**Course Syllabus**

**PLS 335**

***European Political Systems***

**Department of Public and International Affairs**

**University of North Carolina Wilmington**

**Spring Semester, 2012**

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**Course Description:** The recent economic troubles in Greece, Spain, Ireland, and Italy have drawn renewed attention to Europe, its development, and political condition. Europe is a region that has been developing over the past several centuries to a point where today it stands as one of the wealthiest regions with the highest standards of living, and some of the most representative governments in the world. The advantage to success in representative government is creating political systems that can absorb many different demands from competing political groups and weave them into policies that satisfy a range of interests. The disadvantage, as we have observed over the past year, is that when difficulties arise in areas like fiscal and monetary policy the effort to satisfy widely divergent demands is difficult in order to solve emergent issues. Combine this condition with obligation that each country now has to the European Union, and we have a recipe for political paralysis. In this course we will analyze and evaluate European political systems from a variety of perspectives. We will begin with a brief overview of the region to look at the historical evolution of Europe, the political culture of the region, and the evolution and role of the European Union in regional politics. Next, we turn our attention most directly to the organization of European political systems with an emphasis on the executive systems, parliamentary systems, courts and constitutions, administration, elections and parties. Much of the course content is delivered in abstract form to discussion general principles of government and political organization. To supplement this general characterization of the region in a more specific and tangible way you will complete a series of assignments that ask you to apply the general concepts to a specific country (of your choosing from an approved country list). These assignments provide you with a more detailed exploration of European politics where you can see how certain ideas and concepts manifest in reality. Which country will you choose: Sweden, or Iceland (the borderland country with the oldest legislature in the world), Greece (the birthplace of democracy), or Lithuania (an emerging country still shedding the shackles of its communist past), or some other country?

**Course Outcomes:**

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

* Compare and contrast the combinations of executive positions inside European States
* Analyze the operation of parliaments and compare that function to American legislative traditions.
* Evaluate the function of European court systems.
* Evaluate the types of political parties and party systems of the region, and 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. (2011). *Representative Government in Modern Europe, 5th 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 given during the final exam period and is worth 100 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 300 points and are worth 75% of the course grade. The final exam is not a comprehensive final.

* **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. There analysis includes (but is not limited to): Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, 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** selected 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, Slovenia, Croatia, or Cyprus. Once you have chosen a country you will complete a total of five (5) 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 3 assignments should be about 150-300 words in length. The first two assignments are worth 15 points each. The third assignment is worth 10 points. The final two assignments are longer and more involved. They should be about 300-500 words in length (at the most). These assignments are worth 30 points each. ***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 25% of the total course grade.

**Course Evaluation:** The sum of all course requirements is 400 possible points for each student during the semester:

Scale:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **A** =360-400pts. |  |
|  | **B** =320-359 pts. |  |
|  | **C** =280-319pts. |  |
|  | **D** =240-279pts. |  |
|  | **F** =239 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** **Reading Assignment**:

1. **Regional Overview** **No Reading (Lecture Notes only)**
2. **European Union** **Gallagher et al, Chapter 5**

**Exam I**

***Section 2: Government***

**Topic** **Reading Assignment**:

1. **The Executive** **Gallagher et al, Chapter 2**

* **Assignment 1**: 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. In addition provide a list of the most recent executives in your country. Include the Head of State, Head of Government, Cabinet, and include as many junior cabinet ministers as you can find. Is the chief executive (for cases where there is a prime minister) installed by a formal investiture vote? What is the formal mechanism for removing the chief executive from office (i.e. explain the confidence voting procedures). When was the most current executive leadership installed? (election).

1. **Parliament** **Gallagher et al, Chapter 3**

* **Assignment 2**: 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. Explain the particular model of parliament (Westminster or Consensus). Explain the confidence voting procedures from the parliamentary perspective (constructive votes of no-confidence, motions of no-confidence). How often is there a “question time” for the executive branch? Is there a formal committee system, and are the committees authoritative? How disciplined are the parties in parliament?

