

Course Syllabus
PLS 335
European Political Systems
Department of Public and International Affairs
University of North Carolina Wilmington
Spring Semester, 2010

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Course Description: Europe as a region expresses many similarities in government and politics. Parliamentary systems with strong cabinets dominate the region. Strong party systems, with very fragmented multiparty systems, are common. Such political traditions deviate significantly from the American two-party dominant system, based on a presidential form of government. At the same time Europe also expresses a wide variety of diversity in its government and politics. Some states have semi-presidential systems, some have ceremonial monarchies, and some have elected ceremonial presidents. Some states have very stable majority party or party coalitions, other states have highly fractured multiparty systems with minority governments as the rule of the day. In short, Europe may express commonalities in how it differs from the U.S., but it expresses a wide variety within the region. In this course you will explore the regional politics of Europe. Our analysis of the region is driven largely by exploring the ways in which European states achieve representative government, given the variety of governing systems there are. To help drive the analysis home, you will see common examples used including: the UK, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands, Poland, Latvia, and Italy. Moreover, to help you gain a deeper understanding of the region you will complete a series of assignments on a single European country (on an approved country list).

Course Outcomes:

By the end of this course you will be able to...

- Analyze and compare the operation of parliamentary forms of government.
- Compare and contrast parliamentary, semi-presidential, and presidential forms of government.
- Evaluate the function of European court systems.
- Analyze the role European government administrations, and the recruitment of civil servants, and the various ways in which political power is divided within European countries.
- Evaluate the various types of political parties and party systems of the region, the electoral regimes of Europe and the impact of the electoral regime on government.

Required Text(s) and Materials:

Gallagher, M., Laver, M. & Mair, P. (2006). *Representative Government in Modern Europe*, 4th ed., Boston: McGraw Hill Companies

Course Requirements:

- **Exams:** During the semester students will complete three in-class exams. All exams are essay exams consisting of 3-4 four questions on materials related to the course outline below. You are expected to complete all reading assignments and to take notes in class on the reading assignments. Two exams are regular semester mid-term exams worth 100 points each. The final exam is partially comprehensive, given during the final exam period, and is worth 200 points. You will be provided with a study guide prior to each exam that will provide you with a list of potential questions for the exam. All exams total 400 points and are worth 80% of the course grade.
- **Country Profile Assignments:** The required textbook provides an analysis of European politics based on a variety of topics including the structures of government institutions, distributions of power, the party system, electoral regimes, and interest group systems. As part of the analysis of these topics the authors provide numerous examples from Europe. Their analysis includes (but is not limited to): France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. You are expected to gain further knowledge on these same topics on a different European country. You **may not** use any of the countries already covered in the book and listed above. You **MAY** select any country from this **APPROVED COUNTRY LIST**: Iceland, Ireland, Portugal, Switzerland, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Belgium, Luxembourg, Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Greece, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Estonia, Romania, or Cyprus. Once you have chosen a country you will complete a total of six (6) country profile assignments about that country's executive, parliament, courts, administration and distribution of power, party system and electoral system. Each assignment should be (typed) about 150-500 words (depending on the assignment). Be sure each assignment answers all the questions required. The content of each assignment is provided in the course outline below. The first 4 assignments should be about 150-300 words in length at the most and are worth 10 points each. The final two assignments are longer and more involved. They should be about 300-500 words in length (at the most), and each is worth 20 points. ***THE DUE DATES FOR THE ASSIGNMENTS ARE ANNOUNCED IN CLASS***, which means you need to be in class in order to get the due dates. Anyone that misses the due date because of an unexcused absence will have the ***Make-up exams and Late Assignments*** policy applied to them (see below). All assignments together are worth 100 points, or 20% of the total course grade.

Course Evaluation: The sum of all course requirements is 500 possible points for each student during the semester: The grading scale does include the +/- so pay attention to the grading scale listed.

Scale:

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|-----------|---------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|
| | A | =465-500pts. | A- | =450-464pts | |
| B+ | = 435-449pts. | B | =420-434 pts. | B- | =400-419pts. |
| C+ | =385-399pts. | C | =370-383pts. | C- | =350-369pts. |
| D+ | =335-349pts. | D | =320-334pts. | D- | =300-319pts. |
| | F | =299 or lower. | | | |

You can track your points through the semester as exams and assignments are handed back. If at any time you wish to come by and compare your tracking with the instructors records feel free to do so. I encourage students to diligently keep track of their records, including absences. Mistakes do happen when recording final grades and if one is made against you, be sure to address it quickly. Protecting your Grade Point Average is your responsibility.

Course Outline: The course is broken up into the following sections and topics related to each section. Reading Assignments for each section are listed here as well. Be sure to keep up with reading assignments. You will find studying for exams much easier if you have completed all reading assignments. Trying to go back and read when preparing the study guide wastes your time and diminishes quality study time.

