Course Description
Southeast Asia—the swath of land and water bounded loosely by China, India, and Australia—includes Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. These nations share important historical, cultural, economic, political, and social ties, and all but Timor-Leste 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. We 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, with additional recommended (optional) readings—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.

Class Structure and Assignments
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!)

Every student should come prepared each week to discuss the assigned work(s) through three frames (which we will generally consider in sequence):

1. What is/are the main argument(s) the author(s) seek to make? If the work is an edited volume, including distinct contributions by various authors, what variations do you note in the nature, scope, or thrust of the arguments presented?
2. What evidence do(es) the author(s) marshal to support their argument, gathered and/or assessed via what method(s)?
3. Do the evidence and methods fit the claim: is the evidence sufficient and is the method appropriate? What counterarguments might you raise—and which of these did the author(s) address?
4. How does this work—in terms of argument, nature/content of evidence, and/or approach—compare with others we have read in this class or that you have encountered elsewhere?
5. What extensions might be possible and particularly useful from this work: how might that author(s) develop a research agenda, building on this effort?

Short papers

Each student will prepare short papers (3-4 pages, double-spaced, including notes and references) for each of three weeks; those students should also prepare a set of questions to present to the class, drawing from or building upon the assigned reading. We will divvy up weeks early in the term, to ensure at least one student writes/poses questions per week.

The short papers should offer a “critical summary” and discussion. Go beyond a descriptive overview: analyze the work in question in light of the 5 questions listed above, both to evaluate and critique the work, and to link it with other theoretical perspectives, approaches, or cases. Above all: present and support a clear argument. Your model should be a published book review (although you need not specify aspects such as appropriate audience). You are strongly advised to read at least one supplemental article for the weeks on which you write—choose from among the recommended readings listed or see me for suggestions of works more in line with your specific interests—to broaden your perspective and serve as a foil. How thoroughly or extensively you incorporate that secondary piece into your paper is up to you, though it should not be your primary focus (equal billing is fine, but you will likely prefer to give more attention to the assigned book).

Each student writing a short paper for a given week will present their argument briefly to the class (with or without visual aids), as well as pose the questions they have prepared. If your argument and/or questions draw substantially on works not assigned for the class, please plan to elaborate orally and/or circulate materials in advance, to bring everyone else up to speed. (If you have encountered film clips or other materials relevant to your claim, feel free to present those, as well—but let me know in advance if you will need longer than about 15-20 minutes.) Student short-paper presentations will normally be in the final portion of the class session; however, you may introduce your prepared questions earlier, if germane to the discussion at that point.
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, most likely from among those identified in the Kuhonta, Slater, & Vu volume (parties and elections, politics of religion, etc.) and (b) any one or two states in Southeast Asia. (If you opt to focus on a single state, develop a within-case comparison: e.g., across time periods, subnational units, or population segments.)

Begin with a review of the literature on that theme specifically on your chosen state(s) (and more broadly as needed). Make and support a clear claim: for instance, on the nature, quality, and salience of ethnicity as a political variable in Indonesia versus Malaysia; or on internal security in Thailand under civilian versus military rule. You may choose to keep your focus at a relatively high level, or home in more narrowly on a specific policy or subtopic within that broad domain (i.e., policies related to land distribution specifically versus agrarian political economy generally).

You MUST come speak with me about your topic before you get too far into the research, or by April 18 at the very latest. (You are encouraged to speak with me more than once about your paper, however!) Your completed paper should be approximately 20 pages, including notes and references. Formatting guidelines: Times New Roman font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, in-text parenthetical citations + bibliography. Edit and proofread your work carefully. Your aim is a paper sufficiently well-argued and polished that you could consider submitting it to an academic journal (though you are not obliged to do so).

Final papers will be due at midnight on May 15. No extensions will be granted except in case of documented medical or family emergency.

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. Be prepared, too, to listen closely and ask questions of your classmates, on their research. (Again, good practice for attending talks and conferences …)

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.
• Assess 1-2 Southeast Asian states rigorously in terms of one core theme or dimension.

Evaluation Criteria
• Class participation 35%
• Three short papers 30% total
• Final paper 30%
• Paper presentation 5%
For students registered for RPOS557R, the breakdown will be:

- Class participation 80%
- Two short papers 20%

**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 (preferably 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**

All required texts are available for purchase from the UAlbany bookstore. You may prefer to borrow some from the library, instead—in which case, be sure to leave sufficient time for delivery via interlibrary loan (ILL) if needed. Do not feel obliged to purchase all these books if your budget is limited—although some are classics that you may want to own (and the books by Bertrand and Kuhonta, et al. in particular may be useful for future reference). I will post any additional non-full-book readings (i.e., journal articles or selected book chapters) on Blackboard.

I will be happy to recommend additional readings on any of the topics or countries we cover; the Kuhonta, et al. volume we read early in the term also offers a wealth of suggestions. I have included a handful of recommended additional readings, but those lists just scratch the surface—whether for your short papers or for other purposes, feel free to ask for more to read!

Schedule (Readings are due on the date under which they are listed. Books are to be read in their entirety; readings listed as “recommended” are optional.):

24 January: Introduction

• Donald Emerson, “‘Southeast Asia’: What’s in a name?” Journal of Southeast Asian Studies 15(1): 1-21

• Kuhonta, Slater, Vu, Southeast Asia in Political Science (chapter 1)

31 January: Encountering Area Studies

No discussion leader this week; all should come prepared with questions.

• Benedict Anderson, A Life Beyond Boundaries

7 February: Regional Overview

No discussion leader this week; all should come prepared with questions.

Sign up for summaries/discussion-leading; come with a list of weeks that interest you and topics for next week.

• Jacques Bertrand, Political Change in Southeast Asia

Recommended:


14 February: Thematic Overview

Each student will prepare questions for 1-2 topics.
Start thinking about the countries and theme on which you will focus for your paper.

- Kuhonta, Slater, Vu, *Southeast Asia in Political Science* (rest of volume)
  - A collaborative, critical, dense 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 (with some reframing/reordering).
  - 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.

Recommended:

**21 February: State-making**
- Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*

Recommended:

**28 February: Regime-making**
- Slater, *Ordering Power*

Recommended:

**7 March: Political Parties and Elections**
- Hicken and Kuhonta, *Party System Institutionalization in Asia* (Southeast Asian cases and comparisons: chapters 1-3, 6, 9-10, 12-14)

Recommended:

14 March: Spring Break

21 March: Authoritarianism

• Callahan, Making Enemies

Recommended:

28 March: Mass & Agrarian Politics

• Benedict Kerkvliet, The Huk Rebellion

Recommended:

4 April: Civil Society

• Weiss, Politics of Protest

Recommended:

11 April: Classes suspended

18 April: Religion

Deadline to see me about your paper topic
• Hefner, *Civil Islam*

Recommeneded:

25 April: **Rural Political Economy**
• Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*

Recommeneded:

2 May: **Development**
• Vu, *Paths to Development in Asia*

Recommeneded:

9 May: **Paper presentations**

15 May: **Final papers due (midnight)**
Southeast Asia, circa 2009: