CIEE Global Institute - London

Course name: European Comparative Political Systems  
Course number: (GI) POLI 3002 LNEN  
Programs offering course: Open Campus (International Relations and Political Science Track)  
Language of instruction: English  
U.S. semester credits: 3  
Contact hours: 45  
Term: Spring 2020

Course Description

This course examines the political systems of various European nation-states. Focus is placed on the main political cleavages in each, such as class, ideology, ethnicity, and religion, and how these divisions have influenced the political playing field. Additional topics include nationalism, citizenship, party structures, corporatism, the welfare state, and electoral politics. A special focus will be recent symptomatic challenges to European democracy. As we compare the features of these different democratic systems in detail and relate them to their historical and cultural context, we will focus on three major challenges common to all of these democracies: the decreasing level of participation, especially regarding voter turnout; the decline of large political parties, which raises the question of who, in future, is going to mediate between the citizens’ interests and those of the state; and the perception that the major decisions in democratic countries are increasingly made outside the purview of democratic institutions.

Learning Objectives

This course will enable students to:

- Identify the significant differences between the political systems of the countries analyzed and be able to explain how these differences translate into a specific landscape of political parties and characteristic patterns of governance.
- Converse on the wider historical and social context that has brought forth different variants of democratic constitutions.
- Identify common problems of and challenges to European democracies and discuss these at the level of democratic theory.
- Encounter the most important positions in the recurrent debate about the "crisis of democracy."
- Assess proposals for improvement and think creatively about how to help democracies become more just and more democratic and regain their lost public appeal.
- Practice critical thinking skills, e.g. by developing and applying category schemes to identify the strengths and weaknesses of constitutional democracies in Europe and analyze their similarities and differences.
- Use the meetings with legislators, activists, and political scientists that are part of the course to hone one’s questioning techniques and other interview skills.

Course Prerequisites
Methods of Instruction

Among other techniques, the methodology used throughout this course will include: teacher presentations with student-teacher dialogue and discussion; active discussion in which students will be expected to prepare presentations to argue a specific case and defend it to an opponent and the class. Students will also attend site visits, special events, and guest lectures. They are expected to take copious notes of readings, lectures and out-of-class activities to be potentially used for course submissions. Rules for citation and referencing apply.

Assessment and Final Grade

Evaluation will be based on conceptual clarity, self-critical skills, and the ability to relate disparate concepts, but equally to creative thinking and original critique. The final grade will be made up of the following components:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essay 1</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graded Debates</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay 2</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group Presentation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100%</td>
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Course Requirements

Essays (x 2)

Students will be required to write two 1500 word essays for this course. Each essay should address one of the weekly themes or topics of the course by invoking reflexive thinking of the site visits, lectures, guest speakers, and texts from the course. The paper will be assessed on structure, clarity, critical analysis / argument, style and referencing. This paper should be written for an academic audience, with appropriate sources to evidence arguments. The topics selected cannot be the same as the presentation topic.

**Note that all written work should use appropriate citations. Students should use Harvard formatting. In class, we will go over how to use Harvard formatting in your writing.**

Graded Debates

Each student is required to participate in a prepared debate session based on selected case studies. The debates will be in groups each given a topic. Each group will have time to prepare for the debate during the session beforehand. Grading will be based on knowledge, participation and preparation demonstrated in the in-class debate.
Group Presentations

The in-class presentation will be delivered by the students in groups of no more than 2 or 3 people. Each group will choose a topic relating to a specific European political system. The presentation should be in Powerpoint format; it should not last more than 15 minutes and will be followed by a Q&A session. Groups should ensure that their topic includes critical analysis and, if possible, cross-references to material discussed in class. Each member of the group must participate in preparing and delivering a portion of the presentation. Presentations will be assessed on five key areas: structure, content, critical analysis, general delivery, communication / presentation skills.

*Note that the PowerPoint presentation should be uploaded to Canvas prior to the class when groups will present their findings. Each student should upload their group’s presentation individually; however, everyone will receive the same grade for the presentation within each group.

Participation

Participation is valued as meaningful contribution in the digital and tangible classroom, utilizing the resources and materials presented to students as part of the course. Meaningful contribution requires students to be prepared in advance of each class session and to have regular attendance. Students must clearly demonstrate they have engaged with the materials as directed, for example, through classroom discussions, online discussion boards, peer-to-peer feedback (after presentations), interaction with guest speakers, and attentiveness on co-curricular and outside-of-classroom activities.

Attendance Policy

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program, and all unexcused absences will result in a lower participation grade for any affected CIEE course. Due to the intensive schedules for Open Campus and Short Term programs, unexcused absences that constitute more than 10% of the total course will result in a written warning.

Students who transfer from one CIEE class to another during the add/drop period will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of their new class, provided they were marked present for the first session(s) of their original class. Otherwise, the absence(s) from the original class carry over to the new class and count against the grade in that class.

For CIEE classes, excessively tardy (over 15 minutes late) students must be marked absent. Attendance policies also apply to any required co-curricular class excursion or event, as well as to Internship, Service Learning, or required field placement. Students who miss class for personal travel, including unforeseen delays that arise as a result of personal travel, will be marked as absent and unexcused. No make-up or re-sit opportunity will be provided.
Attendance policies also apply to any required class excursion, with the exception that some class excursions cannot accommodate any tardiness, and students risk being marked as absent if they fail to be present at the appointed time.

