COURSE OVERVIEW AND GOALS

What are the political sources of Africa’s poor economic performance? Why have African states historically been weak and poorly governed? Why have some African countries transitioned to democracy while others have not, and does democracy “matter” for the poor living in African countries? What is ethnic identity and why is it important to politics in many African countries? What explains conflict and political violence? Is the image of Africa as being conflict-ridden, poorly governed, and economically backward outdated? That is, are things changing in Africa?

To address these and other questions, this course surveys the major themes, issues, and theories in the politics of Africa. We will discuss broad trends and issues across the continent. At the same time, we will be attuned to the diversity of political, social, and economic life in Africa. Where possible, we will also seek to place Africa’s political and economic trajectory in comparative perspective.

This course is organized thematically. Course readings and lectures will provide details about politics in particular African cases. A group policy project will provide the opportunity for each student to develop expertise in the politics of one African country and in a domain of contemporary policy importance.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This course has the following learning objectives:

- Students will be able to engage critically in policy and academic debates about politics in Africa.
- Students will understand and be able to assess the utility and limitations of the dominant theoretical approaches to politics in Africa.
- Students will gain expertise in the politics of one African country.
- Students will be able to identify the sources of a policy challenge in Africa and make policy recommendations to different international actors.
- Students will be better able to work collaboratively in a team on a difficult policy problem.
- Students will be better able to communicate their ideas in oral presentations and in writing.

CLASS MEETINGS

The course meets twice per week (Tuesdays and Thursdays). Class meetings will include a mix of lecture and discussion. In order to understand the themes and debates presented in lecture, to participate actively in discussions, and, ultimately, to get as much as possible out of this course, it is essential that students complete all required readings prior to lecture.
CLASSROOM POLICIES

I will allow the use of laptops to take notes only. However, if a student’s laptop becomes a distraction to the rest of the class, that student will be asked to leave. The use of cell phones and other electronic devices is not permitted during class. Texting, emailing, checking facebook and twitter, surfing the internet, and so on are disruptive and degrade the quality of your education and that of your fellow students. If you do these (and other related activities) in class, you will be asked to leave.

I would like to encourage students to use their computers responsibly during class and to avoid distractions during our time together. It is all too easy to check email, peruse Facebook and Twitter, send texts, and so on during lecture. These activities may seem harmless but they are not. Engaging in them during class, even briefly, obstructs your concentration and ability to learn and think deeply. All of the available research shows that multi-tasking (particularly on the internet) has negative impacts on intellectual performance. An intellectually engaging classroom also requires participation, active listening, and mutual respect. Active listening requires that we focus on the content of our colleagues’ comments and arguments, rather than on our email or Facebook accounts. I expect that all students will be respectful to one another in their use of technology in the classroom.

BLACKBOARD

All course documents, including the syllabus, will be posted on the blackboard page for this course at http://blackboard.gwu.edu. To log on to Blackboard, you will need to use your Net ID and email password. If you have any questions about how to use the system, try going to http://helpdesk.gwu.edu.

READINGS

This course has a substantial amount of reading, which is intended to complement the lectures and to serve as a basis for discussion. Both lectures and readings will be covered on the exams and one is not a substitute the other.

Students are expected to locate journal articles using the library’s electronic resources. Book chapters and articles that are not available through the library will available on Blackboard.

We will read substantial portions of several books. Copyright laws prevent me from posting these readings on Blackboard. Each book will be placed on reserve at the library and each is available for purchase at the bookstore. Used versions of each of these books can generally be found online very cheaply. The books are as follows:

- Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa*
- Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa*
- Daniel Jordan Smith, *A Culture of Corruption*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

*Attendance:* Course attendance is not required. However, the substance of lecture will often differ from the content of the readings. Lectures and readings are designed to be complementary resources and material from each will be tested on the midterm and final. If you do not attend many lectures, it will be difficult to do well in the course.
Map quiz: Studying African politics requires that we know the political geography of the continent. On September 4 (Thursday of Week 2), students will be given a blank map of Africa. Ten countries will be selected at random for you to identify. A recent map of Africa is included at the end of this syllabus.

Midterm: There will be an in-class midterm on October 14. The midterm will include a small number of multiple-choice questions and a short essay question.

