Texas A&M University
Departmental Request for a New Course
Undergraduate • Graduate • Professional
• Submit original form and attach a course syllabus.

1. This request is submitted by the Department of: Political Science

2. Course prefix, number and complete title of course: POLS 621: Theory and Method in Comparative Politics

3. Course description (not to exceed 50 words): Introduction to methods for conducting research in comparative politics, including approaches to theory development and overcoming obstacles to comparative politics research.

4. Prerequisite(s): Graduate Standing or Permission of the Instructor

Cross-listed with: Cross-listed courses require the signature of both department heads.

5. Is this a variable credit course? ☑ Yes ☐ No If yes, from _______ to _______

6. Is this a repeatable course? ☐ Yes ☑ No If yes, this course may be taken _______ times.
Will this course be repeated within the same semester? ☐ Yes ☑ No

7. Has this course been taught as a 489/689? ☑ Yes ☐ No If yes, how many times? _______
Indicate the number of students enrolled for each academic period it was taught.

8. This course will be:
   a. required for students enrolled in the following degree program(s) (e.g., B.A. in history)
   b. an elective for students enrolled in the following degree program(s) (e.g., M.S., Ph.D. in geography)

Ph.D. in Political Science

9. If other departments are teaching or are responsible for related subject matter, the course must be coordinated with these departments. Attach approval letters.

10. Prefix Course # Title (excluding punctuation)
    POLS 6 2 1 THRY & METHOD IN CMP POL

    Lect. Lab SCH CIP and Fund Code Admin. Unit Acad. Year FICE Code
    0 3 0 0 3 4 5 1 0 0 1 0 0 1 2 3 4 0 9 - 1 0 0 0 3 6 3 2

    Approval recommended by: Level 6

    Head of Department Date
    Chair, College Review Committee Date

    Head of Department (if cross-listed course) Date
    Dean of College Date

    Submitted to Coordinating Board by:
    Dean of College Date

    Associate Director, Curricular Services Date Effective Date

Questions regarding this form should be directed to Sandra Williams at 845-8201.
Curricular Services – 11/07

1 of 14 C13
Texas A&M University
Departmental Request for a New Course
Undergraduate • Graduate • Professional
• Submit original form and attach a course syllabus.

1. This request is submitted by the Department of [Political Science]

2. Course prefix, number and complete title of course: POLS 621 Theory and Method in Comparative Politics

3. Course description (not to exceed 50 words): This course is designed to introduce various methods for conducting research in comparative politics, and to consider how to deal with the challenges of conducting comparative research.

4. Prerequisite(s): Graduate Standing or permission of the instructor.

5. Is this a variable credit course? [ ] Yes [X] No

6. Is this a repeatable course? [ ] Yes [X] No

7. Has this course been taught as a 489/689? [ ] Yes [X] No

8. This course will be:
   a. required for students enrolled in the following degree program(s) (e.g., B.A. in history)

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10. If other departments are teaching or are responsible for related subject matter, the course must be coordinated with these departments. Attach approval letters.

   Approval recommended by:

   Head of Department: [Signature] 9/26/05

   Head of Department (if cross-listed course): [Signature] Date

   Submitted to Coordinating Board by:

   Associate Director, Curricular Services: [Signature] Date

   Chair, College Review Committee: [Signature] 10-13-08

   Dean of College: [Signature] 10-13-08

   Dean of College: [Signature] 11/4/08

   Date: [Effective Date]

Questions regarding this form should be directed to Sandra Williams at 845-8201.
Curricular Services - 11/07

2 of 14 C13
POLS-689: Theory and Method in Comparative Politics
Fall 2009

Maria Escobar-Lemmon
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845-1442
escobar@polisci.tamu.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 12:45 – 1:45
or by prior arrangement

Course Description
This course is designed to introduce various methods for conducting research in comparative politics, and consider how to deal with the challenges of conducting comparative research. We will also explore these approaches as they have been used in various substantive research areas that have occupied the interest of comparativists in the past or present. As a companion to 620, this course is intended to introduce students to questions of how research in comparative politics is conducted and theory is developed; 620 is intended to provide exposure to a wide variety of research topics and questions in the field.

