The chief aim of those engaged in the study of comparative politics is to find solutions to “puzzles” involving real-world phenomena that are counterintuitive or at odds with the expectations of existing theory. “Comparativists” seek to identify the causes of change and stability within and across national boundaries and to explain cross-national variation and similarity in policy, process, and politics. For example, why do broadly similar polities pursue distinctly different means in addressing common policy challenges? Consider the issue of climate change – how can it be “impossible” to achieve lower carbon emissions in one advanced industrialized country when this objective is being realized through policymaking or social change in another country at a similar level of advancement? In many cases, “in country” fieldwork is needed to collect data, conduct interviews, and carry out site visits, while the “comparative method” provides a ready set of tools to assist in case selection and in determining causation. Most comparativists are proficient in at least one foreign language and possess deep contextual and cultural familiarity concerning a particular country (e.g., Australia or Fiji), region (e.g., Latin America or Western Europe), or socio-economic grouping (e.g., the Global South or OECD countries).

A primary aim of this course is to survey the five “lenses” that together constitute the theoretical core of comparative politics. Using the comparative method, we will employ these theoretical lenses to assess why and how different polities address critical policy challenges in the particular manner in which they do. Although we will examine a variety of issues in this course, we will focus intensively on the complex interplay of factors that produces cross-national variation in policy responses to the challenge of climate change. In so doing, it will become clear that policy responses cannot be divorced from economic concerns, particularly as pertain to energy use. Indeed, as a former British prime minister observed, energy and environment are so inextricably interconnected as to represent “two sides of the same coin.” In the final sessions of the course, we explore the interconnectedness of environmental and energy policies in cross-national perspective through a group exercise. As de Tocqueville put it, “Without comparisons to make, the mind does not know how to proceed.” The principal aim of this course is to provide students with the mental tools needed to explain change and stability through comparative analysis.
CORE AREA/ATTRIBUTES

Successful completion of this course counts toward fulfillment of Georgia Tech’s Social Science General Education requirement and the Global Perspectives Overlay area. The expected learning outcomes of these requirements are explained on the Registrar’s Office website (http://www.registrar.gatech.edu/students/gened.php).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The success of this course depends upon active, informed student participation. In addition, course grading will be determined by student performance on two examinations, a research design project using the comparative method, and a 3-5 page writing assignment (movie critique). During the final weeks of the semester, students will be assigned to “country teams” tasked with exploring the sources of variation in national responses to the challenge of climate change. Be advised – “free riding” will not be tolerated! Course grades will be weighted as follows:

- participation: 10 percent (includes attendance and active, informed participation)
- research design project: 10 percent
- examination #1: 25 percent
- writing assignment (movie critique): 10 percent
- group project: 20 percent (includes in-class presentation, PPT slides, and findings)
- examination #2: 25 percent

Honor Code: Academic honesty is required of all Georgia Tech students by the Institute’s honor code, the text of which is found at www.honor.gatech.edu.

Special Accommodations: Students requesting academic accommodations based on a documented disability are required to register with the Access Disabled Assistance Program for Tech Students (ADAPTS) at http://www.adapts.gatech.edu.

LEARNING GOALS

- Cultural, contextual, and ethical awareness. Students will become more aware of the diversity of cultural and ethical systems in the world. Includes the ability to identify, critically analyze, and apply distinguishing traits/perspectives/ formulations/ institutions in comparative or international empirical cases or issue areas. May include ability to communicate in a foreign language.
- Students will come away with a basic understanding of the major theories, paradigms, and models that comprise the theoretical core of the field of comparative politics.
- Students will be able to use the comparative method to critically assess the ability of the theoretical core of comparative politics to explain the political and economic change.
• Students will apply the comparative method and best practices in teamwork to solve a current problem in the field of comparative politics.
• Students will prepare compelling, evidence-based, arguments to defend their critical assessments and problem-solving proposals. These arguments will be presented in written, oral, and audio-visual formats.

READINGS

The textbook listed below is required. Other required readings will be posted to T-Square or can be downloaded from the Georgia Tech Library’s ejournals.

Acemoglu, Daron, and James Robinson  
*Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* [Paperback]  
Publisher: Crown Business  
Date of publication: 2013  

Students wishing to pursue a particular topic in more depth should feel free to consult with the Instructor.

DISCUSSION TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Session 1: Introductions and Course Overview  
Date: February 15 (Sydney)

Session 2: What Is Comparative Politics?  
Date: February 16 (Sydney)  
Reading: Acemoglu & Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 1-44

Session 3: Globalization  
Date: February 17 (Sydney)  

Session 4: The Comparative Method  
Date: February 18 (Sydney)  
Reading: Collier, “The Comparative Method” (uploaded to T-Square)

Session 5: Theoretical Core of Comparative Politics  
Date: February 22 (Sydney)
Reading: contributions by Peter Evans and Peter J. Katzenstein, "The Role of Theory in Comparative Politics: A Symposium." *World Politics* 48 (October 1995): 2-15 (download from GT Library eJournals)

Session 6: Rational Choice Theory  
Date: February 23 (Sydney)  

Session 7: World System Theory  
Date: February 24 (Sydney)  
Reading: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/date/index.htm), chapters 1, 2, and 4

Session 8: Modernization & Development Theory  
Date: February 25 (Sydney)  

Session 9: Cultural Explanations  
Date: February 29 (Sydney)  

Session 10: Institutionalism  
Date: March 1 (Sydney)  
Reading: Acemoglu & Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 45-123

Session 11: Review for Examination #1  
Date: March 2 (Sydney)

Session 12: Examination #1  
Date: March 3 (Sydney)

Session 13: Comparing Institutions I – United Kingdom  
Date: March 7 (Heron Island)  
Reading: TBA

Session 14: Comparing Institutions II – Australia & New Zealand  
Date: March 8 (Heron Island)

Session 15: Comparing Institutions III – Japan
Date: March 9 (Heron Island)
Reading: Woodall, Growing Democracy, 1-30 (uploaded to T-Square)

Session 16: Comparing Institutions IV – China
Date: March 10 (Heron Island)

Session 17: Understanding Policy Variation – Focus: Environmental Policy
Date: March 14 (Pacific Harbor, Fiji)

Session 18: Policy Variation, continued
Date: March 15 (Pacific Harbor, Fiji)

Session 19: Policy Variation, continued
Date: March 16 (Pacific Harbor, Fiji)

Session 20: Preparation for GP^{4}
Date: March 17 (Pacific Harbor, Fiji)

Session 21: GP^{4} Group Meeting
Date: March 21 (Pacific Harbor, Fiji)

Session 22: GP^{4} Presentations
Date: March 22 (Pacific Harbor, Fiji)
Session 23: Course re-cap  
Date: March 23 (Pacific Harbor, Fiji)  
Reading: Acemoglu & Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 368-427

Session 24: Review for Examination #2  
Date: March 24 (Pacific Harbor, Fiji)

Session 24: Examination #2  
Date: TBA (Pacific Harbor, Fiji)