POLS 675-1: Comparative Political Institutions and Processes
Fall Semester 2017
Weds 12.30–3.10pm: DuSable 464
Associate Professor Michael Clark
Office: Zulauf 401
Office Hours: Mon/Weds 10.00-11.30 and by appointment
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Course Overview:
The purpose of this graduate-level seminar is to introduce students to some of the major literature and subfields covered by scholars of political institutions and processes, to help them prepare for CP comp exams, and/or to satisfy graduate course requirements. In a course such as this it is impossible to do justice to the vast array of quality scholarship that has been, and is being, generated. However, the subject matter and readings covered in this seminar should provide students with enough of a foundation that they feel confident pursuing further reading and research independently. A focus on institutions produces two related areas of discussion: one which concentrates on institutions as a way of shaping, explaining, and predicting political outcomes (the “new institutionalism”), and one which examines major political institutions (executives, legislatures, electoral laws, party systems/types etc) in order to uncover similarities and differences between them, and to explain outcomes of various kinds (election results, attitudes towards democracy, policy implementation etc). The seminar will open with an overview of the major institutional approaches to the study of politics – rational choice institutionalism and historical institutionalism - and then move on to cover a number of substantive topics where an institutional approach has either helped generate understanding and new insights, or where the institutions themselves are of particular interest to political scientists for various reasons. Lastly, it is worth noting that this seminar focuses on processes also, and to this end, public opinion and voter behaviour will also be covered.

Course Readings:
The first two texts are required whilst the Lijphart book is recommended, especially for those of you with little knowledge of this material. All should be available in the University Bookstore or the Village Commons Bookstore. Alternatively, they can be bought from an online vendor such as Amazon if you prefer, where considerable discounts for new/used books can be found.

3. Arend Lijphart, Patterns of Democracy (Yale University Press, 2012)

Academic journal articles are to be tracked down by students. Should the need arise, copies of book chapters and other readings will be made available by posting them directly to the class’s Blackboard website.

Course Requirements:
Class participation – 50%
Research paper – 50%

Since this is a graduate level seminar, attendance is always expected, as is participation. If you cannot make class for any reason, please e-mail the professor beforehand. Students are also expected to have completed all reading assignments before class, and be prepared to discuss the week’s readings accordingly. Students should not be attempting to catch up on reading during class, and are advised to make brief outlines of the main points of each piece of reading in order to assist discussion and analysis. Should students encounter issues, arguments, language and so on that they do not understand, they should make a note of these points, and raise them during class so that they can benefit from the insight of their peers. Being prepared to discuss the week’s reading is especially important since a large part of each student’s grade will be based on his or her contribution to the class discussion (50% of total grade). To aid discussion, a series of questions will be sent around weekly to assist students in thinking about the week’s readings. ALL students should be prepared to respond to these questions in class, as well as raise any other talking points in relation to the week’s readings they feel are relevant.

The other major class requirement will be a research paper on a related topic to the class material. Students should discuss their topic with the professor at some point during the semester to ensure their topic is suitable. While students are encouraged to think about this paper early on, do not overlook a research question based upon the last few weeks of reading if this material is of particular interest. The paper should be around 15 pages in length – about 5,000 words – and draw on relevant class readings. No outside research is necessary, though students are welcome to do so if they wish. The paper can be thought of, in large part, as a “relevant” literature review, but must present a balanced argument, and come to some form of conclusion rather than merely summarising various authors’ arguments about a particular debate/issue. Papers that present connections between the readings from different weeks, and can identify aspects where the readings can be viewed as “speaking” to one another, or where commonalities or differences in emphases can be identified, will be looked up favourably. Those papers that simply summarise the authors’ work, with no clear analysis/critique/argumentation will not. Naturally, papers should start with a clearly presented thesis, and present evidence for and against the thesis. These points will be taken into consideration when grades are awarded, along with style and organization. Late papers will be penalised. Papers should be simply formatted: double-spaced, 12-point font with standard Word margins, include appropriate citations/footnotes, and a bibliography. There is no preference regarding citation, format (MLA vs Chicago, footnotes vs endnotes) but it must be consistent. Papers will be due at the final class meeting though students are free to turn in their paper anytime before this.

**Special Needs:**
Please speak to the professor if you have any. Students with disabilities are entitled to various forms of assistance and should take advantage of any resources NIU can offer.
***Class Schedule and Assigned Readings (subject to change!!)***

**August 30th** – Introduction/Class Overview (no reading assigned)

**September 6th** – The Institutional Approach in Political Science
Reading:
- Ch. 1 in *Electoral Engineering* (focus on discussion of rational-choice institutionalism).

Recommended:

**September 13th** – Political Representation
Reading:
- Ch. 11 in *Citizen Politics*
Recommended:
Chs. 1-3 in *Patterns of Democracy*

**September 20th - Party and Candidate Strategy**
Reading:

Recommended:
September 27th – The Emergence, and Consolidation of Party Systems

Reading:
- Ch. 7 in Citizen Politics
- Ch. 5 in Electoral Engineering

Recommended:

October 4th – Parties and Party Systems

Reading:

Recommended:
- Ch. 5 in Patterns of Democracy
October 11th - Electoral Laws
Reading:
- Chs. 2 and 3 in Electoral Engineering

Recommended:
- Ch. 8 in Patterns of Democracy

October 18th – Electoral Laws and Their Consequences
Reading:
- Chs. 7-9 in Electoral Engineering

Recommended:

October 25th – Party Competition – Voting Based Theories
Reading:

Recommended:

November 1st – Influences on Voter Choice
Reading:
- Ch. 8-10 in *Citizen Politics*

Recommended:

**November 8th – Valence Politics**
Reading:

**November 15th – Political Trust and Satisfaction with Democracy**
Reading:
November 22nd – No Class in Observance of Thanksgiving Holiday. Enjoy!!!!

November 29th – Coalition Governments: Formation and Effects
Reading:
- Ch. 6 in *Patterns of Democracy*

Recommended:

December 6th – Corruption and Fraud in Electoral Politics
Reading:

Recommended:

**December 13th – The State and Challenges to The State**

**Reading:**

**Recommended:**