Course Description

Southeast Asia—the swath of land and water bounded loosely by China, India, and Australia—includes Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. These nations share important historical, cultural, economic, political, and social ties, and all but East Timor are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Nonetheless, the region is far from homogenous, encompassing a vast array of ethnic and linguistic groups, most major and many “minor” religions, various sociopolitical and economic institutions and ideologies, and a range of landscapes and climates. Its strategic location put Southeast Asia at the crux of Cold War power struggles; more recently, the Asian economic “miracle” and its dramatic collapse in 1997-98, continuing struggles for regime change and consolidation, and resurgent radicalisms in several states have kept the region in the limelight.

In this class, we will explore the politics and societies of Southeast Asia through the study of significant texts. We will begin with a brief overview of the region as a whole and prevailing theoretical lenses, then move on to a series of classic works, by some of the most prominent scholars in the field, covering a range of themes. I have chosen to focus on books rather than articles or selected chapters both to allow you to see the full process of building and supporting a set of theoretically-informed arguments (keeping in mind that some of these texts began as PhD dissertations …), and to ease the burden on those with little or no prior exposure to Southeast Asia (since each book will offer pretty much all the background you need for that particular reading). By the end of the semester, you will not only know far more about Southeast Asia, but will have read a diverse array of canonical, interdisciplinary works on the region (several of them renowned outside the subfield, as well) and delved into a range of distinct approaches to and methods for studying politics, development, and sociopolitical change.

The reading load is reasonably heavy—generally one full book per week, sometimes along with one (usually short) chapter or article—but varied, and many of the assigned texts are exceptionally well-written. The class will be run as a discussion-driven seminar, so it is vitally
important that everyone complete the reading, come to class, and participate actively every week. One student will prepare a summary of the assigned text (which will be useful for you to have for later reference) and several discussion questions to kick off conversation for each week’s class. Each of you, too, will write a substantial, comparative term paper on one dimension of Southeast Asian politics.

**Objectives**

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Summarize and compare the key sociopolitical attributes and dynamics across states of Southeast Asia.
- Evaluate several key issues in comparative politics in the context of Southeast Asia.
- Understand and compare different methods for and approaches to the study of politics.
- Compare and contrast two Southeast Asian states in terms of one core theme or dimension.

**Evaluation Criteria**

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summaries &amp; discussion-leading</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper presentation</td>
<td>5%</td>
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For students registered for **RPOS789R**, the breakdown will be:

- Class participation: 80%
- Summaries and discussion-leading: 20%

**Final paper**

The final paper will give you the opportunity not only for original research, but also to put the theories you are learning to the test. You will select (a) one theme of study identified in the Kuhonta, Slater, & Vu volume (parties & elections, agrarian politics, etc.) and (b) any two states in Southeast Asia. Beginning with a review of the literature on that theme specifically on those two states (and more broadly as needed), you will compare and contrast your chosen cases in terms of that dimension—i.e., the nature, quality, and salience of *ethnicity* as a political variable in *Indonesia* versus *Malaysia*. You may choose to keep your focus at a relatively high level, or home in more narrowly on a more specific policy or subtopic within that broad domain (i.e., policies related to land distribution specifically vs. agrarian political economy generally).

You MUST come speak with me about your topic before you get too far into the research, or by November 1 at the latest. Your completed paper should be approximately 25 pages/8,000 words, including notes and references. I will be happy to read an outline or draft, but please allow one week’s turnaround time. I will also be happy to help you prepare your paper for submission to a journal, if appropriate, at the end of the semester.

Final papers will be due at 5:00pm on Friday, December 17. No extensions will be granted except in case of documented medical or family emergency.
Class participation

The class will be run as a seminar. Participation will be evaluated based on whether you voluntarily pose and respond to questions in each class session, demonstrate that you have read and thought through the assigned reading, and listen respectfully to what your peers say. Given the nature of the course and the fact that we meet only once per week, I will ask you to withdraw from the course if you miss more than one class session. (That does not mean you have one “freebie,” since participation is a core requirement!)

