GOVT/AFS 328 - Political Institutions in the Developing World
St. Lawrence University
Spring 2014
Carnegie 207

Professor Kristin McKie
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Fridays 2:00-4:00pm
or by appointment

Course Overview and Goals

Can the choice of certain political institutions help address challenges in developing countries by promoting better representation, political stability, more government accountability, less corruption, or improved economic performance? What institutions are best able to deliver these outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Central and South Asia and others developing regions of the world? This course tackle these question through introducing students to the main concepts and approaches of comparative institutional analysis through an examination of democratic political institutions in countries across the developing world. In order to examine the possibilities and limits institutional design, each class juxtaposes contemporary research on institutions in developing countries with classic comparative and theoretical studies of political institutions from the developed world.

We will open the course by asking “what are institutions and what do they do?” and examining the various ways in which political scientists approach the study of political institutions. Next, we will delve into an exploration of a wide range of political institutions (or “rules of the political game”) such as state institutions, constitutions/rule of law, electoral systems, executive powers, the legislature, the judiciary, and sub-national structures, paying attention to both the formal and informal practices associated with each. Discussions will center on conceptual themes such as tradeoffs between representativeness and efficiency and debates about topics such as whether political behavior can in fact be shaped by incentives, the impact of historical legacies, and the unique challenge of implementing formal institutional rules in societies where informal practices shape much of the political life. Students will have the opportunity to explore the effects of political institutions in an area of the world of interest to them through a semester-long research project.

Course Readings

All readings for the course will be available on our class Sakai site under the “Resources” tab. There are no books to purchase for this course. I strongly encourage you to print out each week’s readings and bringing them to class with you so that we can refer to the text during our class discussions.

Assignments and Evaluation

The main modes of evaluation in the course will be three analysis papers on course readings (two due by mid-semester), and a research paper on a topic of your choice (including smaller assignments leading up to the paper). In addition, students will submit QAEs and two discussion questions before every class meeting and will also be evaluated on class engagement. Descriptions of each of these course components are as follows:
1) The **two analysis papers due during the semester** will give you a chance to expand upon the themes we cover in a given week through a critical analysis of the readings on that topic. These papers can take many forms. For example, you could adjudicate between two articles that reach opposite conclusions and discuss why one author is more convincing that the other, you can critique the research design of one or more readings and discuss what different conclusions the author may have reached using different case studies/research methods, or you can discuss what the implications (intended or unintended) are for a conclusion one or more authors reach for developing countries more generally. The strongest papers will be ones that are able to draw connections between the various readings for the week, and they should be grounded in scholarly analysis, not merely opinion.

Papers should be between **3-5 pages long**. Analysis papers are **due to your Analysis Paper folder in your Drop Box in Sakai by 11:59pm on the Friday** after the class in which we discussed the topic.

2) The **research paper** will allow you to take a more in-depth look at a question about institutions in the developing world that personally interests you. You will choose your own research question/topic in consultation with Professor McKie. The final paper should be **15-20 pages in length and will be due on Monday, May 5th** (the scheduled date of the final for this class). Material for the paper can be drawn from both course readings and outside research.

In addition to the final paper itself, you will be evaluated on a few smaller assignments leading up to the paper including a research proposal, a literature review and a brief presentation of your research given during the final two weeks of the semester.

3) Prior to coming to class, please submit your **QAEs (Question, Answer, Evidence)** for each reading assigned for the day and **two discussion questions for our class meeting** to your QAE folder in your Drop Box on Sakai. Late submissions will be accepted, but will only receive half credit.

4) Finally, I expect everyone to be **engaged in class** every course meeting, which includes attending class every session, contributing to class discussion, participating in any course activities, etc… You are allowed one absence with no questions asked during the semester, but having two or more absences (meaning you are missing more than 15% of class meetings) will result in your class engagement grade dropping by 3% for each additional absence after the first.

**Grading**

Your **final course grade** will be based on the following breakdown:

- Two Analysis Papers 25% (12.5% each)
- QAE submissions 12.5%
- Final Research Paper 35%
- Scaffolding Assignments(3) 15% (5% each)
- Class Engagement 12.5%

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The **grading scale** I will use to calculate final grades on SLU’s 4.0 scale is as follows:

- **4.0** = 100-94% (A)
- **3.75** = 93-90% (A-)
- **3.5** = 89-88% (B+)
- **3.25** = 87-86% (B+/B)
- **3.0** = 85-83% (B)
- **2.75** = 82-80% (B-)
- **2.5** = 79-78% (C+)
- **2.25** = 77-76% (C+/C)
- **2.0** = 75-73% (C)
- **1.75** = 72-70% (C-)
- **1.5** = 69-68% (D+)
- **1.25** = 67-64% (D)
- **1.0** = 63-60% (D-)
- **0.0** = 59% and below (F)

**Communication and Meeting with Professor McKie**

*Sakai*

Please check our course website on **Sakai** for course readings, announcements, assignments, your personal drop box and other resources.