Unexcused absences will lead to the following penalties:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Total Course Hours Missed</th>
<th>Equivalent Number of Open Campus Semester classes</th>
<th>Minimum Penalty</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 10%</td>
<td>1 content classes, or up to 2 language classes</td>
<td>Participation graded as per class requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 20%</td>
<td>2 content classes, or 3-4 language classes</td>
<td>Participation graded as per class requirements; <strong>written warning</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>More than 20%</td>
<td>3 content classes, or 5 language classes</td>
<td><strong>Automatic course failure</strong>, and possible expulsion</td>
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**Weekly Schedule**

NOTE: this schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor to take advantage of current experiential learning opportunities.


Each week, students will be expected to read the portion of the main text listed in the syllabus prior to coming to class. In class, lectures, seminars and discussions will be based on the main text and additional materials. Students will also be presented with a list of additional reading material to help supplement their understanding of the topics discussed in class, and help with their class assignments.

**Week 1**

**Course Introduction**

The course begins with a revision of the political evolution of Europe and the dominant political ideologies in Europe from the 19th century to our time, a crucial foundation for understanding the political systems to be investigated in detail.
Week 2

Overview: The Transformation of European Politics

The overview of the second week provides general orientation with regard to the variety of constitutions, electoral systems, and political parties in Europe, as well as recent crises and attempts at reform. While concentrating on the contemporary situation of democracies in Europe, some historical aspects will necessarily be included.

Class 2:1

Lecture: Unity through Diversity- A Patchwork of Constitutions

Required Reading:


Additional Reading:


Class 2:2

Lecture: European Parties and Cleavages

Assignment: Graded Debates in Class 2:2

Week 3

Patterns of Democracy I: Germany

In Week 3 we will examine governmental institutions and policy making within the German polity: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the German parliamentary democracy? What is the relationship between political system and civil society? What are general and specific challenges of the future?

Class 3:1

Lecture: Germany: The Powerhouse of Europe

Required Reading:


Week 4

**Constitutional Monarchies: Spain**

Building on our analysis of the German polity, we will study the political system of Spain, focusing on similar questions and keeping in mind a comparative perspective. This week aims to establish the historical and political context necessary for an adequate understanding of modern Spanish politics and institutions. We go on to explore Spain’s political institutional makeup after the country’s transition to democracy following the death of General Franco in 1975. This week also throws light on the relationship of the political system and citizens at a number of levels: First, we consider the relationship between the centre and the autonomous regions. Secondly, it examine the political effects that the global financial crisis – and on-going recession in Spain – have produced in terms of the relationship between the political class – and the democratic system it represents – and Spanish civil society.

**Class 4:1**

**Lecture:** The Curious Case of Spain- A Fragile State?

**Site Visit:** Supreme Court

**Required Reading:**


**Additional Reading:**

**Class 3:2**

**Lecture:** Religion and Politics in Europe

Film Showing and Discussion

**Assignment:** Essay 1

Additional Reading:


Heywood, *Politics*, Ch. 15, "Constitutions, Law and Judges": 331–344


Magone, J. *Contemporary Spanish Politics* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2008), Chapter 2

**Class 4:2**

**Lecture:** Revolution from Below: Minority Nationalism in Europe

**Assignment:** Group Presentations Due in Class

**Week 5**

**European Democracies and the Perception of Crisis: Migrants and Ethnic-Religious Minorities**

This week our focus will turn to the politics of migration to Europe. We will take a look at the rise of nationalist and populist movements that campaign on anti-immigration platforms, and the impact of the rise of the far right on politics in European states, with a particular focus on the U.K, France, Germany, Italy and Hungary.

**Required Reading:**


**Class 5:1**

**Lecture:** The Politics of Crisis: Migration in Europe

**Class 5:2**

**Guest Speaker:** Dr. James Heartfield, Historian - Talk on the European Union (EU)

**Assignment:** Essay 2

**Week 6**

**Reforming and Strengthening Democracy: Experiments in Theory and Practice**

How relevant and urgent are recurrent warnings about a “crisis of democracy”, the loss of trust in democratic institutions and the inefficiency of their decision-making processes? We will look at reform proposals such as those connected with the concept of “deliberative democracy”, and concrete reform experiments such as the G1000 manifesto in Belgium.

**Required Reading:**

Class 6: Revolution from Above: The Future of Democracy in Europe and the European Union

Guest Speaker: Talk by Dr. Andreas Staab, founder and Managing Director of EPIC – the European Policy Information Centre.

Readings

Course Textbook:

Additional Readings:


Magone, José M. *Contemporary Spanish Politics*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2008


**Online resources:**

WZB Rule of Law Center:

The Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University:
http://cdd.stanford.edu/

Eurozine (a netmagazine that publishes outstanding articles from more than 80 associated journals partnered in the network by the same name):
http://www.eurozine.com/

G1000 Platform for democratic innovation:
http://www.g1000.org/en/