School of Social and Political Studies
MSc Comparative Public Policy
MSc Policy Studies

Comparative Analysis of Social and Public Policy
Autumn Semester 2007
Convener: Ingela Naumann, ingela.naumann@ed.ac.uk
Contributors: Andy Aitchison, Jochen Clasen, Daniel Clegg, Frank Castles, Alison Smith

Mondays 4 - 6 pm,
Room 2.01, Psychology, 7 George Square

THE COURSE STARTS IN WEEK 2 ON MONDAY 24TH SEPTEMBER 2007

PLEASE NOTE DIFFERENT VENUE ON THE 22ND AND 29TH OCTOBER!!!

Level
This course is the compulsory research training course for the MSc degree in Comparative Public Policy, and is available as a course unit for other MSc students (taught and by research) and for PhD students in their first year.

Course Objectives and Structure
This course introduces students to the main methodological approaches to comparative policy analysis. Its aims are to give students an understanding of key issues involved in comparative social research and to develop their analytical skills in systematic comparison that will add rigour to their research and help achieve valid and well-founded generalizations and evaluations of social and public policy developments in national and international context.

The course will run as a series of ten two-hour seminar sessions. Each week, students will be introduced to a different aspect of comparative analysis, which will be discussed on the basis of one or two selected texts. Students are expected to have read and prepared these readings prior to each session. A course reader with the key readings will be available for purchase from the Graduate School office. Each week’s readings also include a list of key methodological and empirical research texts that serve as exemplars of the various approaches to comparative policy analysis. Examples will primarily reflect the research interests of staff, though students will be encouraged to bring and develop their own comparative interests.

The seminars will mostly be based on a mixture of staff and student presentations and discussions. Some weeks will also include some “lab” style elements focused on skills acquisition (please note different venue for the lab sessions!!). The final session will be organized as a panel where staff members discuss their comparative approaches and practical experiences with conducting empirical comparative research.
Learning Objectives
• understanding of the role of theory and modelling in comparative analysis
• knowledge of data sources and their limitations
• introduction to comparative methods and to issues of inference and generalisation
• understanding of context, constraints, choice and values in policy development
• exploration of processes of policy learning and policy transfer
• engagement with substantive issues in comparative social policy

Assessment
A short exercise (1000-1500 words) on a set assignment, and a 2500-3000 word essay, discussing an aspect of comparative analysis of the student’s choice, will be required.

PLEASE NOTE: In weeks 5 and 6 (22. + 29. October) the seminar will take place in the Statistics Lab of the Hugh Robson Building, George Square

Course Programme

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<td>2. 1.October</td>
<td>Concepts and comparative analysis</td>
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<td>Ideal types and typologies – useful tools for comparative analysis?</td>
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<td>The qualitative lessons of quantitative cross-national research</td>
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<td>6. 29.October</td>
<td>Cross-national comparison using large samples</td>
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<td>7. 5. November</td>
<td>Comparing few countries</td>
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<td>8. 12.November</td>
<td>Comparison in one country</td>
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<td>Panel discussion on comparative research “out in the field”</td>
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Week 1: The logic of comparative inquiry

Lecturer: Ingela Naumann

Topics covered:
Comparison is a key element of social and public policy analysis. This session takes a general look at why comparisons are central in the social sciences and what comparisons are for; what can be compared and what kind of comparisons there are.

Set texts:

Additional reading:

Methodological classics still worth reading:
Classical examples of historical comparisons:

Classical examples of political comparisons:

Classical examples of social policy comparisons:

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**Week 2: Concepts and comparative analysis**

*Lecturer: Daniel Clegg*

**Topics covered:**
- What are concepts and why are they important?
- ‘Travelling’ and ‘stretching’
- Family and radial categories
- The ladder of abstraction
- Concepts, ontology and comparative research design

**Set text:**

**Additional reading:**
Students may want to start with the general discussion in chapter 4 of Peters, G. (1998) *Comparative Politics*, Basingstoke: Palgrave (which also discusses ideal-type analysis, see week 3), but everyone should also try and read a couple of the more advanced texts listed below.

Week 3: Ideal types and typologies - useful tools for comparative analysis?  

Lecturer: Ingela Naumann

08.10.2007

Topics covered:
- what is an ideal type
- what are ideal types for
- examples of different typologies in social and public policy research
- do typologies based on ideal types have theoretical and empirical value?

Set texts:

Additional reading:
Examples of welfare state and social policy typologies:
Students are encouraged to look at at least two examples of the different social policy typologies from the list below.


Classical examples of typologies:

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Week 4: Comparative policy evaluation: constructing indices
Lecturer: Alison Smith 15.10.2007

This session is intended to be a “how to” session. It consists of a 1 hr lecture on how to build an index with the aim of cross-national comparison and a 1 hr class session designing an index.

