

**THE UNIVERSITY OF OREGON  
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**

**NUMBER:** PS 607  
**TITLE:** Concepts and Methods in Social Science

**INSTRUCTOR:** Prof. Dr. Cas Mudde (casmudde@uoregon.edu)  
**TERM:** Winter 2009  
**DATE & TIME:** Mondays, 2:00-4:50  
**ROOM:** PLC 905  
**OFFICE HOURS:** Tue. 1:00 – 2:00 & Wed. 1:00 – 3:00  
**OFFICE:** 917 PLC; 346-4862

**Introduction:**

Concepts are crucial in any academic enterprise, and nowhere more so than in the social sciences, where researchers study social realities and have to use concepts that live up to both academic rigor and have at least some relation to popular usage and social reality. Unfortunately, conceptualization receives little attention in political science research and methods training. Similarly, the topic of methods is increasingly relegated to an issue of statistics within the social sciences.

This course builds upon the seminal work of Italian political scientists Giovanni Sartori, whose work has impacted generations of political scientists worldwide. By reading several of his classic texts, as well as texts of some of his most influential disciples, we will develop a deeper understanding of the many dos and don'ts of conceptualization and comparison. These insights will be then employed in critical analyses of contemporary political science research.

This is very much a work-in-progress course, in the sense that (1) I have never taught this course before; (2) you are expected to relate the course to your own research interests; (3) some literature will be added during the course.

**Prerequisites**

This course does not require the student to have taken any specific courses beforehand, although prior knowledge of social science methodology and philosophical logics will undoubtedly prove helpful. Similarly, having a research project in mind throughout the course will help giving this at times highly abstract topic hand and feet.

**Course objectives:**

The objectives of the course are:

- o To provide a deeper understanding of the key writings of Giovanni Sartori on concepts and (comparative) methods.
- o To introduce students to the dos and don'ts of conceptualization and comparison.

- o To help students think critically about the use of concepts and methods in (comparative) social science.
- o To help students assess (comparative) social science research in terms of concepts and method.

### **Course Text**

This course is based largely on one book, which combines several seminal articles of Giovanni Sartori with conceptual analyses by other comparative scholars working more or less in the Sartorian tradition. Students are therefore advised to buy the following text for this course:

**Collier, David and John Gerring (ed.). *Concepts and Method in Social Science: The Tradition of Giovanni Sartori*. London: Routledge, 2009.**

The other required readings will be made available through Blackboard.

### **Teaching Methodology:**

The course will use the following teaching methodologies:

- o Group discussions
- o Student presentations

### **Classroom Activity**

This class meets once a week and attendance is mandatory. Each absence will result in half a letter grade reduction in your final grade. Students are expected to have read (at least) all required readings before the relevant class and to participate very actively in the class discussion. It is forbidden to use cell phones or surf the Internet in class.

### **Course Evaluation:**

The course evaluation will consist of the following:

- o Three oral presentations of 20-30 minutes, introducing a text to the class (1/3)
- o One individual essay, a short research outline, max. 5.000 words exclusive (1/3)
- o One long individual paper, a Sartorian assessment of Mudde (2007), max. 5.000 words exclusive (1/3)

The short research outline should be sent to all students and the instructor by February 13, 2009, 12.00 PT, so that everyone has ample time to read them in advance of the class. They should focus particularly on conceptualization and method (in the Sartorian sense). What concept did you choose and why? What method of investigation did you use and why? If you are unsure about this assignment, please come and discuss it during my office hours. Late assignments lose a half letter grade each day.

The long individual paper should assess chapter 1 (“Constructing a conceptual framework”) of Mudde (2007) on the basis of the key ideas of concept formation of Sartori, as studied in (particularly) the first part of the course. The deadline for the paper is March 16, 2009, 12.00 PT. Late assignments lose a half letter grade each day.

While I don't require a specific reference style, you will need to reference according to normal academic standards, using one and the same system consistently throughout your paper. Lay-out: use Times New Roman 12 pt (or something similar), lining of (at least) 1.5, paging, and normal margins. *It's the number of words that counts, not the number of pages!* The word limit excludes all (foot or end) notes and references! If you go substantially over the word limit (more than 10% extra), you will be penalized.

### **Academic Honesty**

I am aware that in this day and age it is getting more and more tempting to plagiarize, given the wonders of Internet. However, it is also more and more easy to detect plagiarism and it will be severely punished. At the very least cheating or plagiarism will result in failing the class; most such cases will be brought to the attention of the university. If you have any doubt at all about what constitutes plagiarism, please see the UO information at <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/>.

**Thematic Outline:**

**PART I – THEORY: SARTORI’S SEMINAL ARTICLES**

**1) On Concepts and Politics (01/05)**

Compulsory Readings:

Collier & Gerring, Introduction

Sartori, chapters 1 and 2

**2) Conceptualization (01/12)**

Compulsory Readings:

Sartori, chapters 3 and 4

**3) Comparison (01/19)**

Compulsory Readings:

Sartori, chapters 5 and 6

**PART II – PRACTICE: SARTORI’S DISCIPLES**

**4) Intension vs. Extension (01/26)**

Compulsory Readings:

Goertz, chapter 7

Kotowski, chapter 8

**5) Conceptual Hierarchies (02/02)**

Compulsory Reading:

Gerring & Baresi, chapter 9

Collier & Levitsky, chapter 10

**6) Concepts and Causality (02/09)**

Compulsory Readings:

Kurtz, chapter 11

Levitsky, chapter 12

## **PART III – APPLICATIONS: ASSESSING THE LITERATURE**

### **7) Research Design (02/16)**

*In this class students will critically assess the research designs of their classmates. The particular focus is on the concepts and methods used. Is the conceptualization clear? Is the comparison logical and correct?*

#### Compulsory Readings:

Research design outlines

### **8) Conceptualizations (02/23)**

*In this class we will critically assess articles/book chapters that deal with the conceptualization of the prime concept of a major research project/book. Students have to choose and discuss one additional article/chapter.*

#### Compulsory Readings:

Collier, David and James E. Mahon, Jr., “Conceptual ‘Stretching’ Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis”, *American Political Science Review*, Vol.87, No.4, 1993, pp.845–55.

Bevir, Mark and Asaf Kedar, “Concept Formation in Political Science: An Anti-Naturalist Critique of Qualitative Methodology”, *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol.6, No.3, 2008, pp.503-517.

Goertz, Gary and Amy Mazur, “Mapping Gender and Politics Concepts: Ten Guidelines”, in Gary Goertz and Amy G. Mazur (eds.), *Politics, Gender, and Concepts: Theory and Methodology*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, pp.14-43.

### **9) Comparisons (03/02)**

*In this class we will critically assess two articles/book chapters that deal with the comparative logic and method of a major research project/book. Students have to choose and discuss one additional article/chapter.*

#### Compulsory Readings:

Przeworski, Adam and Henry Teune, *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry*. New York: Wiley-Interscience, chapter 2.

### **10) Sartori in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (03/09)**

*We will shortly discuss the relevance of Sartori to contemporary political science. In addition, this class will address all questions students might (still) have with regard to the readings or other (related) issues of concepts and methods in social science.*

#### Compulsory Readings:

Chapters 13-15