Western European Politics

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Office Hours: Mondays 1-2pm and Tuesdays 3:30-4:30pm or by appointment

Course Description

The goal of this seminar is to familiarize students with the politics of Western Europe. During the course of the semester, we will be exploring the critical dimensions which have shaped political life in this region since World War II. This thematic and comparative approach will allow us to understand why, for example, some countries have benefited from continuous and stable democratic governments and regimes whereas others have been plagued by instability and change; why unions and interest groups are critical bargaining players in only some countries; how certain countries have avoided the conflict associated with deep ethnic cleavages; and how greater European regionalization has created new and different political winners and losers across Western European states.

Course Requirements

This advanced seminar is open to graduate students; interested undergraduates may attend at the discretion of the instructor. The course grade will be based on three criteria: attendance and participation in class discussions, short response papers and a regularly scheduled final exam.

Informed participation in class: Students are expected to attend and participate in all class meetings. This seminar places an emphasis on discussion and debate, and thus, active participation is essential and expected. Many of the readings are challenging, and therefore, students should carefully read and take notes on the readings prior to attending class.

In addition, as part of the participation grade, each student will be responsible for knowing about one country in the region. We will choose countries on the first day of class. Before each class, the student will need to find out the characteristics of that country with regard to the topic at hand. At the last session
of the semester (Dec. 7), each student will turn in an information sheet(s) which details the characteristics of the country.

**Short (4 page) Response Papers:** Students will be asked to write reaction papers which critically discuss one major theme or debate present in the week’s readings. No additional, outside research should be undertaken for these assignments. **At least two of the papers must be completed before October 24. These papers are due at the start of class.** No late papers will be accepted. **By September 21, students need to give me a list of the dates on which they plan to submit a paper; these dates may be changed with sufficient prior notice.**

The goal of these papers is to identify the central issues raised in the assigned readings, to locate the principal author’s positions on those issues, and to comment critically on the state of the debate and the value of the individual contributions to it. Some of the questions that these papers should address include: What are the major theoretical or empirical strengths and weaknesses of the readings? How valuable or viable is the theory that each proposes? How effectively does it marshal evidence in support of the argument? Basically, you are writing a brief review essay. It should not be a summary of the readings, but a critical commentary and discussion of the issues that arise in the works. The readings should be carefully cited (with parenthetical citation or footnotes); an additional bibliography is not required.

**Final Exam:** A cumulative final exam will be given during the final exam period.

**Grading for the course will be determined as follows:**

**For Graduate Students:**  
- Participation: 20%  
- 5 short papers: 50%  
- Final Exam: 30%

**For Undergraduate Students:**  
- Participation: 20%  
- 4 short papers: 40%  
- Final Exam: 40%

**Readings**

In this course, we will read a combination of books, book chapters and journal articles. Articles and book chapters that are not available on the web (through JSTOR, etc) will be made available for you to copy. The following texts are available for purchase at the Bookstore:


*Recommended for an Overview of Western European Politics:*


**Class Schedule:**

**Sept. 7: Orientation and Overview**


**Sept. 14: What is Europe? The Development of Modern Europe**


**Sept. 21: European Societies and Cleavages**


Recommended:


**Sept. 28: Interest Articulation: Interest Groups and Political Parties**


Recommended:


**Oct. 5: Party Politics**


*Recommended:*
Gallagher, Michael Laver and Peter Mair, eds. *Representative Government in Modern Europe*. Chapters 7, 8, 10, 11.

**Institutions**  
**Oct. 12: Electoral Institutions**


**Oct. 19: Governmental Institutions**

Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, Chapters 7 and 11.


*Recommended:*
Gallagher, Michael Laver and Peter Mair, eds. *Representative Government in Modern Europe*. Chapters 2, 3.
Oct. 26: The Formation of Governments and Their Policy Implications


Recommended:

Nov. 2: Ethnicity and Citizenship


Nov. 9: Federalism and Regionalism


**Nov. 16: New Parties and Political Challenges**


**Nov. 23: Beyond the Nation-State: The European Union and EU Integration**


Other Articles TBA

*Recommended:*

Gallagher, Michael Laver and Peter Mair, eds. *Representative Government in Modern Europe*. Chapters 5.

**Nov. 30: European Union: European Parliament and Domestic Politics**

**Please note that students must turn in newspaper/journal articles for discussion in class Dec. 7.**


**Dec. 7: New Challenges for Europe in the 21st Century**
Readings for this week will include recent newspaper clippings or journal articles on the new problems facing Western Europe as chosen by Professor Meguid and students.