PSCI 518: West European Politics  
Spring 2010

Department of Political Science  
University of Pennsylvania  
Stiteler Hall B30  
Wednesdays 2-5 pm

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Office Hours: Mondays 2-3:30pm

Course description:  
This seminar is devoted to analysis of the domestic politics of Western European  
countries. Topics include political parties and party systems; economic regulation, labor  
relations, and the welfare state; and various aspects of political culture. Unifying these  
topics is an analytic emphasis on the historical antecedents of contemporary politics, and  
on the ways in which political scientists seek to understand continuities and  
discontinuities in European politics.

The seminar is designed for advanced undergraduates who have some background in  
European politics or history or who have taken at least two courses in Comparative  
Politics; and for graduate students in political science or related disciplines. It is run as a  
discussion seminar, with students taking on progressively greater responsibility as the  
semester proceeds for structuring the discussion and initiating debate. By the end of the  
semester, each student will be familiar with a number of the signal works of recent  
political science research in European politics, and will have completed a significant  
research project of his/her own.

Course Readings:  
This course is organized around the critical reading of classic and more recent scholarly  
books about West European politics. Students are expected to read the assigned book in  
its entirety each week, except where specific chapter selections are noted. Reading whole  
books efficiently -- i.e., maximizing the amount learned while minimizing the time spent  
doing it -- is an art, and instruction in this art will be given! Each week an additional  
brief reading that challenges or supplements the premises of the assigned books is also  
assigned.

I strongly encourage you to form into groups of 2-4 students to share notes and critical  
summaries and discuss the assigned readings before coming to class. Students who do  
this generally do very well in the course, while those who attempt to go it alone have  
more trouble participating effectively and writing high-quality papers.
The following books are required and available for purchase at the Penn Book Center, 130 S. 34th St.


The remaining required readings will be posted to the course Blackboard site. Please be sure to bring copies of the readings and your notes to class each week.

The readings listed under “For further reading” are optional, but it is highly recommended that graduate students taking this class do at least some additional readings for the topics in which they are particularly interested. The optional readings are also useful starting points for those interested in writing research papers on topics related to those covered in class.

**Assignments:**

The capstone of the course will be a research paper on a topic of your choosing. The paper must pose and answer an empirical question (1) that bears some relationship to the political science theories discussed in the course, and (2) to which it is possible to learn the answer through the research conducted during the course of a semester. The use of primary source material (legislative debates, party manifestos, newspaper coverage, personal interviews, survey data, etc.) and comparative questions (why do some do this, while others do that) are both very strongly encouraged. Papers that are primarily descriptive (what happened) are very strongly discouraged. Papers that are centrally concerned with forecasting or speculating ("What will happen…" or "What would have happened if…") are not permitted, as they fail to meet criterion (2) above.

**Research paper planning meeting**

Before submitting the research proposal, each of you should meet with me during my office hours to discuss potential paper topics. I encourage you to do this as early in the semester as you can, but no later than the fourth week of the semester, especially if you are having trouble coming up with a topic.
Research paper proposal (15%)
You will submit a detailed research paper proposal due in Week 6 specifying (1) the question to be asked in the paper, (2) the significance of the question for the theoretically-informed study of European politics, (3) your best guess about the answer to the question, (4) how you will evaluate the strength of your own theory versus any obvious competing hypotheses, and (5) where you will get the data that you need to test your argument against others. **You will need to do some research in order to identify your research question, specify hypotheses (both your own and others'), and develop a reasonable research design.** Please start working on this assignment in Week 3 at the latest. *The research proposal that you hand in must explicitly and succinctly (5-8 pages) address all five of these considerations.* The proposals will be graded. You may also be asked to rewrite and resubmit the proposal until it is in good enough shape to proceed with the main research and writing, but the initial grade will be the one recorded.

Oral presentation (15%) and response (10%)
Parts of the last three class meetings will be devoted to presentations of your research, with commentary and feedback from the class. Each student will present his or her own research to the class to receive informed commentary and feedback; and each student will be assigned to comment on another student's research project.

Presentations of your research should inform the audience of: the main question animating the research; the justification for the project (why should we care, what does this tell us about political science and/or the real world?); your main argument/answer to the question; a summary of the evidence that you use to defend your answer against other plausible alternatives; and any problem areas that you see with the paper as it stands. Presentations should last *ten to fifteen minutes* (please practice them to be sure of the timing), and should use some kind of visual aid (PowerPoint slides, handouts, blackboard) to assist listeners in following the presentation. You will be required to submit a draft of the research paper and a preview of the presentation to your commentator at least five days before your presentation.

