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**Master Syllabus**

**Course: PSC 151 Intro to Comparative Politics**

**Cluster Requirement: 4C – The Nature of the Global Society**

This University Studies Master Syllabus serves as a guide and standard for all instructors teaching an approved course in the University Studies program. Individual instructors have full academic freedom in teaching their courses, but as a condition of course approval, agree to focus on the outcomes listed below, to cover the identified material, to use these or comparable assignments as part of the course work, and to make available the agreed-upon artifacts for assessment of learning outcomes.

**Course Overview:**

This course provides an introduction to the field of comparative politics. The course introduces students to a number of concepts and analytical frameworks – such as political culture, structure, institutions and the state – that are used to examine a wide range of political phenomena. These concepts and related theories are used to elucidate some of the fundamental questions in comparative politics, such as: Why are some countries democratic while others are not? How do dictators maintain their grip on power? Why do some countries become wealthy while others remain mired in poverty? Why does political order sometimes break down, leaving countries in anarchy? Under what conditions do social movements achieve meaningful political change? Why do revolutions happen?

**Learning Outcomes:**

Course-Specific Learning Outcomes:

1. Identify the key differences between democratic, transitional, and non-democratic political systems;
2. Identify the key institutional differences across political systems and explain their effects.
3. Explain different analytical perspectives of contentious politics (e.g., social movements and revolutions) and apply them to real world cases.
4. Explain different theoretical approaches to development.
5. Understand and utilize the analytic methods of comparative politics.

University Studies Learning Outcomes:

1. Explain basic problems faced by societies and cultures outside the US or issues that shape societies globally.
2. Locate, analyze, summarize, paraphrase and synthesize material from a variety of sources.
3. Evaluate arguments made in support of different perspectives on global society.

**Examples of Texts and/or Assigned Readings:**

(There are dozens of introductory comparative politics textbooks that cover essentially the same material. Alternatively, some instructors may eschew a textbook in favor of some combination of articles, primary sources, and book excerpts, or combine a textbook with supplementary readings.)

Textbook Example

Carol Ann Drogus and Stephen Orvis, *Introducing Comparative Politics: Cases and Concepts in Context*, 3rd edition (CQ Press, 2014).

Supplementary Reading Examples

Graeme Robertson, “Think Again: Dictators.” *Foreign Policy* (2011)

Jack Goldstone, “Understanding the Revolutions of 2011*.” Foreign Affairs* Vol. 90, No. 3 (2011)

Amartya Sen, “Democracy as a Universal Value.” *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 10, No. 3 (1999)

**Example Assignments:**

The assignments employed to assess the University Studies learning outcomes will necessarily vary with class size and instructor preferences. Larger sections will tend to employ multiple choice examinations and/or short answer quizzes and essays, while smaller sections may employ a variety of longer written assignments. The following examples are illustrative and do not exhaust the full range of options available.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Multiple-Choice Questions | Reading Responses | Research Paper |
| **Learning Outcome 1** | X | X | X |
| **Learning Outcome 2** | X | X | X |
| **Learning Outcome 3** | X | X | X |

Assignment #1 – Multiple-Choice Questions

Multiple-choice questions can be used in a variety of different assessment settings: readings quizzes, in-class clicker questions, news quizzes, and examinations. Moreover, these questions can be used potentially to assess each of the University Studies outcomes. That said, it should be made clear that not all multiple-choice questions will assess each of the US Learning Outcomes. In terms of assessing students’ ability to ***explain basic problems faced by societies and cultures outside the US or issues that shape societies globally*** (US Learning Outcome 1), questions on an assigned reading may require students to demonstrate knowledge of, and ability to explain, problems of political and economic development and political participation and behavior that societies face globally. In addition, an in-class clicker may assess students’ knowledge of the “dictator’s dilemma” – a well-known issue wherein authoritarian regimes that wish to remain in power make use of repression to control the population but, in so doing, cannot be certain of their levels of popular support and, related to this, how much resources should be allocated to this unproductive activity. US Learning Outcome 1 can also be achieved via examination questions that may assess students’ understanding of the collective action problem – a well-known issue where individuals are unwilling to engage in political action to address a particular problem because of their (rational) belief that their action will have little or no effect.

