PS 503 - PRO-SEMINAR: APPROACHES TO COMPARATIVE POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Course Description and Objectives:
This course provides doctoral students with an advanced introduction to the study of comparative politics. The course has two basic objectives: to acquaint students with several key substantive areas of research in the field of comparative politics and to introduce the major theoretical and methodological debates that animate the field.  The course will provide students with intellectual tools that will improve their ability to analyze some of the most pressing political problems around the world today.

Comparative politics is both a subfield of the discipline of political science and an approach to the study of politics. As a subfield, comparative politics has an incredibly wide scope – with comparativists studying topics as diverse as the origins of the state, democratization, the dynamics of competitive authoritarianism, revolution, economic development, the welfare state, economic and social regulation, collective action, interest group representation, the impact of various democratic institutions on the effectiveness of government, executive-legislative relations, processes of judicialization, elections, parties, party systems, ethnicity, civil war, and the role of ideas in politics (to name but a few) – in countries around the world.   As an approach to the study of politics, comparative politics embraces – unsurprisingly – comparison! These comparisons take many forms, some small-N and qualitative, some large-N and quantitative. While there are ongoing methodological debates about the merits and limitations of various approaches, in a broad sense comparativists share a commitment to learning about politics through comparison.

As this course is designed to provide graduate students with a baseline knowledge of debates in the subfield, the requirements are different from those that would apply in a research seminar. There is less emphasis on independent research and far more emphasis on extensive reading of foundational and important recent works in the field. Students should go beyond the required readings, and read from the recommended readings as much as possible.