By the end of the semester, students should be familiar with the terminology, methods, and challenges of conducting comparative research. To be an excellent comparative political scientist, you must be able to think systematically about what theoretical approach you are pursuing, to compare your approach (at least implicitly) with the other main approaches in the field, and to think about alternative hypotheses that derive from the competing approaches. This does not mean that you must settle on one theoretical approach that you will use for the rest of your career, but rather that you should be able to identify different approaches and reflect on how they would address the problem you are analyzing.

Prerequisite: Graduate standing or permission of the instructor.

Course Objectives
By the end of the course students will be ready for future seminars in comparative politics, able to critically evaluate research in comparative politics and be prepared to undertake their own research. To that end students should be able to:

- Distinguish between different theories in comparative politics including: systems theory, structural functionalism, and developmentalism.
- Evaluate existing research in comparative politics
- Identify the strengths and weaknesses of the statistical method, the case study method, and the experimental method.
- Assess the challenges associated with field research, survey research, and experimental research and determine how to mitigate or overcome those challenges.
- Formulate a plan for independent research on a topic of importance in comparative politics

Required Texts
Students are responsible for obtaining their own copy of all readings. Many are available electronically. Others will be placed on reserve.
**Students with Disabilities/ADA Statement**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Department of Student Life, Disabilities Services in Room B118 of Cain Hall, or call 845-1637. Once accommodations are approved please discuss with me how we can best implement them in this course.

**Course Materials/Copyright**

The handouts used in this course are copyrighted. By “handouts,” I mean all materials generated for this class, which include but are not limited to syllabi, quizzes, exams, lab problems, in-class materials review sheets, and additional problem sets. Because these are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy the handouts, unless I expressly grant permission.

**Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty**

“As commonly defined, plagiarism consists of passing off as one’s own the ideas, words, writings, etc., which belong to another. In accordance with the definition, you are committing plagiarism if you copy the work of another person and turn it in as your own, even if you should have the permission of the person. Plagiarism is one of the worst academic sins, for the plagiarist destroys the trust among colleagues without which research cannot be safely communicated. If you have any questions regarding plagiarism, please consult the Aggie Honor System Office website (http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor) or the latest version of the Texas A&M University Student Rules, under the section “Scholastic Dishonesty.”

I do not expect this to be an issue in a graduate seminar. In the unlikely event it occurs, plagiarism will be punished by receiving a zero on the assignment and a report on the incident will be included in the summary statement about your performance in the class which is included in your file.

Aggie Honor Code: “An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do.”

**Late Work Policy:**

Plan ahead and do not leave assignments to the last minute. Computer hard drives fail, disks are lost, and illness strikes at the most inconvenient moment. Do not assume that you can finish an entire assignment the day before it is due. Even with the best laid plans delays sometimes occur. I will accept late work, except for talking points; however you lose half a letter grade per day (including weekends) for every day something is late unless the assignment is accompanied by some kind of documentation that this was a university excused absence.

Incompletes are bad for your academic health – and your personal health as you try to resolve them. Do not plan on receiving an incomplete in this class. I will grant incompletes only in the most unusual or exceptional circumstances.
Assignments and Grades

Final averages of 90-100 will earn a grade of A; 89.9 – 80 = B, 79.9 – 70 = C, 69.9 – 60 = D.

Students whose final average is below a 60 will fail the course.

- Participation (20%): It should go without saying, but participation means far more than simply showing up for class. In order to participate actively and extensively in our class discussion you need to arrive prepared for class. I expect you to have completed the readings in advance of each class and I expect that you will do more than turn the pages of each assignment. Our discussions are likely to much better if you take notes on each reading, making note of your positive and negative evaluations of the work, and also consider how the week’s readings fit together.

To help organize our discussions I am adopting the strategy other faculty use of asking students to submit “talking points” prior to the seminar. By 9am each Monday before class, each student must submit (via email) 2 talking points (each based on different chapter(s) or article(s)) from the week’s readings (no more than 150 words each). Talking points should highlight what you see as the most interesting question or argument in this literature, and should reference specific sections of the week’s readings (with appropriate page references). Some ideas for what you could consider in the talking point include future research directions (i.e. questions that this literature raises but doesn’t answer); ways different articles interact with or respond to each other; connections across readings from different weeks; specific strengths/weakness in terms of the substance of the argument and/or research design employed. Talking points, combined with your participation in discussion determine the participation grade.

