

Course Title	:	Comparative Research Methods in Social Policy
Course Code	:	SOC606
Recommended Study Year	:	Taught Master Year 1
No. of Credits/Term	:	3
Mode of Tuition	:	Lectures, computer workshops and tutorials
Class Contact Hours	:	3 hours per week
Category in Major Prog.	:	Master of Social Sciences in Comparative Social Policy (International)
Discipline	:	Sociology and Social Policy
Prerequisite(s)	:	N/A
Co-requisite(s)	:	N/A
Exclusion(s)	:	N/A
Exemption Requirement(s)	:	N/A

Brief Course Description

This required course begins with a broad overview of the nature, measurement, and limitations of major social indicators used in comparative social policy analysis. Student will then learn to apply these indicators by ‘actively comparing’ data provided by international organisations, including the United Nations, OECD, World Bank, UNESCO. As such, the course is underpinned by a series of interrelated ‘hands on’ data workshops that require students to explore and interpret social indicators relating to social policy. Weekly exercises will allow students to test the validity of arguments put forward by key theorists in comparative social policy analysis and to explore some of the methodological difficulties involved in conducting comparative research.

Aims

This course aims to equip students with the knowledge to understand:

1. The quantitative comparative approach to the study of key pillars of social policy, such as education, employment, social security, housing and health care;
2. Social indicators and methodological techniques employed in comparative social policy research;
3. Macro-comparative data sources and software packages; and
4. Analytical and methodological debates in comparative social policy analysis.

It will, thus, instil in them the ability to apply such knowledge to actively evaluate and to compare social policies across national contexts.

Learning Outcomes (LOs)

On completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. **Identify** the advantages and disadvantages of a comparative approach to the study of social policy;
2. **Summarise** key data sources and research methodologies that exist to explore the broad ‘typologies’ of education, employment, social security, housing and health care policy;
3. **Analyse** the nature, measurements, and limitations of major social indicators;
4. **Effectively evaluate** cross-national social policies both orally and in writing; and
5. **Design** independent research on social indicators using dependable sources.

Indicative Contents

1. Introduction
 - i. Why Compare? How to Compare? Who to Compare?
 - ii. The nature and functions of social indicators
 - iii. Introduction to data sources and software packages
2. Measures of population dynamics
 - i. Population size, growth rate, distribution and population pyramid
 - ii. Indicators of mortality, fertility and migration
 - iii. Indicators of population ageing
 - iv. World trends in population dynamics
2. Measures of socio-economic indicators
 - i. Gross domestic product
 - ii. Economic growth
 - iii. Globalisation
 - iv. Labour force participation
3. Measures of health status
 - i. Objective health status
 - ii. Subjective health status
 - iii. World trends in global health
4. Measures of quality of life
 - i. Quality of life and life satisfaction
 - ii. Domains of life satisfaction
 - iii. Subjective well-being and happiness
 - iv. World trends in human development

5. Measures of poverty and income inequality
 - i. Poverty lines and the working poor
 - ii. Gini index and Palma ratio
 - iii. World trends in income disparities and poverty
6. Measures of social policy inputs
 - i. Social expenditure
 - ii. Decommmodification
 - iii. World trends in social policy expansion and retrenchment
7. Measures of gender, race, and ethnicity
 - i. Gender equality indices
 - ii. Measuring race and ethnicity
 - iii. World trends in social equality
8. Exploring Demographic, Economic, Labour Market Trends
9. Exploring Social Policy Inputs and Outcomes
10. Capturing Social Policy Diversity Through Indices
11. Causes and Correlation in Comparative Social Policy Analysis
12. Conclusion
 - i. Future development of social indicators
 - ii. Mixing social indicators with comparative historical case studies

Teaching Method

Lectures are combined with ‘hands-on’ computer workshops and flipped classrooms, where students have to engage actively in discussions. Lectures will provide students with an introduction to key theories in comparative social policy research including the social indicators commonly used in this literature. Hands-on computer workshops and flipped classrooms will train students ability to actively analyse real comparative data around the globe and facilitate their ability to identify meaningful research questions to pursue and answer on their own.

Assessment

Continuous assessment	100%
<i>Participation and engagement</i>	20%
<i>Group presentation</i>	30%
<i>Research report</i>	50%

Participation and Engagement 20%	• Students will be asked to actively participate in class discussions and contribute in a constructive manner. • They will also complete weekly computer exercises to actively apply the materials on the comparative approach to the study of social policy and key data sources and research methodologies covered in lectures and compulsory readings. • Grading will be based on the marking rubric provided on <i>Page 6</i> of this syllabus.
Group presentation 30%	• Students will form groups and give presentations on topics mostly identified by themselves (the instructor may assist individual groups to identify suitable research questions). • The group presentation will be designed to allow students to analyse these research questions with reference to key policy issues, theories in the literature, or the nature, measurements, and limitations of major social indicators. • Excellent presentation will manage to effectively evaluate the policy issue, theory, or social indicator in questions and begin to suggest possible solutions with reference to meaningful dependable cross-national evidence. • Each presentation will last between 20-30 minutes and be followed by questions and discussion. • Grading will be based on the marking rubric provided on <i>Page 5</i> of this course outline.
Research report 50%	• Students will have to submit an individual research report of no more than 4,000 words (excluding cover page, tables, figures, references, and appendices). • The theme of the report will be the students' choice: students can choose to focus on discussing any specific topic related to the course content, but in most cases the theme will be further developed from the group presentation thus training them not only analyse cross-national social policies orally, but also in writing. • Excellent research reports will be fully developed independent pieces of research on social indicators, which begin to potentially make a contribution to the existing literature. • Grading will be based on the marking rubric provided on <i>Page 6</i> of this course outline.

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

Learning outcome	Assessment Method		
	Participation and engagement	Group presentation	Research report
1. Identify the advantages and disadvantages of a comparative approach to the study of social policy	X	X	X
2. Summarise key data sources and research methodologies that exist to explore the broad 'typologies' of education, employment, social security, housing and health care policy	X	X	X
3. Analyse the nature, measurements, and limitations of major social indicators	X	X	X
4. Effectively evaluate cross-national social policies both orally and in writing		X	X
5. Design independent research on social indicators using dependable sources			X

Required/Essential Readings:

Hemerijck, A. (2012) *Changing Welfare States*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Land, Kenneth C., Michalos, Alex C. Sirgy, Joseph (eds.) (2012) *Handbook of Social Indicators and Quality of Life Research*. NY: Springer

Morel, N., Palier, B., & Palme, J. (2012) *Towards a Social Investment Welfare State?: Ideas, Policies and Challenges*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Various years, *Society At A Glance*, OECD Publication.

Recommended/Supplementary Readings:

- Census and Statistics Department, Various years, Annual Digest of Statistics, Hong Kong: Government Printer.
- Census and Statistics Department, Biennial, Hong Kong Social and Economic Trends, Hong Kong: Government Printer.
- Census and Statistics Department, An outline of Statistical Development, Hong Kong: Government Printer, 2009.
- The United Nations (UN Women) Progress of the World's Women 2015-16: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights. NY.: United Nations, 2015
- The United Nations (Department of Social and Economic affairs), Global Challenge and Global Opportunity: Trends in Sustainable Development, N.Y.:
- United Nations, 2002. The United Nations (Population Division), World Population Ageing, 2007, N.Y.: United Nations, 2008.
- The United Nations (Population Division), World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision. N.Y.: United Nations, 2009.

- The United Nations (Statistics Division), Handbook of Social Indicators, N.Y.: United Nations, 1989.
- The United Nations (Statistics Division), The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics. N.Y.: United Nations, 2006.
- The World Bank, Various years, World Development Report, The World Bank.
- World Economic Forum, Various years, Global Competitiveness Report. WEF Publication.
- World Health Organisation, Various years, The World Health Report, WHO Publication.

Important Notes

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of **9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week** to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is “the presentation of another person’s work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student’s own work”. Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.
- (4) To enhance students’ understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course “Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness” is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>.
- (5) Students must adhere to the University’s guidelines and practices when using Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. The official documents “*Guidelines for Using GAI Tools at Lingnan University*” and “*Best Practices for Ethical and Responsible Use of GAI Tools in Course Assessments*” can be found here: <https://www.ln.edu.hk/tlc/generative-artificial-intelligence/gai-guidelines-best-practices>.

Marking rubric for participation and engagement (20%):

	A A- Excellent 100-80	B+ B B- Good 79-65	C+ C C- Pass 64-50	F Failure 49-0
Contributes to group meetings (25%)	<i>Helps group discussions move forward by demonstrating analytical thinking.</i>	<i>Offers new suggestions to advance the work of the group.</i>	<i>Shares ideas but does not advance the work of the group.</i>	<i>Does not share ideas.</i>
Facilitates the contributions of course participants (25%)	<i>Engages team members in ways that facilitate their contributions to group discussions by both constructively building upon or synthesizing the contributions of others as well as noticing when someone is not participating and inviting them to engage.</i>	<i>Engages team members in ways that facilitate their contributions to meetings by restating the views of other team members and/or asking questions for clarification.</i>	<i>Engages team members by taking turns and listening to others without interrupting.</i>	<i>Does not engage team members and fails to listen to others.</i>
Fosters constructive team environment (25%)	<i>Supports a constructive team climate by doing all of the following:</i> <i>• Treats team members respectfully by being polite and constructive in communication.</i> <i>• Uses positive vocal or written tone, facial expressions, and/or body language to convey a positive attitude about the group and its work.</i> <i>• Provides assistance and/or encouragement to team members.</i>	<i>Supports a constructive team climate by doing any two of the following:</i> <i>• Treats team members respectfully by being polite and constructive in communication.</i> <i>• Uses positive vocal or written tone, facial expressions, and/or body language to convey a positive attitude about the group and its work.</i> <i>• Provides assistance and/or encouragement to team members.</i>	<i>Supports a constructive team climate by doing any one of the following:</i> <i>• Treats team members respectfully by being polite and constructive in communication.</i> <i>• Uses positive vocal or written tone, facial expressions, and/or body language to convey a positive attitude about the group and its work.</i> <i>• Provides assistance and/or encouragement to team members.</i>	<i>Does not support a constructive team climate.</i>
Individual contributions outside of team meetings (25%)	<i>Completes all assigned tasks by deadline. Work accomplished is thorough, comprehensive, and advances teaching and learning in the group. Proactively helps other team members complete their assigned tasks to a similar level of excellence.</i>	<i>Completes all assigned tasks by deadline. Work accomplished advances the project.</i>	<i>Completes all assigned tasks by deadline.</i>	<i>Fails to complete assigned tasks by the deadline.</i>

