of that country. 4) Presentation skills, e.g. clarity, group cooperation, time control, etc. **More specific evaluation criteria and a Group Research Demo will be posted on the WebCT as a reference for you.**

Each group presentation is expected to last for 30 to 35 minutes. Overtime performance will result in grade deduction (i.e. every three more minutes will result in 2 points reduction.). After presentation, a 15 to 20 minutes Q&A section follows, so researchers should be prepared for questions.

The grade that each student receives for group research will be the average of “your individual grade (the grade for your part of your group’s presentation) + the collective grade (the overall grade for your group’s presentation).” Note: for the collective grade, not only the instructor’s opinion matters. Feedback of all the audience will be taken as

reference.

Follow the timeline of the Group Research Project listed in the syllabus closely. Late submission of each part of the project will result in grade deduction. When a team hand in your projects each time, always **mark out “who is in charge of what.”** Your **final presentation draft is due one week before your presentation**, so that I can give you some final feedback and you can improve before the formal presentation. Throughout the research, you are welcome to consult me in person or by emails.

**Evaluation Methods:**

Class Attendance and Participation: 15% (Absence will result in 0 score of that day.)

Open Book Quiz 1: 12.5%

Open Book Quiz 2: 12.5%

Open Book Quiz 3: 12.5%

Open Book Quiz 4: 12.5%

(Quiz will include multiple questions and essay questions.)

Group Research Project and Presentation: 35%

**Required Texts:**

Michael J. Sodaro. 2007. *Comparative Politics: a Global Introduction* (3rd edition). McGraw Hill.

Patrick O’Neil and Ronald Rogowski (ed). 2006. *Essential Readings in Comparative Politics*. New York: Norton.

Arend Lijphart. 1999. *Patterns of Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

**Wed Jan 21**

**Lecture 1 Introduction**

**Part I Conceptual Framework**

**Fri Jan 23, Mon Jan 26, Wed Jan 28**

**Lecture 2 What is Comparative Politics?**

Why do I have to explain to my mom’s friends that I am not a politician or a political advocate when I tell them that I am a political scientist? What is the scientific inquiry of politics?

Sen, Armatya. 1999. *Development as freedom* (electronic reserve). New York: Knof, 1999, pp. 87-110 (Chapter 4).

Hayek, Friedrich A. von. 1994. *The road to serfdom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 8-20 (electronic reserve)

O’Neil and Ronald Rogowski (ed.) pp. 129-135, 308-315

Sodaro, pp. 60-97

**\*\*Fri Jan 30 Deadline to sign up for research groups**

**Mon February 2, Wed Feb 4**

**Lecture 3 Collective Action, Hierarchy; Institutions, State, Nation**

Why do we even need a government in the first place? Can't the market provide everyone's needs in an efficient manner? Suppose we believe that we need a government to provide some goods, how do we organize people to provide it? What is the difference between institution, state, and nation?

Olson, Mancur. 1965. *The Logic of Collective Action*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 1-16. (Library Reserved)

Sodaro: pp. 54-58; 98-112; Chapter 5-6

O'Neil and Ronald Rogowski (ed.) pp. 29-61, 70-79, 143-153

**Fri Feb 6 Open Book Quiz 1-- In Class**

**Mon Feb 9, Wed Feb 11, Fri Feb 13**

**Lecture 4 What is a Democracy, Presidential and Parliamentary System**

What makes a democracy? What are the different definitions of a democracy? What is the difference between the US Presidential system and the Parliamentary system prevalent in other parts of the world?

Lijphart, pp. 48-61, 116-141, 90-115 (read in that order)

Sodaro: pp. Chapter 7, 194-205

O'Neil and Rogowski (ed.) pp. 247-253, 257-266

**Mon Feb 16 President's Day, No Class**

**\*\*Wed Feb 18: Deadline to post countries that you will study on the WebCT and divide team members by countries**

**Fri Feb 20, Mon Feb 23**

**Lecture 5 Voting, Electoral Systems, Party Systems**

Why do we vote? Why do some people almost never vote? What are the different ways that democracies can aggregate votes? What are the implications of these different voting systems? Why are there only two parties in some democracies and many in other democracies?

Lijphart, pp. 62-89, 143-170

Sodaro: Chapter 8, 11

O'Neil and Ronald Rogowski (ed.) pp. 330-342

**Wed Feb 25 Open Book Quiz 2 – In Class**

**Fri Feb 27, Mon March 2**

**Lecture 6 Problematic and New Democracies**

Why are some countries considered quasi-democracies, even though they have elections? How are they different from healthy democracies? What are some problems confronting new democracies?

O'Neil and Ronald Rogowski (ed.), pp. 181-193

Sodaro: Chapter 19, pp. 614-651

**Wed March 4, Fri March 6, Mon March 9**

**Lecture 7 Authoritarian Regimes**

What is authoritarianism? What are the different types of authoritarian regimes? How do they differ? How are they different from democracies?