Commentators are responsible for fashioning a constructive critique of the research project as it stands at the date of the presentation. The critique should focus on the research design and argumentation rather than on the quality of prose, which will not necessarily be polished at this point. Does the author highlight the most important implications of her research? Has he anticipated all plausible alternative hypotheses? Does the argument flow logically from the evidence? Are there other sources that need to be consulted? Could other case studies be added to shed additional light on the question? Commentators may wish to use PowerPoint or other visual aids in their responses, which should last *no more than ten minutes.*

Presenters and commentators will be paired where possible according to overlapping research interests.
**Final paper (40%)**
The final research paper will be 15 to 25 pages in length, double-spaced (graduate student papers may be up to 35 pages double-spaced, including all references and figures). Final papers are due via email and in hard copy in my mailbox in the Political Science department office (210 Stiteler Hall) on Tuesday May 11th by 4:30pm. This is the last day of exam period, and an absolute drop-dead deadline. No papers will be accepted after May 11th unless in case of a dire, documented medical or family emergency.

**Seminar participation (20%)**
Informed, active participation in seminar is a requirement of the course. While a variety of lesson formats offer opportunities for different kinds of participation (oral and written, individual and collaborative, large and small group), you will be graded on both the **quality and quantity of your required contributions to the seminar**. I encourage you to request an evaluation of your seminar participation at an early stage during the semester.

**Academic integrity:**
The University of Pennsylvania’s Code of Academic Integrity states: “Since the University is an academic community, its fundamental purpose is the pursuit of knowledge. Essential to the success of this educational mission is a commitment to the principles of academic integrity. Every member of the University community is responsible for upholding the highest standards of honesty at all times. Students, as members of the community, are also responsible for adhering to the principles and spirit of the […] Code of Academic Integrity.” The seven points of this code (on cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, multiple submission, misrepresentation, facilitating dishonesty, and unfair advantage) can be found at [http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/osl/acadint.html](http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/osl/acadint.html).
Week 1 (Jan 13) -- Course Introduction

Week 2 (Jan 20) -- Paradigms and Patterns


Reflection questions:
What distinguishes the three main types of research traditions (institutional, ideational, and interest-based) in political science?

What are the important similarities and differences that characterize the political and government structures of the main Western European countries?

What is a critical juncture, and why is it critical?

Week 3 (Jan 27) -- From Pre-War to Post-War
If you have not already begun working on finding a researchable topic and developing preliminary hypotheses, start now!


Reflection questions:
Was the fact that Western Europe became rich and politically stable after WWII an accident or historical contingency, or an outcome with deeper roots?

Does the development of the catch-all party reflect a new "critical juncture" in West European politics? If so, what is the cause of this critical juncture?
For further reading:


**Week 4 (Feb 3) -- Social Democracy**
Schedule meeting with me during office hours to discuss your research topic.


Reflection question:
Imagine a conversation between Lipset and Rokkan and Berman about the causes of cross-national variation in social democratic electoral success in the post-war period. How would this conversation go?

For further reading:


Week 5 (Feb 10) -- Christian Democracy
By the end of this week you should have met with me during office hours to discuss your research topic.


Reflection question:
Through what mechanisms has Christian Democracy influenced politics and/or policy? Which of these mechanisms is most important in the contemporary period, and why?

For further reading:

Week 6 (Feb 17) – Welfare States
Research proposals due in the Blackboard electronic drop box by 4:30 pm on Friday this week.


Reflection question:
Is the development of European welfare states a result of "ideas," "institutions," or "interests"?

For further reading:


Week 7 (Feb 24) -- Governing the Economy

Reflection question:
To what extent could European economic policy-makers shape the functioning of their political economies in the "Golden Age" of European capitalism, and to what extent were they constrained by either legacies of the past or the complex of societal and political institutions within which they operated?

For further reading:


Week 8 (Mar 3) -- Political Culture and Institutional Performance


Reflection question:
How much leeway do political actors have to choose how their institutions perform?

For further reading:


**SPRING BREAK**

**Week 9 (Mar 17) -- Citizenship and Identity**


Reflection question:
Are national identities deeply rooted or of recent invention? Are they fixed or malleable?

For further reading:


**Week 10 (Mar 24) -- The Left after Socialism**


Reflection question:
What are the most important constraints on the policies that the Left may pursue in the current environment? Are these constraints imposed from the outside, or a part of the historical cleavage structure, institutional and/or ideational heritage of a nation?

For further reading:


MARCH 31 – NO CLASS

**Week 11 (Apr 7) -- The New Radical Right**
Week 12 presenters: Please give a draft of your paper to your commentator by Friday this week.


**Reflection question:**
What theories about European politics can explain why there is not more continuity between the Old Right and the New Right?

**For further reading:**


**Week 12 (Apr 14) -- The Domestic Politics of European Union, Paper Presentations**
Week 13 presenters: Please give a draft of your paper to your commentator by Friday this week.


**Reflection question:**
Is it completely unreasonable to design a course on West European politics with only a week on the European Union?

For further reading:


**Week 13 (Apr 21) -- Paper Presentations**

**Final Papers Due Tuesday, May 11th (last day of exam period)**
*Via email AND hard copy in my mailbox in the Political Science main office (210 Stiteler Hall) by 4:30 pm.*