POLS 657: Post-Communist Politics

The collapse of the Soviet Union and its empire produced widespread optimism that the Communist authoritarian regimes would give way to stable capitalist democracies across the successor states. In reality, political development across the region has been uneven and ambiguous, raising countless questions about the nature of regime transition, the factors that shape regime outcomes, the importance of Soviet-era legacies, and the formation of civil society. This course will examine this outcome through the lens of a number of critical debates: the failure of our dominant research paradigm, the rise of hybrid regimes, electoral competition, the use of symbols and economic appeals to win regime support, and the phenomena of post-election protest—or lack of protest. We will also go back to the debates over the causes of the collapse examining two important new works in the field.

The course is designed to address contemporary debates in political science as they are applied to post-Communist states. The syllabus is designed with three goals in mind. The first goal is to provoke students to think about regional studies in the process of theory-building (what does the application of the theory to the region tell us about omitted variables or misspecification of the theory), research design, and theory testing (when theories travel what do they tell us about the region). Second, to understand important debates in our field and their relevance for real world politics. Third, to develop the practical skills or presenting insightful analysis in a number of different forms: short papers, discussion, book reviews, grant applications, and policy memos.

Reading: Given the focus on debates, the course readings are article-based and available in electronic form at the library’s website. If the required reading includes book chapters, I have had them scanned and put them on Canvas/readings. If you would like to do the same for some of the suggested readings, you are free to borrow my copy and scan it and I will upload for everyone. I have tried to be expansive in selecting readings for the course. However, I encourage students with an interest in a particular country to substitute an appropriate country-specific reading for one or more of the applied articles listed on the syllabus. In some weeks, choosing country/region specific reading is part of the course design. This element is intended to help you build a bibliography for your own work. Students who are not regional specialists might add relevant large-N or comparative work to their reading.

You will also read two books by prominent scholars in our field that also fit with your research agenda. The first book should be a single-country study. The second book will be a classic in our field, *Subversive Institutions*, by Valerie Bunce.
Course Requirements: Grading will be based on three components with choice on the structure of the final project.

Participation and Preparedness (40 percent of your grade): This portion of your grade will be based on your participation in class.

1) All students are expected to come to class prepared and participate actively in class discussion.
2) You will be responsible for two discussant exercises during the semester to be outlined in class.
3) On one of the weeks where you can choose readings that focus on your country/area of interest, please be prepared to summarize that work for the class on how the debate has emerged in that literature. For weeks when you are adding readings to the core set of papers, please be sure to send me full citations for your readings so that I can add them to the supplemental reading list.

Book Review (10 percent of your grade): Students will write one 1200 word book review on a recent single country case book of their choice. Your review should be modeled on a review that might appear in Perspectives on Politics. A model review and review instructions are included on the course website under files/class materials. There are also some useful guides available on the web:

http://depts.washington.edu/pswrite/bookrev.html
http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/book_reviews.shtml
http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/CriNonfiction.html

Writing Component (50 percent of your grade):

For all Students:

Syllabus Construction Assignment: You will identify five papers that you might include on single session of a graduate syllabus on your country/topic of interest. This assignment can be a precursor to your annotated bibliography. You should also write a three-page essay (750 words) on the main themes of the class, the debates that you are addressing, the points of agreement and disagreement among the papers, and any other issues that you might address based on these readings. Please upload the citations for your seminar session and the essay by noon on Monday, November 17 so that I can read them prior to class and upload them for the rest of the class.

Annotated Bibliography. Final assignment preparation. Construct an annotated bibliography of at least ten resources that will facilitate your final project for this course. You should write a review essay (no more than 2250 words) that integrates at least five of the books or articles to support your final project. We will discuss strategies for essays prior to the due date. Due: December 4, 2016

There are many online resources available as models of the annotated bibliography:
http://guides.library.cornell.edu/annotatedbibliography
http://www1.crk.umn.edu/library/researchresources/CRK_CONTENT_119694.html
http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/annotated-bibliographies/

Each Student Should Also Pick One of the Following Options:

**Option 1:** PhD and MA candidates in political science can choose to write a research design proposal that precisely follows the format for dissertation enhancement grants from any relevant funding agency, including the IU Mellon Fellowship Competition or other university–based funding. Scholars from other disciplines may suggest an alternative proposal format or funding source. The research design should be based on your own research interests or works in progress as it is applied to the region. Ideally, the design will incorporate some of the variables or theoretic frames addressed throughout the class. This is a great option for students thinking about applying for field research support in spring/summer 2014. For a guide to the NSF format see: http://www.nsf.gov/sbe/ses/polisci/ddrip1.jsp. Please take a look at the requirements early in the semester. The website and program announcement have excellent discussions of what constitutes an excellent grant proposal. For additional guidance, see http://www.ssrc.org/fellowships/art_of_writing_proposals.page.

**Option 2:** In lieu of the final research design proposal, MA students may choose to write either two brief (3-4 page) policy memos or a literature review for to explore topics for their MA essays.

**Memos:** The memos may discuss a narrow aspect of the theory/application of the topic of the week to any post-Communist state. You may write about the policy implications of the literature or what we learn from applying the ideas evident in the readings. For example, you might wish to think about how the readings on the colored revolution apply to protests in Belarus or Moldova or how property rights distribution was different in Poland or Hungary. Or a memo might focus on your own area of interest but be framed in terms of political science theory. You might want to think of this assignment of a precursor to framing a thesis topic. Excellent memos will either apply a new framework to clarify a puzzle or question in the region or present new evidence that speaks to a puzzle or question. Writing style is critical here. Memos must be precise and parsimonious. For examples of short policy memos, please see the extensive list of memos by Russian and American scholars at: http://www.csis.org/ruseura/ponars/. Please identify your class-related memo topics at the third class meeting and your final memo topic in your annotated bibliography. Memos relating to the course subject are due on the day that the subject is discussed.

