

**POS 6933: Interpretive Approaches to Political Science, Graduate Seminar
Spring 2009**

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Office Hours: MWF 3:00–5:00 or by appt.

Course Description and Requirements

Naturalism, the idea that empirical social research should be patterned after the natural sciences, continues to enjoy a hegemonic status in the discipline of political science even as the shaky philosophical foundations of this idea have been exposed by major thinkers from a variety of philosophical traditions, including hermeneutics, phenomenology, pragmatism, and post-analytic philosophy. This course is designed for students whose research interests, or intellectual curiosity, or activist temperament incline them toward a non-naturalistic, that is, interpretive political science. The purpose is to help such students build both the requisite intellectual capital and a sense of intellectual community. I want you to be able to present interpretive research findings to a general audience of political scientists with a sense of intellectual confidence, without apologizing for the fact that your empirical analysis does not consist of developing general causal models and/or “testing” the “predictions” of such models.

The course has two parts. First, we will discuss the philosophical critiques of naturalism and the ontological and epistemological presuppositions of interpretive social science: that the meaningfulness and historical contingency of human life sets the social realm apart from nature and that (to most interpretivists) social science, rather than being separate from its object, is situated within the webs of meaning and historical context that it studies. In the second, longer part of the semester, we will cover a variety (if by no means an exhaustive list) of empirical research strategies rooted in these presuppositions, including unstructured interviewing, ordinary language interviewing, ethnographic (participant-observer) field research, reflexive/critical historical analysis, applications of science studies, and interpretive analyses of space. The course readings consist not of methodological cookbook recipes so much as of the published work of researchers who have “done it.” We will read and discuss exemplars of fine interpretive scholarship, paired in most cases with brief essays (or appendices) in which the authors reflect upon their careers and/or their interpretive methodological strategies.

The requirements of the course include (1) class participation; (2) one book review (2,000–2,500 words), to be presented in class; and (3) a research project prospectus (10–15 pages), to be presented at the semester’s final session.

Participation: You will be expected to have done all the week’s reading *before* each class and to come to class prepared to discuss the readings in depth. Your active participation in class is very important; it will account for 25% of the final grade.

Book review: In consultation with me, select a book that features interpretive analysis (and is not already part of the syllabus). Prepare a 10–15 minute class presentation on this book—the date of the presentation will be determined so that the methodological strategy employed in the book you selected corresponds, more or less, to the readings assigned for that week. A 2,000–2,500 word book review is due to me the week following the presentation (no later than the following week’s seminar session). Although you are welcome to discuss your chosen book’s substantive argument(s), your presentation and written review

should address primarily the book's epistemological/methodological aspect. The presentation and book review will account for 35 percent of the final grade.

Research project prospectus: You may think of this assignment as a proto-dissertation prospectus. In 10–15 pages, outline (a) a research question/puzzle; (b) the state of the relevant literature; (c) an interpretive research strategy—what will you actually do to address the question? (d) The merits of your chosen strategy—why is it appropriate for the question at hand? Prepare a 10–15 minute presentation of your proposed project for the term's final session (April 17) and submit the prospectus to me no later than Thursday, April 23, at Noon. The prospectus will account for 40 percent of the final grade.

Required Readings: The principal textbook that will accompany us throughout the semester is Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, eds., *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2006)—please order it promptly from your favorite online vendor. You should also order several books that we will read in their entirety, by Joe Soss, Frederic Charles Schaffer, David Laitin, Cecelia Lynch, and Pamela Brandwein—the titles and full citations of these books are listed in the course schedule below. Other readings—book chapters, unpublished papers, or journal articles—will be available either on electronic reserves in the library or, in hard copy, in the graduate student lounge on the third floor of Anderson Hall. At the beginning of each class session, I will briefly explain where you may find the readings assigned for the following week.

COURSE SCHEDULE

January 9 **Introduction**
No reading

January 16 **The “Other”**

- Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 1–114.
- Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Cornell University Press, 1997), 1–43.

