This seminar introduces PhD students to the study of politics through “the comparative method.” Topics will include concept formation, theory development and testing, case selection, measurement, and causal inference using qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Students will learn to assess research designs and causal claims as both consumers and producers of research.

This course is the second of two required courses for students whose major field is Comparative Politics. However, because comparison is found across the discipline of political science, and because the conceptual and theoretical issues that we entertain are general, all students in the PhD program in Government should take this course. There are no prerequisites except for an interest in learning the material and understanding how social scientists use comparison to build and assess arguments. Course readings are sometimes technical, but are accessible to any student who has completed the equivalent of U.S. high school algebra and wants to complete them.

Requirements

Assignments and Grading: You are required to attend all class meetings, to come to seminar having read and thought about the assigned material for the week, and to participate actively in class discussions. Class participation will comprise 30% of the final grade.

The remainder of your course grade is comprised of two written exercises.

1. Research design (30% of the final grade). Complete five research design assignments, and be prepared to discuss these ideas in class. All assignments are due Sundays at 10:00 PM via email to me, on the following dates.

   Assignment 1: February 5
   Assignment 2: February 19
   Assignment 3: March 12
   Assignment 4: April 19
   Assignment 5: May 7

   We will discuss these assignments in more depth in our first class meeting.
2. *Replication and extension* (40% of the final grade). The purpose of this exercise is to acquaint you with the details of actual research and of constructive criticism. You will identify by February 8 a piece of research—article or book—that you can feasibly replicate and extend. The methodology may be qualitative or quantitative. Your task is not to download and re-run an existing replication file, but to work with original source materials to reconstruct the argument and analysis, and build from there. This will be due at the end of the semester.

Finally, students are expected to give one another regular feedback on their written work. Before the second assignment is due, the class will be divided into small research support groups. You should read the written assignments of the other members of your group as you receive them and e-mail constructive comments to one another. Groups may also meet regularly to discuss their ideas.

**Readings:**

The following books are available for purchase at the Cornell bookstore. Copies are also available at the Olin Library reserve desk.


Remaining assigned readings are available online at the Blackboard course site, which may be accessed at [http://blackboard.cornell.edu](http://blackboard.cornell.edu). The course ID is 7005_2017SP. Readings are found under the Readings tab on the left-hand navigation panel.

**Course Schedule**

**January 25:** Introduction
February 1: “The” Comparative Method. In this class, we ask “what do we mean when we say ‘the’ comparative method?”


Also review


February 8: Units, Cases, and Ontologies. In this class, we ask “what are the things in the world and what are they made of?”


February 15: Theories and Models In this class, we ask “how to we know what to study, and what do we do after we’ve studied it?”


**February 22: Concepts. In this class, we ask “how do we link ‘what the world is made of’ to ‘how we know what to study’?”**


**March 1: Description. In this class, we ask “how do we actually learn about those things in the world that we think exist and that we ought to study?”**

• KKV, pp. 34-74.

**March 8: Case Section. In this class, we ask “which instances of the things in the world that we think exist and ought to study should we actually study?”**
March 15: Causal Inference In this class, we ask “what do we mean when we say that one of the things that we think exists in the world causes another of the things that we think exists in the world?”

- KKV, 75-114.
- MW, pp. 3-149.
- Aronow and Miller, pp. 180-186.

March 22: Experiments. In this class, we ask “under what conditions do experiments allow us to infer that one of the things that we think exists in the world causes another of the things that we think exists in the world?”

- AP, pp. 1-46.
March 29: Regression, RDD, and Matching. *In this class, we ask “under what conditions do regressions and related things allow us to infer that one of the things that we think exists in the world causes another of the things that we think exists in the world?”*

- AP, pp. 47-97, 178-208.

*Supplemental readings*

- MW, pp. 188-225, 355-392.
- Find a regression-for-causal-inference or a differences-in-differences paper on your own. Read it and be prepared to discuss it with the class.

April 5: Spring Break

April 12: IV, RDD, and Beyond. *In this class, we ask “under what conditions do natural experiments allow us to infer that one of the things that we think exists in the world causes another of the things that we think exists in the world?”*

- AP, pp. 98-177.

*Supplemental readings*

- Find a RDD paper or an instrumental variables paper on your own. Read it and be prepared to discuss it with the class.

April 19: Process-Tracing. *In this class, we ask “under what conditions does a close analysis of mechanisms allow us to infer that one of the things that we think exists in the world causes another of the things that we think exists in the world?”*
April 26: Time and Sequence. In this class, we ask “do we need different tools or concepts to make sense of causal relationships that operate across time rather than across space?”


May 3: Complicated versus Complex. In this class, we ask “is there a difference between a complicated social world and a complex social world, and so what?”

May 10: Mixing Methods. *In this class, we ask “can we put together ‘qualitative’ and ‘quantitative’ comparative methods, and if so, how?”*

- Mahoney, James, and Gary Goertz. 2006. “A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Qualitative and Quantitative Research.” *Political Analysis* 14: 227-249.
- Cathie Jo Martin, “Crafting Interviews to Capture Cause and Effect,” in Mosley.