Section 1: Overview of Europe

Topic

- 1. Regional Overview**
- 2. European Union**

Reading Assignment:

Gallagher et al, Chapter 1
Gallagher et al, Chapter 5

Exam I

Section 2: Government

Topic

1. The Executive

- **Assignment:** Choose a country from the approved country list and provide an overview of the executive branch. What executive positions exist, how are executives chosen, the composition and role of the cabinet.

Reading Assignment:

Gallagher et al, Chapter 2

2. Parliament

- **Assignment:** Choose a country from the approved country list and provide an overview of the parliament. What is the structure of the parliament, what is the balance of power between the houses of parliament, what is the balance of power between parliament and the executive, what is the role of parliament in policy making, what is the impact of the party system on the internal discipline and order of parliament.

Gallagher et al, Chapter 3

3. Courts and Constitutions

- **Assignment:** Choose a country from the approved country list and provide an overview of the judicial system. What is the authority and power of the court within the political system (i.e. do they have strong or weak judicial review powers), what is the role of the courts in making or revising policies, what is noticeable in terms of the court system structure.

Gallagher et al, Chapter 4

4. Distributions of Power

- **Assignment:** Choose a country from the approved country list and provide an overview of its administration and distribution of powers. What is the common path of recruitment for civil servants, what is the line of demarcation between the civil service and elected offices (in terms of policy making), is the country unitary, federal, or something in between?

Gallagher et al, Chapter 6

Exam II

Section 3: Interest Articulation and Aggregation

Topic

Reading Assignment:

1. Political Parties

Gallagher et al, Chapters 8 & 10

- **Assignment:** Choose a country from the approved country list and provide an overview of the party system. First, provide a list of the parties inside the state and provide a structure of the party system based on the common party families found in Europe. If a party falls outside the traditional party family structure say so and explain why and where it might fit. Second, provide election results for the parties over the 3-4 most recent elections. Give the percentage of the vote each party received in the election, and if known the number of seats the party received in the election.

2. Elections and Electoral Systems

Gallagher et al, Chapters 9, 11-12

- **Assignment:** Choose a country from the approved country list and provide an overview of its electoral system and the impact of the electoral system on government. First, analyze the electoral regime (system of rules used to elect representatives) and analyze the impact of this system on the distribution of seats between parties. Does the system amplify the power of small parties, or does it weaken small parties and give inordinate power to larger parties? Second, analyze the impact of the electoral system on government. Does your country rely on a majority government, majority coalition, multiparty coalition, minority government, etc. How stable is the government in-between election cycles? What is the average number of years between elections?

3. Interest Group Systems

Gallagher et al, Chapter 14

Final Exam (TBA)

Miscellaneous:

Make-up exams and late assignments: The pace of the course is always in flux. Class discussions and time needed to address study guides and the paper assignment will inevitably take time during the course. As such, assignment and exam dates are announced in class (with the exception of the final exam). If a student misses class it is his or her responsibility to get all information from class on the day missed. This includes notes and announcements regarding assignments and exams. If a student misses class and subsequently misses an assignment or exam due to the absence, this does not constitute an excuse for a make up exam, or late assignment. Make-up exams are allowed for excused absences only. Late assignments are allowed only for excused absences. An excused absence is one where the **student informs the instructor prior to class** that he or she will not be in class on a particular day, or a university excused absence. It is always in your interest, as a student, to inform the instructor before class that you will not be in class on a particular day.

Students with Disabilities: The instructor does recognize and will work with students with various disabilities. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing accommodations

of any type in order to participate in this class, please notify Disability Services (Westside Hall, 962-7555), provide the necessary documentation of the disability and arrange for the appropriate authorized accommodations. Once these accommodations are approved, any and all accommodations will be implemented as needed during the duration of this course.

General Rules of Classroom Conduct:

As time and technology march on there comes the need for new rules for classroom conduct. Though I personally do not like laying down such rules, they are necessary to ensure a peaceful learning environment for you and your fellow students. So please observe these rules.

Tardiness and Absences: Students must attend all classes scheduled during the semester. The only allowable absences are: a) University excused; b) university holidays; c) pre-approved absences where the student has contacted and informed the instructor of a need to miss class. Students should make any and all efforts (within reason) to be in class at the beginning of the class session everyday. Tardiness is generally disruptive to the flow of the course and is discourteous to your fellow students. If tardiness cannot be avoided, please enter the class quietly and try not to draw attention to yourself. Exercise judgment as well. If you are significantly late to a class, please do not enter. Speak with the instructor afterwards

Cell Phones, Pagers, other communication devices: Please turn off all communications devices before entering the class room. Only emergency personnel and individuals with outside emergency situations are allowed to keep communications devices on during class, and the device should be set to vibrate in order to avoid any unnecessary disruption during class. Since communications devices can become a vehicle for cheating during exams, any and all devices must be turned off during exams and quizzes, unless the above mentioned conditions apply. If an unapproved communication device is on during an exam, the instructor will confiscate it until the end of the exam.