**Office Hours and Appointments**

Students are encouraged to take advantage of the small size of St. Lawrence courses to get individual guidance on course material and to get to know their professors. Coming to office hours or arranging to meet for lunch or coffee is a good way to do so. During office hours, you can just drop by Hepburn 206, but for appointments at other times please email me to arrange a time.

**Laptops in the Classroom**

I strongly prefer that students not bring laptops to class, as they present too much of a temptation for distraction (believe me, I know). However, if you must use a laptop for note taking in this class, please use Leechblock (on Firefox), StayFocusd (on Chrome), SelfControl (Macs only), Freedom (http://macfreedom.com/) or another program that blocks you from certain websites for a set time in order to help keep you focused during class.

**St. Lawrence University Policies**

In compliance with the St. Lawrence University policy and national civil rights laws, I will gladly comply with any appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for students with disabilities of any nature. Students who are eligible for accommodations are encouraged to register with the Office of Academic Services for Students with Special Needs to discuss their IEAP with Dr. McKie in order to work out a plan for accommodations in the course.

**Academic Integrity:**

All of the work that you submit in this course must have been written for this course and not another, and must originate solely with you in form and content with all sources fully and specifically cited. Any instances of academic dishonesty will result in a report of your name to the Dean of Academic Affairs and, per my discretion, either a 0 for the entire relevant portion of the final course grade or a referral to an Academic Honor Council hearing.
If you have any questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty, what is considered plagiarism or how to cite sources properly, come talk to me, visit The WORD Studio in ODY, or refer to SLU’s info sheets on citations and plagiarism:

www.stlawu.edu/writing/plagiarismfaq.html    www.stlawu.edu/writing/usingsources.doc

**Course Schedule (subject to revision!):**

**Week 1 (January 22): Course Introduction & Conceptualizing Political Institutions**

*Discussion topic: What are political institutions and what do they do?*

**Week 2 (January 29): Analyzing Political Institutions**

*Discussion topic: How do political scientists study institutions?*


**Week 3 (February 5): Formal vs. Informal Institutions in Developing Countries**

*Discussion topic: What are informal institutions and how do they interact with formal institutions to drive outcomes?*

Week 4 (February 12): Colonial Institutions and their Effects

Discussion topic: How do experiences with colonial institutions affect countries during the colonial era and beyond?


Week 5 (February 19): The State

Discussion topic: What are the challenges to state-building in developing countries and how do these challenges impact governance and economic development?

Week 6 (February 26): Federalism and Decentralization

Discussion topic: What are the prospects and pitfalls of devolving power to sub-state institutions in developing country contexts?


Week 7 (March 5): Rule of Law and Human Rights

Discussion topic: How can a rule of law and respect for human rights be established in developing countries? Is a “western” style rule of law necessary for governance and development?


**Spring break: March 8-16**

Week 8 (March 19): Strengthening Legislatures

Discussion topic: What is the role of the legislature in democratic systems? To what extent are Legislatures in developing countries able to carry out these functions?

Week 9 (March 26): Electoral Systems

Discussion topics: What factors determine how electoral systems are chosen and how they impact the distribution of power within political systems?


Week 10 (April 2): Constraining the Executive

Discussion topic: How should executive power be structured in developing regions where “hyper-presidentialism” has been an enduring feature of political life?


Week 11 (April 9): Developing the Judiciary

Discussion topic: What explains variation in judicial independence across developing countries (or even within countries)?

- Prempeh, H. Kwasi. 2006. “Marbury in Africa: Judicial Review and the Challenge of Constitutionalism in Contemporary Africa,” *Tulane Law Review* 80. **NOTE:** Read only 1239-1247 (Section I) and 1295-1323 (sections IV and V)
Week 12 (April 16): Post-Conflict Institution-building

Discussion topic: What institutions can best promote stability in a post-conflict country context?


Week 13 (April 23): Student Presentations of Research Findings

Week 14 (April 30): Student Presentations of Research Findings

*Research papers due Monday May 5th by 11:59pm to the “Assignments” tab on Sakai*