Exploring Political Transitions

Office: SS 3029
Office Hours: M 1:00-2:30 and by appointment
Tel: 416-978-3859
e-mail: victor.falkenheim@utoronto.ca

Course Overview

This course is intended primarily for M.A. students to meet the research requirements of the Departmental M.A. program. The primary purpose of the seminar is to provide an opportunity for students to design and conduct an independent research project on a topic of their choice. Topics chosen may fit within the major themes of the course, but equally students are free to define their own topics outside of those parameters.

The course is designed to assist students with their choice of research topic, with framing the research appropriately in terms of conceptualization and research design, and in identifying useful methodologies and appropriate resources and research materials. The seminar format will provide a collegial setting within which students can present their research, hone their presentational skills, gain useful feedback and develop a variety of skills useful in their future academic or professional life.

Format(s)

The format will vary during the year. The Fall semester will involve a number of standard colloquium-style sessions dealing with methodology and conceptualization. The substantive focus will be on issues of political transition. The purpose is not so much to introduce the broad field of transitology as to assess the various approaches that have been used in the study of ‘Third Wave’ transitions. In particular, I would like to examine the utility of a variety of popular problematics, including ‘civil society’, ‘contentious politics’ among others. Depending on student interest other concepts and issues may be added to this list as the year progresses.

A number of sessions will be devoted to the presentation and discussion of research projects as they take shape over the course of the year. In addition, a number of seminars will feature guest presentations by graduate students and faculty members reflecting on their own research choices and strategies at early and formative points in their professional development.
Evaluation:

Grades will be based on the following:

Research proposal, including brief literature review, proposed methodology and outline:
Initial Draft: Due: January 4. Revised Draft: March 1
Weight: 10%

Final Research Paper: Due: April 15 (For those graduating in June) Due: September 6
for those convocating in November,
Weight: 80%

Participation, including class discussion, research presentations
10%

Texts:
1. Barbara Geddes. Paradigms and Sandcastles: Theory Building and Research
2. Additional weekly readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Schedule of Topics and Readings: Fall Term

September 13 Course Introduction

September 20 Thinking About the Discipline

September 27 Disciplinary Alternatives
1. Moses and Knutsen, Ways of Knowing, Chapter 8.
2. Rosenau, Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences, Chapter 1.

October 4 Problematics and Paradigms
October 11  Classification and Regime Taxonomies


October 18  Conceptualization and Measurement: Rethinking Legitimacy


October 25  Civil Society and Political Transitions: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches


November 1  Case Selection and Research Puzzles

1. Geddes, Paradigms and Sandcastles, Chapter 3

November 8  Fall Reading Break: No Class

November 15  Library Orientation

November 22  Data, Meta-data and Narratives

1. Geddes, Paradigms and Sandcastles, Chapter 4.
2. Moses and Knutsen, Ways of Knowing, Chapter 9
November 29

‘Rational Choice’ and ‘Path Dependency’: The Virtues of Theory

1. Barbara Geddes, Paradigms and Sandcastles, Chapters 5.

Spring Term: Research Progress Meetings and Guest Lectures, Schedule to be announced.