POS 550—Field Seminar in Comparative Politics
Professor Erik P. Hoffmann

REQUIRED TEXTS (all paperbacks)

RECOMMENDED TEXTS (all paperbacks)

WEEKLY READING ASSIGNMENTS (optional readings marked with an asterisk*)
1/21 Introduction
The goals, contents, and requirements of this seminar (see IMPORTANT NOTES, p. 4) will be discussed; student expectations, suggestions, and questions will be voiced; and significant conceptual, theoretical, methodological, empirical, and normative issues will be raised.

1/28 Concepts, Theories, Explanations, Issues, and Methods
Landman, pp. xi-xxi, chapters 1-5, and pp. 313-319.
Caramani, pp. xxi-xliv, chapters 1-3, and pp. 653-702. Also, explore Caramani’s “Online Resource Centre” (see the card in your text for the Activation Code).

2/4 History of Comparative Political Studies
Caramani, chapters 4-6.
G. Munck, in Munck and Snyder, chapter 2.

2/11 Retrospect and Prospect

2/18 Comparing Comparisons
Landman, chapters 6-14.

2/25 Institutions, Organizations, Structures, and Actors
Caramani, chapters 7-16.
3/4 Political Culture, Policy Making, and Beyond the Nation-State
Caramani, chapters 17-25.

3/11 The Human Dimension of Comparative Analysis: Interviews with Almond, Moore Jr.,
Dahl, and Linz
Munck and Snyder, preface, chapters 1 and 3-6.

3/18 Interviews with Huntington, Lijphart, O’Donnell, Schmitter, Scott, and Stepan
Munck and Snyder, chapters 7-12.

3/25 Interviews with Przeworski, Bates, Collier, Laitin, and Skocpol
Munck and Snyder, chapters 13-17.

4/1 NO CLASS (spring break)
No additional readings

4/8 Paradigms, Foci, and Explanations (I)
Lichbach and Zuckerman, preface and chapters 1-3.
G. Richardson, FEEDBACK THOUGHT IN SOCIAL SCIENCE AND SYSTEMS
in Dewey Library).

4/15 Paradigms, Foci, and Explanations (II) (read chapters in the following order)
Lichbach and Zuckerman, chapters 4-6, 13, 7-8, 14.

4/22 Paradigms, Foci, and Explanations (III)
Lichbach and Zuckerman, chapters 9-12, 15.

4/29 Drawing Conclusions
No additional readings, but compare and evaluate previous readings.
Email a detailed outline of your final paper to the instructor for feedback about structure,
argumentation, evidence, etc.
For paper instructions and suggestions, see Week 5/6 below.
Present draft final papers in class for feedback from the instructor and classmates.

5/6 NO CLASS
Submit final papers by email (Microsoft Word only) to the instructor: eph@albany.edu

Your paper should be an analytical and interpretive essay that compares and evaluates all
of the assigned books and most of the assigned articles in this seminar. Your essay should
be a minimum of 25 pages—type-written, double-spaced, and numbered with minimal
quotations and simple footnoting (e.g., Linz in Munck and Snyder, p. 167).

There is no assigned structure to this paper. The choices of format and emphasis are
yours. Most important, find some way to include the major conclusions you have drawn
from this course, your reasons and evidence supporting these conclusions, and your
reflections on the most important components of comparative political studies.
For example, you might wish to address the following basic questions, devoting the first quarter or third of your paper to question 1, and the rest of your paper to question 2.

1) Which major puzzles and mysteries in comparative political studies do you find most puzzling and mysterious, and why?
2) Which theories and methods do you find most useful for explaining or solving these puzzles and mysteries, and why?

In responding to both questions, be sure to elucidate the concepts of “paradigm” and “theory” and their linkages with “explanation” and “understanding” in comparative inquiry. Also, demonstrate your knowledge of the issues in comparative politics as well as your skills in comparative analysis (e.g., identify two or three theoretically and methodologically significant questions or problems and compare theories and methods that are helpful or not helpful in addressing these questions and problems; in other words, buttress your own views by eliminating plausible alternatives or options).