- Research Critiques (20%): An important part of this course is learning evaluating and judging the quality of research. During the course of the semester each student is required to submit two critiques of current published work. For each critique, students should select a journal article published in the past year. After carefully reading the article students should write a 2-3 page evaluation of the work that discusses both the strengths and weaknesses of the research design used in the article. Each critique is worth 10% of the grade. Critiques are due: September 21st and October 26th by 5pm.

- Research design essay (25%): After reading works from a particular topic of interest in the comparative politics literature, this essay explores how different research designs contribute to the accumulation of knowledge on that topic. This essay must include 3 different types of research designs (e.g., large N statistical, small N comparison, single country study, experimental) in the literature presented, preferably utilizing more than one example from the selected literature of each type of research design. In addition to assessing the contributions each type of research makes to overall knowledge in the field, explain how the utilization of different research designs evolved in the field and why. The paper should be 8-9 pages in length (double spaced), plus a bibliography. Consult with your professor before choosing a topic, especially as it may be helpful to use this literature to help develop a research design. Research Design Essays are due by 5pm, Nov. 16th.

- Proposal Presentation (5%): On Nov. 20th during the class session – students will give a 10-15 minute presentation outlining the literature, theory, and method to be employed in their research design. Depending upon the class size we will have 10 – 15 minutes available for discussion and critique of the proposal. All students are expected to
contribute positively to the development of their classmates proposals. Grades will be assigned based on the quality of the presentation as well as its content.

Research Design Proposal (30%): After reading works from a particular topic of interest to you in the comparative politics literature you should prepare a research design/proposal. The research design should begin by identifying our knowledge to date based on the literature and identifying a possible research question that has not been addressed combined with a plan for conducting research to test it. The advantage is that you will identify what data you would need to actually conduct this research, but do not have to collect it. You should feel free to consult with me as you develop the research design. The final research design should be 12-15 pages (double-spaced, 12 point font, 1 inch margins). The research design proposal is due: Dec 6th by 5pm.

**Course schedule**

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<th>Week 1: Introductions</th>
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<td>No readings</td>
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<tr>
<th>Week 2: Early efforts at theory building</th>
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<tr>
<td>History of the Comparative Politics field and early attempts at global theory: systems theory, structural-functionalism, and political development</td>
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Required readings:

Part I: Methodological questions

Week 3: The research design debate: experimental, statistical, comparative method, case study, rational choice

Required readings:


Week 4: What is a concept?

conceptual stretching, degrees of freedom, Galton's problem

Required readings:


RESEARCH CRITIQUE #1 DUE SEPT 21ST BY 5PM.
Part II: Examples of the major research design approaches

Week 5: Large-scale empirical studies

Required readings:


Read four or more of the following:


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**Week 6: Small-N country studies**

**Required readings:**


**Read three or more of the following:**


### Week 7: using edited volumes to produce small-n comparisons

**Required reading:**

• Carey, John and Matthew S. Shugart (eds.). 1998. *Executive Decree Authority: Calling Out the Tanks, or Filling Out the Forms?* New York: Cambridge University Press.

**Read two of the following:**


### Week 8: Case studies -- building theory with one case?

**Required readings:**


**Read two or more of the following:**

Part III: Evaluating literatures

**Week 9: Typologies of regimes: totalitarian, authoritarian, democratic, and corporatism**

**Required readings:**


**RESEARCH CRITIQUE #2 DUE OCT 26TH BY 5PM.**

**Week 10: Theory Building and Evaluation**

**Required Reading:**


**Part IV: Practical Considerations when designing research in comparative politics**

**Week 11: Survey Research**

**Required Reading:**


**Week 12: Documentary/Archival and Field Research**

**Required Reading:**
• J.A. Barnes, "Some Ethical Problems in Modern Fieldwork," *British Journal of Sociology*. 9:2 (June 1963), pp. 188-234

**RESEARCH DESIGN ESSAY DUE BY 5PM, Nov. 16th.**

**Week 13: Proposal Presentations**

Each student will give a 10-15 overview of their research design proposal followed by 10-15 minutes (dependent upon class size) of comments/questions/suggestions from the class.

**Week 14: Summing up and future directions**


**DECEMBER 6: RESEARCH DESIGN DUE BY 5 PM.**