1. **Courts and Constitutions** **Gallagher et al, Chapter 4**

* **Assignment 3**: 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. What is the constitutional tradition of your country (does it follow the American model or the French Model)? What are the amending procedures for the constitution? Explain the notion of judicial review. Does the country require “concrete review” or “abstract review”? Does the country follow a “Kelsenian Model” of judicial review or some other model? What are the appointment procedures for justices/judges? What is the name of the highest court in the land?

1. **Distributions of Power** **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 4**: 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 5 most recent elections (you may use 4 cycles or less if you country does not have 5 full cycles yet, but clear this with the instructor first). 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. WikipediaTM is perhaps the best, most direct and readily available source of election results for countries. You can track election results for countries over several election cycles. Put this information in a table with the following format: (1) on the left hand side of the page list the party family in bold, and list all specific parties that fall under that party family, (2) along the top, in 5 separate columns, list the year of the election (use legislative election cycles only, not presidential cycles), In each cell for each party, in each column, list the actual vote count (if known) and the percent of the vote each party got in that election cycle, (3) in parenthesis under the vote total and vote percent, list the percent of seats the party won in the election. As additional information, calculate the total votes, vote percent, and total seats for each party family. Analyze these results. Provide the following information in the analysis: the average number of years (or days) between elections, which party families (and parties) tend to capture the highest vote count and seat count, and any important shifts in the distribution of votes over the election cycles (e.g. did a party family emerge, did the dominant party change, etc).

1. **Elections and Electoral Systems** **Gallagher et al, Chapters 9, 11-12**

* **Assignment 5**: 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 single party-majority, minimal wining coalition, surplus majority coalition, single party minority, minority coalition? How stable is the government in-between election cycles? What is the average number of years (or days for more accuracy) between elections? (Refer to table 12.3 on page 434 to provide answers to these questions). To complete the assignment reinsert the table you used in assignment 4 (political parties). Take note of the number of “effective parties” at the elective level and the legislative level (please refer to table 11.5 on page 391 for additional information on effective parties). In effect you want to look at the number of votes or vote percent per party compared to the percentage of seats held by the party after the election. This analysis will tell you if there is a mechanical amplification of party power from election to representation, or if the country achieves better representation in the election. The analysis will also demonstrate the trade-off between representation and stability of a government. Finally, analyze the volatility of election results. This requires some simple math on your part, but it is very simple. We use what is referred to as the *Pedersen Index* where you first calculate the difference in a party’s percentage of the vote between two elections, then you sum the absolute value of all gains and losses and divide by 2.

**Example:** Election (1): Party A=65%; Party B=25%; Party C=10%

Election (2): Party A=65%; Party B=15%; Party C=20%

Gain/Loss Party A=0%;; Party B=-10; Party C-+10

Sum: 0+[-10]+10=20/2

Total Volatility=10%

Interpretation: The higher the index value the more volatility there is in the party system from one election to the next. We consider it ideal when the index value is lower, it means the system is stable over time. There are always major electoral shifts where one party or coalition is tossed out of office. So periodic spikes in volatility are expected. What is considered problematic is when the Pedersen Index is persistently high over a series of elections. It suggests high levels of voter dissatisfaction and political instability. You need to calculate the Pedersen Index between all parties in each election cycle. You will have five index values. You can then assess if those values are stable or volatile, and evaluate what this means for the political system.

1. **Interest Group Systems** **Gallagher et al, Chapter 14**

**Final Exam (Wednesday May 2, 11:30 to 2:30)**

**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.

*Computers*: Increasingly students are more comfortable with using computers in class to take notes. I have no problem with using computers for note taking. However, there is a tendency among students with computers to periodically go online to get information, or because of other interests than the class lecture. Such behavior, while entirely your decision, does cause a distraction to other students. Therefore, any student using a computer for class is required to sit in seats at the rear of the class so as to reduce the potential to distract other students that may sit behind you. This applies to all students using computers.