Comparative Politics

From the faculty committee for Comparative Politics
Preliminary Exam for the Ph.D., to begin fall 2014.

Introduction:
Preliminary examinations are about demonstrating breadth; dissertations are about demonstrating specialized knowledge. Good answers to preliminary examination questions may illustrate critical points with examples from one or many countries so long as case material (regardless of how many countries it involves) buttresses theoretical arguments. Accordingly, an essay should convey that a student is: (1) well-versed in the key literature and (2) able to knowledgeably apply a case or cases of their own choosing to that literature.

You must answer one question in each section (Sections I-III). Answers for each question should be no more that 2,500 words. You may turn in your reference pages by 1:00 pm the day after your examination. Your reference pages are not counted in the word limit.

Section I: Comparative Theory
In preparation for this section, you should think about comparative theories and how to link them to the big questions in political science. You should be able to diagnose and analyzes various aspects of theory and bring in your own examples. You should be able to derive a question from one of the general theories and think about how to apply it.

Section II: Comparative Methods
This section will cover the range of methodological issues that have been raised in the context of comparative politics. This is not a statistics exam, but every student in comparative politics is expected to be familiar with a range of issues, such as conceptual stretching, most different and most similar systems designs, functional equivalence. In preparation for this section, you should be familiar with the various methodological approaches commonly used in comparative politics. In addition, you should be able to discuss past and contemporary methodological debates in the field regarding different approaches to the study of comparative politics.

Section III: Substantive and Thematic Area
When you declare your intention to take the comparative politics comprehensive exam, we ask that you declare an area in comparative politics to form the basis of a question in this section. For example, you could indicate “institutions,” “political parties,” or “social movements.” Section III will not be limited to only that area (or specialization) of comparative politics, but there will be at least one question addressing your declared topic of interest.