Group project paper and presentation: Groups of 5-6 students will each be assigned to work on a project that investigates an area of contemporary policy relevance in a particular African country. The goal is for students to develop expertise in the politics of a particular African country and in an important political and policy domain. Each group will make a formal presentation to the class on their topic (see dates in the schedule below). Each group will also turn in a policy paper (due December 4). Details on topics and requirements will be distributed.

Final: The final will include a small number of multiple-choice questions. It will also include two short essay questions.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

- Map quiz (10 percent)
- Midterm (20 percent)
- Group project and presentation (30 percent)
- Final (40 percent)

I will assign letter grades as follows: A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D (60-69), F (0-59). Note that there are no +/- grades in the D or F range. Grades for this course will not be curved.

Other important information about grading for this course:

- If you have any questions about the grade you received on a particular assignment, I am happy to discuss the grade with you and to suggest strategies for improving your grades in the future.
- If you do not think that the grade you received reflects the quality of your work you may formally request a re-grade. To do so, you must submit a written petition that explains why your grade does not reflect the quality of your work. Be aware that if I re-grade your assignment, your grade may go up or down and the new grade you receive will be final.
- There will not be opportunities to do extra-credit work to improve your grade or to re-do assignments.
- Late assignments will not be tolerated. Your grade will be lowered by one-half of a letter grade for each day it is late. If you do not complete an assignment you will receive a grade of zero.
- There will be no makeup exams for the map quiz, midterm, and final. If you do not show up, you will receive a grade of zero.
- There are only two exceptions to the late-assignment and make-up exam policy: illness or family emergency. If either of these circumstances arises, you must notify me ahead of time and you must provide written documentation.

If an assignment/test/quiz falls on a day that you will be observing a religious holiday, we will work together to find an alternative time for you to complete the assignment. You must communicate with me in advance.
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I expect that students will hold themselves to the highest standards of academic integrity. Academic dishonesty of any form will not be tolerated. The GW Code of Academic Integrity defines academic dishonesty as: “cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” Suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be referred to the Office of Academic Integrity. If you have questions about what constitutes proper use of published or unpublished sources, please ask me. Also, please review the Code at http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html.

STUDENT SUPPORT

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Marvin Center, Suite 242, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please see http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/. The University Counseling Center (UCC) offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students’ personal, social, career, and study skills problems. See the following website for more info: http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel/CounselingServices/AcademicSupportServices.
COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

August 26: Course Introduction

Binyavanga Wainaina, “How to Write About Africa,” Granta 92
(http://www.granta.com/Archive/92/How-to-Write-about-Africa/Page-1)

August 28: Pre-colonial Africa and the Slave Trade


Adam Hochschild. 1998. King Leopold’s Ghost, Prologue


September 2: Colonial Rule: Conquest and Policies


September 4: Colonial Rule: Legacies

Assignment: Map quiz in class


September 9: Nationalist Movements and Independence

Policy project groups will meet during second half of class


September 11: The African State Post-Independence


September 16: Informal Institutions and Clientelism


September 18: Politics and Economic Development after Independence


September 23: “Democratization” in the 1990s


September 25: Regime Trajectories after Democratization


September 30: Ethnic Politics Part I


October 2: Ethnic Politics Part II


October 7: Elections and Voting in Contemporary Africa


October 9: Elections Part II + Midterm Review

October 14: Midterm

October 16: Group project presentation preparation

Groups will meet in class to prepare presentations

October 21: Civil War

Assignment: Democratic Republic of Congo presentation in class


October 23: Genocide

Assignment: Rwanda presentation in class


October 28: Political Violence, Violent Crime, and Vigilantism

Assignment: Kenya presentation in class


October 30: Terrorism and Religious Violence

Assignment: Nigeria group presentation in class


November 4: Natural Resources

Assignment: Ghana group presentation in class

November 6: Corruption and Governance

Assignment: Angola group presentation in class


November 11: The HIV/AIDS Crisis

Assignment: South Africa group presentation in class


November 13: Religion and Politics

Assignment: Uganda group presentation in class


November 18: The Politics of Development Interventions


November 20: The Politics of Foreign Aid


November 25: What Can and Should “We” Do to Help Africa?


November 27: Thanksgiving (no class)

December 2: Make up day (no class)

December 4: Looking to the Future

Assignment: Group policy papers due