**Literature Reviews:** Literature reviews synthesize the existing state of research on your topic and establish a foundation for hypothesis formation for a research project.

**Option 3:** All students may also take a final exam that is modeled in the comparative politics preliminary exam—three questions from three different sections. The difference
between this simulated exam and the prelim will be that you should answer the questions relying extensively, but not exclusively, on the readings from this seminar. I will choose the questions from past exams and modify them to make this approach possible. If you choose this option, you can choose to take the exam any day before December 17 and write the exam in the required eight-hour framework. The exam questions will be posted on Canvas in the last week of class. Please do not open that file prior to taking the exam. You do not need to be physically present in the department to take the exam. You need only note the start and end times on your exams before you submit them. I will also post the guidelines for the comparative exam on Canvas and will expect you to follow the rules of the exam to make the simulated exercise as useful as possible.

***All Final Projects Must be Submitted by December 12, 2016***

**Week 1: Monday, August 22, Post-Communism and Comparative Politics**

Studying post-Communist cases raises a series of questions at the heart of comparative politics. These questions are our focus this week: is post-Communism a relevant construct, area versus science, approaches in political science, strategies of comparison.

**Reading:**


**Either/or:**


**AND:** Listen to Tim Frye’s discussion of the evolution of our field: “Political Perestroika,”

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=me6q4NT7kTg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=me6q4NT7kTg)

**Week 2, Monday, August 29: Transitology**


Add one paper on the transition trajectory of your region or country of study.

*Consider the Methodological Debate:*


*Suggested Reading:*


**Week 3, Monday, September 5: ***NO CLASS MEETING***

*Research Design and Postcommunist Cases. What should be compared and how should we compare?*

This week we will focus on the value of single country studies in comparative politics. Each student should choose one book that examines their country of interest, preferably using an approach and focusing on a question or analytic area of interest. A good source of suggestions is the list at the Cambridge University Press list on Comparative Politics. Each student should write a book review that comports to the model of *Perspective on Politics* posted on the class website. Book Reviews are due on Sunday, September 18.

You should also read these articles that posit different strategies for single country research design:


**Week 4, Monday, September 12: Single Country Studies, continued….*
The discussion this week will be based on your book review, individual reading and also the articles.

**Week 5, Monday, September 19: Regime Change, part II**


**Week 6, Monday, September 26: Legacies**

**Read one paper on methodology:**

Or

**Read one take on defining legacies**

Or
And Also Applications:


Please add one additional reading on legacy on the country or region of your choice.

Week 7, Monday October 3: Soft Authoritarianism and Post-Communist States
Reading


Week 8, Monday, October 10: Developments in Post-Communist Elections? The Rise of Electoral Authoritarianism in the Region?


Read three of these papers:


**Week 8, October 17: No Class Meeting**

**Assignment Due, October 21: Syllabus Construction**

**Syllabus Construction Assignment:** For this week, you will identify five papers that you might include on single session of a graduate syllabus on your country/topic of interest. This assignment can be a precursor to your annotated bibliography. You should also write a three-page essay on the main themes of the class, the debates that you are addressing, the points of agreement and disagreement among the papers, and any other issues that you might address based on these readings. Please upload the citations for your seminar session and the essay by noon on Monday so that I can read them prior to class and uplad them for the rest of the class.

**Week 9. Monday October 24: Regime Change Part III – Color Revolutions, Take One**


( Discussant Dima Kortukov) Valerie J. Bunce, Sharon L. Wolchik, "Defeating Dictators: Electoral Change and Stability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes" *World Politics*, Volume 62, Number 1, January 2010, pp. 43-86


_Familiarize yourself with this methodological debate:_


**Week 10, Monday, Week October 31:; Regime Change Part III, Individual Participation and Advances in Social Movement Theory**


**TBD**

**Week 11, Monday, November 7: Reading the Classics**


**Week 12, Monday, November 14: Mechanisms of Regime Support - Symbolic Politics, Nationalism and Nation-building**

**Required Reading**


*(Discussant Yana Mommadova)* Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik, Twenty Years After Communism. The Politics of Memory and Commemoration, Introduction and Chapter 1, Available on Canvas.


***THANKSGIVING WEEK***

**Week 13, Monday, November 28: No Class Meeting**

**Annotated Bibliography:** Please develop an annotated bibliography of at least ten readings that are relevant for your final project. Write a short paper that integrates at least five of these papers or books them around a common theme (leaders, political geography, monuments, history, symbols, discourse). You may choose any of the core readings as your point of departure or choose your own theme. You may focus on a single case or broadly on the post-Communist cases. If your own interest lies beyond the post-Communist world, you may want to include two or three papers from your region or country of interest. Bibliographies are due on Sunday, December 4. We will discuss the bibliographies, papers, and final assignments on Monday, December 5.

**Week 14, Monday, December 5: Project Consultation and Bibliography Development**

All work should be submitted by Sunday, December 4 as it will be distributed to the class for discussion and future reference.

***All Final Projects are Due on Monday December 12***