Sodaro: pp. 315-325, 593-614, Chapter 21

O'Neil and Ronald Rogowski (ed.), pp. 168-181, 366-381

**Wed March 11**

**Lecture 8 Tinpots, Warlords, and Worse**

Why do some governments provide hardly any public goods and engage in wanton corruption? Why aren't all governments like that? Why do some governments starve their own people or engage in genocide?

\*Reno, Will "Reinvention of an African Patrimonial State: Charles Taylor's Liberia," *Third World Quarterly*, 16:1 (April 1995), 109-20.

\*Oh, Kongdan; Hassig, Ralph C., "North Korea: the Hardest Nut," *Foreign Policy*, Nov/Dec2003 Issue 139, p44-46

\*Snyder, Scott. "North Korea's Challenge of Regime Survival: Internal Problems and Implications for the Future," *Pacific Affairs*, 73(4).

\*Hintjens, Helen. 1999. "Explaining the 1994 genocide in Rwanda." *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. 37 (2).

O'Neil and Ronald Rogowski (ed.), pp. 61-68

\*items have been uploaded on to WebCT

**Fri March 13 Open Book Quiz 3 – In Class**

**March 14-March 22<sup>nd</sup> Spring Break**

**\*\*\*Mon March 23: Group Research Project Draft Due** (General presentation framework and major hypothesis, creative questions, etc.)

**Wed March 25, Fri March 27, Mon March 30**

**Lecture 10 Democratization**

When does democratization occur? Why do dictators relinquish power? What are the economic consequences of democratization?

Sodaro: pp. Chapter 9, 10

O’Neil and Ronald Rogowski (ed.), pp. 214-228; 316-329

**Wed April 1, Fri April 3, Mon April 6, Wed April 8**

**Lecture 11 The End of History/ Threats to Democracy**

Will all countries converge to capitalist democracies? What is the biggest threat to the current system of capitalist democracies?

O’Neil and Ronald Rogowski (ed.) pp. 105-118, 266-305, 381-391, 445-456, 459-473, 480-500

**Fri April 10 Open Book Quiz 4—In Class**

**Part II. Regional Studies: Application of Conceptual Framework**

Mon April 13 North America group presents

Wed April 15 Latin America group presents

Fri April 17 East Asia group presents

Mon April 20 Southeast Asia group presents

Wed April 22 South Asia group presents

Fri April 24 Former Communist Countries (Eastern Europe) group presents

Mon April 27 Western Europe group presents

Wed April 29 Northern Europe

Fri May 1 Middle East group presents

Mon May 4 Africa group presents

Wed May 6 Prep Day, no class

**Grading System and Policies for Political Science 211, Comparative Politics  
Spring, 2009**

*Grading System*

You are graded on a 100-point scale. All the items in the class add up to 100 points.

There will be no standardization (curving) at the end. Thus, you should have a clear idea about where you stand in the class throughout the quarter. I periodically give decimal grades (e.g. 9.5) for individual assignments, and I will only round up your final grade (.5 or above gets rounded up to the next integer). I will assign final letter grades according to the scale below:

A: 95-100  
A-: 90-94  
B+: 87-89  
B: 83-86  
B-: 80-82  
C+: 77-79  
C: 73-76  
C-: 70-72  
D: 60-69  
F<60

Individual assignments in the course will be graded with this same grade scale in mind.

### *Policies*

1. Unless you have a documented excuse allowable by UNR rules, your absence during the midterms or the final presentations will result in a 0. For your midterms, and your group projects, you are responsible for all the material covered in the course, including both the readings and the lectures. I will lecture on material not included in the readings.
2. Your participation in class is vital and is a substantial portion of your final grade. Both the quality and quantity of class participation matter. Everybody enjoys two absences without excuses in the whole semester, except during exams. After the graces any absence or early leave without permission from the instructor will result in a whole letter grade reduction. For example, if originally you could get A, your final grade will be B caused by the absence. Any two absences without permission will result in an F for you. If you have trouble communicating in class for whatever reason, please contact me or come see me in office hours.
3. You are expected to finish the week's reading assignments by the Monday session of the week. Although we clearly will not discuss all the readings on Monday, the readings we discuss on Monday are not necessarily listed first on the syllabus. Your comprehension of the readings will reflect on the quality of your class participation and thus your participation grade. Please feel free to email me about any questions you have about the readings.

4. We will have four quizzes during the semester. The format of the quizzes could include multiple choices and essay questions. The dates of quizzes indicated on the syllabus could be adjusted according to our lecture pace. Changing dates will be announced in class beforehand. It is your responsibility if your absences result in missing a quiz.

5. Check the WebCT frequently during the semester. Lecture notes, announcements, and emails will be posted on or sent through WebCT.