Summaries & discussion-leading

One student will prepare a written summary and lead the class discussion each week; the total number of days for which each of you will be responsible will depend on enrollment. (If the class is very small, we will leave some weeks open.) The approach you choose is up to you, but this need not be a formal presentation. Your job is just to kick things off by suggesting what in the text you found especially intriguing or worth exploring in class, then facilitate an initial conversation. You may find it helpful to circulate several discussion questions in advance, however, especially if you would like the class to focus on particular aspects while reading. You may not be commenting only on themes/texts of which you have extensive prior knowledge; trust to the texts themselves to bring you up to speed. We will divvy up texts/weeks the first time we meet.

Paper presentation

On the last day of class, each of you will give a 15-minute overview of your final paper: focus, argument, approach, and any challenges, counterintuitive developments, or other findings of note that you have encountered thus far. Think of this exercise as a tantamount to presenting your paper at a conference—but with the expectation that your research and writing will still be in progress. Feel free to circulate questions or issues in advance on which you would especially like guidance or feedback.

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/); 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); 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
All required texts are available for purchase from the UAlbany bookstore (or from your favorite second-hand/online bookstore). You may prefer to get at least some of them from the library, instead—in which case, I urge you to check them out early, to leave time for delivery via inter-library loan (ILL) if needed. (Even if our library’s copy is not available, these should all be readily available through ILL.) Do not feel obliged to purchase all these books if your budget is limited—although some are classics that you may want to own.

I will post any additional readings (i.e., journal articles) on Blackboard.


I will be happy to recommend additional readings on any of the topics or countries we cover; the Kuhonta, et al. volume with which we begin also offers a wealth of suggestions.
Schedule (readings are due on the date under which they are listed; books are to be read in their entirety):

1 Sept: No class (APS A)
   • Dayley & Neher, Southeast Asia in the New International Era (skim)
     o Undergrad textbook—will ensure everyone has at least a basic grasp of SE Asia. Come see me (on campus or at APS A) if you have questions or want to discuss, or just to introduce yourself.
     o Start thinking about the two countries on which you will focus for your paper.

8 Sept: No class (Rosh Hashanah)
   • Start reading for next week—it’s a long, dense book (although the last 100+ pages are end matter)

15 Sept: SE Asia in Political Science
   • Kuhonta, Slater, & Vu, Southeast Asia in Political Science
     o A collaborative, critical review of literature on the region, and of the place of studies of SE Asia in the discipline. While the book may be difficult for those with little prior exposure to SE Asia, the remainder of the course builds on each of the topics presented here (although in a slightly different sequence).
     o If you find yourself lost in the details of specific cases, focus on the larger arguments being made about theory and method, and on the types of topics SE Asianists tend to study when they study politics.
     o Start thinking about the theme on which you will focus for your paper.
     • Sign up for summaries/discussion-leading; come with a list of possible weeks that interest you. (No discussion leader this week.)

22 Sept: Regimes
   • Case, Politics in Southeast Asia
     o This book will reinforce your grasp of the politics of core states in the region, but also essays a comparative argument with intended predictive power. If you are not sure how to prepare to discuss a volume such as this, focus on the core analytical claim(s)—but also make sure you are starting to get a firmer grip on the empirical nuances across states.
   • Anderson, Spectre of Comparisons, chap. 9 (“Cacique Democracy in the Philippines”)

29 Sept: Parties & Elections
   • Taylor, The Politics of Elections
This book, too, will build your comparative understanding. It’s a bit dated, but still the best book of its kind available. Think about how you would update the chapters, given what you have learned thus far.

- Anderson, *Spectre of Comparisons*, chap. 8 (“Murder and Progress in Modern Siam”) (recommended)

6 Oct: **States**
- Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*

13 Oct: **Mass & Agrarian Politics**
- Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion*

20 Oct: **Civil Society**
- Weiss, *Politics of Protest*

27 Oct: **Religion**
- Hefner, *Civil Islam*

[1 Nov: Deadline to see me about your paper topic]

3 Nov: **Ethnicity**
- Brown, *The State and Ethnic Politics*

10 Nov: **Development**
- Hutchcroft, *Booty Capitalism*
17 Nov: Rural Political Economy
   • Popkin, *Rational Economy of the Peasant*

24 Nov: No class (Thanksgiving)

1 Dec: Globalization
   • Tsing, *Friction*

8 Dec: Paper presentations

17 Dec: Final papers due (5pm)
Southeast Asia, circa 2003: