Course description and objectives:

The state remains at the center of some of the most important political-institutional stories of our time, from communist China’s *sui generis* path to market and recurrent civil war in Africa to the Eurozone’s crisis and the unfolding of the Arab Spring. In Latin America, meanwhile, states continue to puzzle because they loom large in politics and society yet are often ineffectual providers of public goods.

This course takes a close look at the most influential theories of the state and state-building, then places three major and distinctive empirical cases in comparative perspective: Mexico, Egypt, and the United States.

The objective of the course is to gain a better understanding of states both as agents of power and as stakes in the struggle for power. More specifically, we want to know why the state -- the quintessential power monopolist and the most tempting of prizes -- can be strong or weak, effective or ineffective, despotic or democratic, or simply muddle through, coping day to day with the vicissitudes of domination and rule.
**Requirements:**

This is a lecture course, but dialogue between the instructor and the class is part of the key to success. Students therefore are expected to do the assigned readings before each session (we meet twice a week). They should also make sure to bring the readings to class, as we will consult the texts frequently.

Grades will be determined as follows: 30% midterm (take-home exam, 10 double-spaced pages); 60% final (take-home exam, 10 double-spaced pages); and 10% class participation.

*Please note that this course is not suitable for freshmen unless they have taken Introduction to Comparative Politics.*

I. “The State” -- a stylized discussion

1. **Introduction**. No readings assigned.

II. Theoretical and historical materials

2. **A brief background**


3. **Classical perspectives on the state**


4. **Classical perspectives (continued)**


5. From traditional states to absolutism and the nation-state


6. From absolutism to the nation-state: capitalism and the state


7. Tilly, Mann and European state-formation


III. State-Building and Society

8. Opposing perspectives on “political order”


9. Who puts “the state” in state-building?

Theda Skocpol: Introduction to *Bringing the State Back In*, 3-37.


10. State/society pt. 1: state-in-society


12. State/Society pt. 2: contemporary changes in governance/society


Bob Jessop, “Narrating the Future of the National Economy and the National State: Remarks on Remapping Regulation and Reinventing
IV. “Post-” Perspectives on State-Formation

13. Ideological and symbolic power


14. Ideological and Symbolic Power (continued)

*Pierre Bourdieu* “Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field,” *State/Culture*, 3-75.

V. Expressive power

15. Elaboration


16. Denial
VI. State failure and Reconstruction

17. Post-conflict situations


VII. Case Studies

18. Latin America and Mexico

Overview


19. Latin America and Mexico (continued)


Mary Kay Vaughan, “Nationalizing the Countryside: Schools and Rural Communities in the 1930s,” in Mary Kay Vaughn and Stephen

**20. Latin America and Mexico (continued)**


**Egypt**

**21. Identity and the state**


**22. Change, challenge, Egypt (continued)**


23. The United States


24. The United States (Continued)


25. Conclusion

Review 3 assigned readings you found most compelling on any topic or country.