Topics covered:
- Cross national policy evaluation
- Data gathering strategies
- Harmonisation of variables
- Building indices

Set text:

It is strongly recommended that you also read the following text:
De Vaus, D. 2002: Surveys in Social Research (5th Edition), Chapter 1: The Nature of Surveys; Chapter 4: Developing Indicators for Concepts; Chapter 12: Overview of analysis; Chapter 11: Building Scales (needs to be read after chapter 12).

Additional reading:

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**Week 5: The qualitative lessons of quantitative cross-national research**

*22.10.2007*

*Lecturer: Frank Castles*

PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF VENUE: HUGH ROBSON BULDING, STATS LAB

This seminar will have a dual focus. In the first half, we shall discuss the methodology [pros and cons] of relatively small-n quantitative research in social policy and political science. In the second half, Frank Castles will seek to demonstrate how model specification and case selection can hugely influence ones results in both quantitative and qualitative research.

**Set texts:**

**Additional reading:**

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Week 6: Cross-national comparison using large samples

Lecturer: Alison Smith

PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF VENUE: HUGH ROBSON BUILDING, STATS LAB

Topics covered:
- contrasting macro-social and micro-social data
- using “country” as a categorical variable;
- within country analysis; pooling cross-national data;
- issues around using survey data

Set text:

Additional reading:
Further discussion of cross-national quantitative research:
Selected research examples:

Week 7: Comparing few countries 05.11.2007
Lecturer: Jochen Clasen

Topics covered:
- aims of small-N comparisons
- Mill's methods of difference
- Mill's method of agreement
- case (country) selection
- constitution of cases
- causality and small-N comparisons

Set text:

Additional reading:
Week 8: 'The fraudulent comparativist?' The role of the single country study in comparative analysis 12.11.2007

Lecturer: Andy Aitchison

Topics covered:
- Rationales for a single-country study
- Single country studies and hypotheses: generation, confirmation, falsification
- Case selection and the single country study: likelihood and deviance

Set text:

Additional reading:
Students may find it is worth citing a general text on comparative analysis, for example Landman’s (2003) Issues and Methods in Comparative Politics: an Introduction, for some general pointers on the role of single-country studies in comparative analysis. However students will also be expected to engage with some of the more substantial readings on the topic, below.


*Garst, W.D. (1998): “From factor endowments to class struggle - Pre-World War I Germany and Rogowski's theory of trade and political cleavages”, Comparative Political Studies, 31(1), 22-44.


*texts marked with an asterisk should be available in electronic format; those without the asterisk are available in paper format in the library.
Week 9: Historical comparisons 19.11.2007
Ingela Naumann

Topics covered:
- Different forms of historical comparison: macro vs. micro-approaches
- within-case analysis: process tracing, pattern matching, historical narratives
- historical context and generalization
- analyzing stability and change: path-dependency, critical junctures, institutional layering

Set text:

Additional Reading:
McDonald, T. J. (ed.) (1996): The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences, Michigan. – see various contributions.

Methodological Controversies:

Week 10: Panel session: comparative research “out in the field”
Ingela Naumann + Team 26.11.2007

This session will be based on discussions between teaching staff and students about doing comparative research “out in the field”. The aim is to give students an idea of what concrete comparative research projects look like, about limitations, intricacies, pitfalls and excitements with empirical comparative research.

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COURSE ASSESSMENT:

Exercise: Construct a comparative framework for cross-national policy analysis
1. Develop and define a concept for a comparative cross-country analysis (such as child well-being or poverty) and discuss relevant dimensions of it.
2. Operationalize it (construct indicators, discuss availability/use of data sources, issues of validity and reliability).

Word limit: 1500 words
Submission deadline: 5th November, 3pm, return of exercise 26th November.

Essay: Choose an essay topic from the list below or write an essay on a topic of your own choice that relates to the issues discussed in this course. If you choose a topic on your own it needs to be agreed with the course convener. I suggest that by the end of week 5 you specify a title and produce an outline of the argument which you can discuss with either the course convener or any of the other lecturers on the course.

Word limit: 3000 words.
Submission deadline: Friday 14th December, 3pm, Graduate Office.

Selection of Essay Topics:

1. Why is careful attention to concepts and categories so important in comparative analysis?
2. Compare two welfare (or other) typologies with respect to their empirical validity and explanatory power.
3. Are indices too simplistic to be effective tools in academic policy analysis?
4. Explanatory power afforded by the use of large samples in cross-national research far exceeds that of alternative approaches to comparative policy analysis. Discuss.
5. Evaluate the contribution of single country studies to comparative research of social and public policy.
6. Discuss advantages and limitations of comparing few countries.
7. Discuss possibilities and problems of measuring change and stability of institutional settings within welfare states (or national systems) over time.
8. Discuss the appropriateness of different statistical techniques (regression, fuzzy-set analysis or any other technique you are familiar with) for cross-national research.