PSC/IR 255: Institutions and Underdevelopment

Spring 2013 – TR 09:40-10:55

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About the course

Why are some countries and societies so much richer than others? This course focuses on the political and institutional causes of differences in economic development across countries. We will address the importance of formal and informal institutions, ethnic and class conflict, the role and organization of the state, and social structure and culture in answering this important question.

Grading

There will be one in-class midterm exam on March 7, and a final exam on Thursday, May 9 from 4pm to 6pm. The midterm will cover all of the material taught up to, and including, March 5. The final exam will focus mostly on the material covered after spring break, though it may include some of the material covered before spring break.

Students are also required to submit four reading responses. A good reading response will be approximately 1200 words, and do the following: summarize the approach and findings of a paper covered in class, and offer a thoughtful critique of the paper in view of the other material that has been taught. Two of the responses must be on different readings covered prior to spring break. The other two must be on different readings covered after spring break. All reading responses must be submitted by email to the TA prior to start of the class in which they are covered.

I will use the Socratic method in class to determine grades for class participation. Each student will be called on, randomly, up to three times in the course of the semester, and will be expected to provide an answer to a question that I ask about the readings. Each time you are called, you should expect to speak for about three minutes, and you should try to promote further class discussion with your answer. If you are not present when your name is called, then you will not receive credit for that time’s participation. If you have a good reason for missing class, you should email me the day before class, explaining your circumstance. I will not cold call students who have informed me of a
good reason for why they will be absent. I will start cold calling on Jan. 22 and continue through April 30.

Your final class grade will be determined as follows:

- Four Reading Responses: 10% x 4 = 40%
- Class Participation: 10%
- Midterm Exam: 20%
- Final Exam: 30%

**Pre-requisite Knowledge**

Though there are no pre-requisites for this course, it is a fact that those who have a strong background in statistics will have an advantage over those who do not. Most of the readings are quite technical. While it would be unfair to expect students to understand every detail of every paper, students will be expected to achieve a basic understanding of both the substance and methodology of the papers. If you have not taken an advanced statistics class before (i.e. you do not know what the word “endogeneity” means) and it is possible for you to take the course at a future time, then you are encouraged to take such a statistics course before you take this course.

**Course Outline**

All course material will be available through Blackboard. Students are expected to do the readings prior to the class time for which they are scheduled.

**Jan. 17**
Introductory Class / Brief Review of Data Analysis

**Jan. 22**

**Jan. 24**

**Jan. 29**

**Jan. 31**

**Feb. 5**
Mar. 7  Midterm Exam.


Apr. 11 No Class.