In terms of assessing students’ ability to ***locate, analyze, summarize, paraphrase and synthesize material from a variety of sources*** (US Learning Outcome 2), news quizzes will require students to gather, read, and analyze various current event news articles from a variety of major news sources. Sources could include newspapers such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and the *Wall Street Journal*; broadcast news outlets such as ABC News, CBS News, NBC news, PBS News, NPR news, CNN, and Fox News; and news magazines such as *The Economist*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*. News quiz assessment tools will be administered on a number of occasions throughout the semester to evaluate students' success in developing the skills specified in US Learning Outcome 2.

Finally, students’ ability to ***evaluate arguments made in support of different perspectives on global society*** (US Learning Outcome 3) may be assessed by examination questions that require the students to identify arguments made in different types of sources and to place those arguments within the context of others examined in the class. For example, the validity of competing explanations concerning the link between economic development and democratic transition can be assessed using a question that requires students to select the explanation that best characterizes the prevailing view within the comparative politics literature.

In some course sections (especially smaller classes), multiple-choice quizzes may be replaced by reading response assignments (see Assignment #2 below), and exams may be replaced by papers or other writing assignments.

The **artifact** produced from these assignments will be summary data of student responses on the variety of assessment strategies employed by the individual instructor in a particular course.

Assignment #2 – Reading Responses

Students may be required to complete short (1-page) writing assignments in response to assigned readings in order to assess students’ ability to ***explain basic problems faced by societies and cultures outside the US or issues that shape societies globally*** (US Learning Outcome 1), ***analyze, summarize, paraphrase and synthesize material from a variety of sources*** (US Learning Outcome 2), and ***evaluate arguments made in support of different perspectives on global society*** (US Learning Outcome 3). These assignments will require students to concisely summarize and paraphrase key points in the assigned readings, to synthesize material from multiple readings, and to evaluate the arguments that are made in those readings. The following is an example of such a reading response assignment:

Compare the two analyses of the relationship between political culture and democracy that you have read from Samuel Huntington and Larry Diamond. What types of evidence does each author use to support his argument? Which author offers a more convincing argument, and why?

The **artifact** produced from these assignments will be students’ written work and a summary description of the students’ performance on the assignments.

Assignment #3 – Research Paper

In this assignment, students will select one or more countries (other than the US) and attempt to explain why the country currently has the political regime that it has. While the precise form of this research paper will vary by instructor, in all cases, students will be required to analyze the nature and dynamics of different countries’ political regimes, so that they engage in ***explaining the problems and issues that shape societies globally*** (US Learning Outcome 1). The research paper will also require students to ***locate, analyze, summarize, paraphrase and synthesize material from a variety of sources*** (US Learning Outcome 2). Instructors will provide guidance to students in locating and analyzing relevant sources by teaching students about different types of sources (primary and secondary sources, scholarly versus popular writing, etc.). Instructors may choose to use Library Instruction Tutorials on “Popular Magazines and Scholarly Journals” and “Primary and Secondary Sources: Recognizing the Differences” for this purpose.[[1]](#footnote-1) Finally, this assignment will require students to ***evaluate arguments made in support of different perspectives on global society*** (US Learning Outcome 3). The paper will require that opposing or competing arguments related to countries’ political regimes be articulated, and that evidence be used to defend one or more of those arguments (or some combination of them) as the best explanation for why a country has the political regime that it has. To do so, students will draw on different theoretical perspectives learned in class, as well as on their independent research on their country (or countries).

Instructors may choose alternative assignments to achieve these same outcomes, such as group research projects that result in a class presentation, a wiki, a group paper, or a number of smaller papers spread throughout the semester. In all cases, however, students will be required to engage in independent research, synthesize diverse sources and evaluate arguments from different perspectives.

The **artifact** resulting from this assignment will be the student research papers or alternative projects.

**Sample Course Outline:**

The range of topics that might be covered in PSC151 is vast, and course outlines will vary across syllabi based on the emphases and expertise of instructors. The following is one possible sample course outline:

1. The Comparative Method
2. The Modern State
3. Nationalism and Identity
4. Colonialism
5. Authoritarian Political Regimes
6. Social Movements
7. Revolution
8. Democracy and Democratization
9. Presidential and Parliamentary Government
10. Electoral Systems and Political Parties
11. Political Economy
12. Social Welfare Policies

1. These tutorials can be viewed at: <http://lib.umassd.edu/help/library-instruction-online>. These tutorials would be built into the myCourses site. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)