For another example, develop and defend the major conclusions you have drawn about the literature in comparative politics by addressing all of the questions with an asterisk (*) and some of the other questions listed below:

*1) What is the author’s stated purpose and actual accomplishments?
*2) What is the author’s metatheory—e.g., patterns of explanation?
*3) Theoretical orientation—e.g., core concepts?
*4) Methodological orientation—e.g., data-gathering techniques?
5) Political orientation—e.g., fundamental values, attitudes, and beliefs?
6) Other orientations—e.g., ideological, class, gender, ethnic, racial, national?
7) Major arguments, insights, assertions, biases, omissions, and conclusions?
8) Policy and policymaking implications of research and findings?
9) Moral and ethical implications of research and findings?
*10) Overall contribution to political science and comparative politics?

IMPORTANT NOTES

Goals and contents of this seminar: The primary purpose of this field seminar is to enhance students’ analytical and critical skills by addressing important and contentious issues in comparative politics and by helping students develop reasoned and informed views on these issues. We will address conceptual, theoretical, metatheoretical, methodological, empirical, and normative issues. Diverse paradigms and foci will be compared and evaluated. All of political science’s subfields (especially international relations) and several cognate disciplines (especially economics, sociology, and history) will help us to describe and explain political norms and forms (especially state-society relations) in various contexts.

We will concentrate on the domestic or internal politics of states and societies but will place heavy emphasis on the international and global contexts in which they are interacting and changing. Your instructor considers the traditional distinction between “comparative” and “international” politics to be increasingly irrelevant and misleading, given the mounting
importance of world markets, information technology, international terrorism, weapons proliferation, ecological threats, and other portentous trends associated with “globalization.”

**Course requirements:** one 25-page (minimum) analytical paper (see week 5/6 assignment for specific instructions). The paper will count about 50% and class participation about 50% of a student’s final grade. There will be no examinations. There will be extensive readings and weekly student critiques of the readings. All students will present oral analyses of assigned readings in every seminar session. Use this opportunity to sharpen your analysis of the assigned readings, to assess core concepts and theories, and to elicit feedback from an interested but not necessarily like-minded audience.

The instructor’s chief expectation is that students do all the assigned readings and some hard thinking about the comparative study of politics. Students will be encouraged—indeed, compelled—to develop and defend their own views on the causes, content, and consequences of political behavior in a wide range of historical, geographic, and socioeconomic contexts.

Regular and prompt attendance is expected and essential to benefit from and contribute to this seminar. Thoughtful and succinct observations and questions in class will greatly increase one’s ability to analyze the many complex and interrelated issues raised. Attendance will not be taken, but students who miss two weekly classes for whatever reasons should talk with the instructor promptly about make-up assignments. Students are requested to email the instructor in advance if they are unable to attend class and make their assigned presentations. Nonetheless, students will be expected to incorporate into their written work key information presented and discussed in all classes.

It will be a very firm policy not to give “Incompletes” in this course (except for medical, personal, or family emergencies).

All required texts should be purchased from Mary Jane’s or elsewhere as soon as possible. Split the sizable expense with a classmate, if necessary, but remember that bookstores often return unsold books to the publishers well before the semester ends. The instructor has carefully chosen books he thinks are worth keeping and will be useful in writing your M.A. essays and Ph.D. dissertations and in preparing for the Ph.D. comprehensive examinations in comparative politics and international relations. He has selected books and other readings that will become tools of your trade and valuable references if you pursue an academic career or other professional work in comparative and international studies.

On plagiarism and its disciplinary consequences, read and heed the UAlbany publication “Community Rights and Responsibilities, 2007-2010,” especially Appendix C.

The instructor’s email is eph@albany.edu and his office hours are: Mondays, 1:15-2:30 (uptown); Thursdays, 1:15-2:30 (downtown); and by appointment. The uptown office is the Rockefeller College contact office, Humanities 016 (call 442-3112 for an appointment); the downtown office is Richardson 284 (442-5376). If you cannot visit or call during these hours, simply talk to the instructor before or after class and arrange a mutually convenient time to get together—quite possibly over coffee or lunch. No calls at home, please.