Course overview
This class offers a critical introduction to the field of comparative politics. Comparative politics is commonly described as the study of the domestic politics of different states. In this class, we will focus less on the “what” (the dimensions of various polities) than on the “how” and “why”: methodological approaches and tools, theoretical advances and assumptions, and core substantive foci. The course offers not only an intellectual history and map, but also an entrée into key debates and the trade-offs among different approaches (rational, cultural, and structural; quantitative, qualitative, and interpretive; small-N and large-N) and an overview of a range of substantive areas in comparative politics (states, regimes, institutions, collective action, nationalism, political economy, and globalization). Overall, the course is designed both to provide a broad survey, including at least a glimpse into many of the field’s canonical texts (either directly or by way of synoptic works assessing those texts), and to give you the tools you will need to embark on further studies and original research.

Objectives
By the end of the course, you will be able to:
- Summarize and compare the key conceptual frameworks used in comparative politics.
- Discuss and critique the major questions and theories on which comparative politics focuses.
- Outline the key debates within core areas of comparative political inquiry.
- Synthesize across cases and approaches in canonical works of comparative politics.
- Demonstrate ability to craft a research prospectus.

Requirements and evaluation criteria
Participation (40%) The class will be run as a discussion-driven seminar. It is vitally important that every student participate actively and thoughtfully each week. Participation will be evaluated based on whether you voluntarily pose and respond to questions in each class session, demonstrate that you have completed the assigned reading, and listen respectfully to what your peers say. The reading load is heavy (about 200 pages per week) and diverse, but you
should come to class having thought through both the arguments and approaches presented, and the significance of and connections among the assigned texts. Do not just read selected pieces from among the assigned works; read *all*, jotting down notes or questions as you read, even if you focus more intently on some texts than others.

As part of the participation requirement, each week, at least one student will prepare a 3-4 page **critical summary** of the week’s readings for distribution to the class (which will be useful for you to have for later reference) and **lead class discussion** for that day. These summaries should go beyond synopsizing individual pieces, to synthesize and critique the readings: identify major themes, highlight points of (dis)agreement, link the readings with what has come before in the class, and tease out methodological or intellectual trends. Depending on enrollment, each student will complete one or two of these summaries. Keep in mind, too, that what is assigned is but a slice of the canonical literature on these topics!

**Exam (30%)** You will have a take-home midterm exam in lieu of class **March 31**.

**Prospectus (30%)** The final project for the class will be a research prospectus of approximately 15 pages in length, structured to match NSF requirements for grant proposals. (We will discuss those requirements in class.) The prospectus will allow you the chance to home in on a particular area in depth, while deploying your new-found knowledge of the approaches, methods, and literatures of comparative politics. A 1-2 page précis is due in class **March 10**. You will both submit and give a 15 minute presentation on your prospectus on the last day of class.

**Special needs** Students with special needs due to physical, learning, or other disabilities will be accommodated. To request such accommodation, first register with the Disability Resource Center (Campus Center 137, [http://www.albany.edu/disability/DRC/](http://www.albany.edu/disability/DRC/)); they will provide you with a letter to me, detailing the provisions requested. To ensure equitable treatment of all students, please submit these letters within the first two weeks of the semester (in person, so we can discuss appropriate arrangements).

**Academic honesty** I expect all students to be ethical and honest in completing all work for this class. You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with the university’s guidelines on academic integrity ([http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html](http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html)); ignorance is NOT an excuse. Violations of this code, such as plagiarism, cheating, copying, or misrepresentation of work as your own, will meet with appropriate penalties and discipline as outlined in UAlbany’s regulations, up to and including loss of course credit, suspension, or expulsion from the university. It is the responsibility of every student also to report any observed violations.

**Course readings** Since we will read mostly journal articles or snippets of larger works, only one book is required for purchase; it is available from the UAlbany bookstore or Mary Jane Books (or from your favorite second-hand/online bookstore). I will post all additional readings (chapters and articles) **on Blackboard**. If a link does not work or you are having trouble accessing Blackboard, find the readings in the library, instead. You may wish to purchase at least some of the books from which these extracts are drawn, however, and/or to read beyond the segments indicated.

**Schedule** (readings are due on the date under which they are listed, but need not be read in the sequence listed):

**20 Jan:**  Introduction

**27 Jan:**  Meta-approaches to comparative politics

**3 Feb:**  Comparative methods
  - James Mahoney & Dietrich Rueschemeyer, “Comparative Historical Analysis: Achievements and Agendas,” in Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 3-38

**10 Feb:**  States & societies
  - Joel Migdal, “Researching the State,” in Lichbach & Zuckerman, chap. 7
• Joel Migdal, Atul Kohli, & Vivienne Shue, *State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 7-34 (Migdal) and 293-326 (Kohli & Shue)
• Margaret Levi, *Of Rule and Revenue* (California, 1989), pp. 1-9, 38-47

17 Feb:  **Regime types & transitions**
• Mancur Olson, “Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development,” *APSR* 87: 3 (1993), pp. 567-76
• Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 3-43, 282-3

24 Feb:  **No class (Winter Break)**

3 Mar:  **Political institutions**

Arend Lijphart, Democracy in Plural Societies (Yale, 1977), pp. 25-52


Giovanni Sartori, Parties and Party Systems (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 3-49


10 Mar: Collective action & contentious politics

Précis of prospectus due in class

Doug McAdam, Sydney Tarrow, & Charles Tilly, “Comparative Perspectives on Contentious Politics,” in Lichbach & Zuckerman, chap. 10 (30p)


James Scott, Weapons of the Weak (Yale, 1987), pp. 28-48

Mark Lichbach, The Rebel’s Dilemma (Michigan, 1995), pp. 3-32


17 Mar: Political economy: Modernization theory and beyond

Mark Blyth, “An Approach to Comparative Analysis or a Subfield within a Subfield: Political Economy,” in Lichbach & Zuckerman, chap. 8 (25)


Alexander Gerschenkron, Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective (Harvard, 1962), pp. 5-30

Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation (Beacon, 1944), pp. 56-76

Samuel Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (Yale, 1968), pp. 32-78


24 Mar:  Political economy: Development, welfare, & reform
• Peter Gourevitch, Politics in Hard Times (Cornell UP, 1986), pp. 17-34 (17p)
• Charles Lindblom, Politics and Markets (Basic Books, 1977), pp. 3-13
• Peter Evans, Dependent Development: The Alliance of Multinational, State, and Local Capital in Brazil (Princeton, 1979), pp. 14-54
• Stephan Haggard, Pathways from the Periphery: The Politics of Growth in the Newly Industrializing Countries, (Cornell UP, 1990), pp. 23-48

31 Mar:  No class
• Take-home exam (due 5pm Friday, April 1)

7 Apr:  Nationalism & identity
• Walker Connor, “A Nation is a Nation, is a State, is an Ethnic Group, is a …,” Ethnic and Racial Studies 1:4 (1978), pp. 377-400
• Kanchan Chandra, “Making Causal Claims about the Effect of ‘Ethnicity,’” in Lichbach & Zuckerman, chap. 15
• Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism (Cornell UP, 1983), pp. 39-62
• Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (Basic Books, 1973), pp. 255-79
• Donald Horowitz, Ethnic Groups in Conflict (California, 1986), pp. 55-92

**14 Apr: The global and the local**

• Etel Solingen, “The Global Context of Comparative Politics,” in Lichbach & Zuckerman, chap. 9


**21 Apr: No class (Spring Break)**

**28 Apr: Conclusion**

• *Prospectus due in class*

• *Student presentations*