Source: Adapted from TEAMWORK VALUE RUBRIC (for more information, see: value@aacu.org)

Marking rubric for group presentation (30%):

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Pass	Failure
	A (85-100) A- (80-84)	B+ (75-79) B (70-74) B- (65-69)	C+ (60-64) C (55-59) C- (50-54)	F (0-49)
Data and commands (20%)	<i>Uses the correct data set, Excel/SPSS commands, and saves the result output in correct format.</i>	<i>Use the correct data set, correct Excel/SPSS commands. Save the result output in an appropriate format.</i>	<i>The data or the Excel/SPSS commands are incorrect. The result output is saved in correct format.</i>	<i>Both data set and the SPSS commands are incorrect. The result output is saved in correct format.</i>
Tables and figures (20%)	<i>All the findings are correctly and clearly presented.</i>	<i>All the key findings are clearly presented while having 1-2 minor mistakes.</i>	<i>Some of the key findings are clearly presented while 1-2 key findings need more clarity.</i>	<i>Some of the key findings are clearly presented while missing 1-2 key findings or having more than 2 minor mistakes.</i>
Interpretation and argument (20%)	<i>Presents a convincing and well-developed argument.</i>	<i>Develops a sound argument.</i>	<i>Argument needs further development.</i>	<i>Arguments not clear.</i>
Organisation (20%)	<i>Clear structure which develops a convincing narrative.</i>	<i>Good structure, but some section too detailed/not detailed enough for the overall narrative of the presentation.</i>	<i>Structure at times unclear.</i>	<i>Structure not clear.</i>
Style of presentation (20%)	<i>Demonstrate excellent presentation skills and communication with audience.</i>	<i>Demonstrate competent presentation skills and communication with audience.</i>	<i>Demonstrate good presentation skills and communication with audience</i>	<i>Demonstrate fair/poor presentation skills and communication with audience</i>

arking rubric for research report (50%):

Grade		Understanding of topic (20%)	Use of evidence (20%)	Critical analysis (20%)	Structure of argument (20%)	Writing and referencing (20%)
A A- (100-80)	Excellent	<i>Comprehensive understanding and coverage of issues. Insightful and well-informed. Makes a potential contribution to the literature.</i>	<i>Wide range of evidence used to support arguments. Thoroughly researched.</i>	<i>Excellent critical awareness of subject matter and current issues. Shows original thinking and analysis.</i>	<i>Clear structure. Presents a convincing and well developed argument.</i>	<i>Thorough referencing throughout Uses Harvard referencing correctly. Demonstrates excellent writing skills.</i>
B+ B B- (79-65)	Good	<i>Clear discussion of relevant issues. Shows good insight into the subject. Answers an original question.</i>	<i>Good use of evidence to support arguments.</i>	<i>Goes beyond description. Analyses material to develop argument.</i>	<i>Clear structure. Develops a sound argument.</i>	<i>Generally uses Harvard referencing correctly but some parts less well referenced. Competent writing skills.</i>
C+ C C- (64-50)	Pass	<i>Shows some coverage and understanding of main issues. Identifies a useful questions, but does not answer it fully/directly enough.</i>	<i>Adequate range of evidence used. Could have drawn on more suitable evidence.</i>	<i>More description than analysis in content. Needs to draw material together to develop argument.</i>	<i>Argument needs further development. Structure needs more clarity.</i>	<i>Some parts not referenced correctly using Harvard style. Writing skills could be improved.</i>
F (49-0)	Failure	<i>Superficial coverage and significant misunderstanding of the issues. Does not pose an original question and fails to answer it.</i>	<i>Relies on limited range of sources. Has not been thoroughly researched.</i>	<i>Too descriptive. Needs to draw material together to develop argument.</i>	<i>Arguments not clear. Structure is not clear. Some repetition. Little clear linkage from point to point.</i>	<i>Harvard referencing is inconsistent. Writing skills need considerable improvement. Sentence structure needs work. Needed proof reading.</i>