I. FOUNDATIONS OF INTERPRETIVE SOCIAL SCIENCE

January 23 **Max Weber's Methodological Breakthroughs: “Understanding;” Ideal Type**

- Read the following selections from Sam Whimster, ed. *The Essential Weber: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004):
 - The ‘Objectivity’ of Knowledge in Social Science and Social Policy (pp. 359–404)
 - Basic Sociological Concepts (310–58) [this essay constitutes the first chapter of Weber's *Economy and Society*]
 - The Vocation of Science (270–87)

January 30 **Philosophical Underpinnings of Interpretive Social Science**

- Charles Taylor, “Interpretation and the Science of Man,” in Fred Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy, *Understanding and Social Inquiry* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 101–31.
- Alfred Schütz, “Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences,” *Journal of Philosophy* 51, No. 9 (April 1954), 257–273.

- Mark Bevir and Asaf Kedar, “Concept Formation in Political Science: An Anti-Naturalistic Critique of Qualitative Methodology.” *Perspectives on Politics* 6, No. 3, (September 2008), 503–17.
- Read the following selections from *Interpretation and Method*
 - Introduction (pp. xi–xxvii)
 - Dvora Yanow, Thinking Interpretively: Philosophical Presuppositions and the Human Sciences (5–26).
 - Mary Hawkesworth, Contending Conceptions of Science and Politics (27–49).
 - Robert Adcock, Generalizations in Comparative and Historical Social Science (50–66).
 - Dvora Yanow, Neither Rigorous Nor Objective? Interrogating Criteria for Knowledge Claims in Interpretive Science (67–88).
 - P. Schwartz-Shae, Judging Quality: Evaluative Criteria and Epistemic Communities (89–113).

II. DOING IT

February 6 **Unstructured Interviewing**

- Joe Soss, “Talking Our Way to Meaningful Explanations: A Practice Centered View of Interviewing for Interpretive Research,” pp. 127–49 in *Interpretation and Method*.
- Joe Soss, *Unwanted Claims: The Politics of Participation in the U.S. Welfare System* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

February 13 **Ordinary Language Interviewing**

- Frederic Charles Schaffer, “Ordinary Language Interviewing,” pp. 150–60 in *Interpretation and Method*.
- Frederic Charles Schaffer, *Democracy in Translation: Understanding Politics in an Unfamiliar Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

February 20 **Ethnographic Research: Participant Observation in the Developing World**

- David Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Change among the Yoruba* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). [Pay special attention to the appendix on research methodology]
- Samer Shehata, “Ethnography, Identity, and the Production of Knowledge,” pp. 244–63 in *Interpretation and Method*.

February 27 **Ethnographic Research: Participant Observation in the United States**

- Timothy Pachirat, “We Call It a Grain of Sand: The Interpretive Orientation and a Human Social Science,” pp. 373–79 in *Interpretation and Method*.
- Timothy Pachirat, “Ethnography from Below? Reflections from an Industrialized Slaughterhouse on Perspective, Power, and the Ethnographic Voice.” Presented at the 2006 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association.
- Katherine Cramer Walsh, *Talking about Politics: Informal Groups and Social Identity in American Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Selection TBA. Pay special attention to the methodological appendix.

- March 6** **Roundtable Discussion: Stories from the Trenches**
- We will have an informal discussion (or an unstructured interview, sort of) with a panel of advanced graduate students and faculty members who will share with us their experiences in conducting field research or other forms of interpretive research.
- March 13** **Enjoy Spring Break!**
- March 20** **Critical Historical Interpretation**
- Cecelia Lynch, “Critical Interpretation and Interwar Peace Movements,” pp. 291–99 in *Interpretation and Method*.
 - Cecelia Lynch, *Beyond Appeasement: Interpreting Interwar Peace Movements in World Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).
- March 27** **Reflexive Historical Analysis**
- Lisa Wedeen, “Scientific Knowledge, Liberalism, and Empire: American Political Science in the Modern Middle East.” [Download from http://www.ssrc.org/program_areas/global/june2007_meeting/]
 - Ido Oren, “Political Science As History: A Reflexive Approach,” pp. 215–27 in *Interpretation and Method*.
 - Ido Oren, “The Subjectivity of the ‘Democratic’ Peace: Changing U.S. Perceptions of Imperial Germany,” *International Security* 20 (Fall 1995): 147–84
 - Ido Oren, *Our Enemies and US: America’s Rivalries and the Making of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), read Introduction and Conclusion.
 - Ido Oren, “Can Political Science Emulate the Natural Sciences? The Problem of Self-Disconfirming Analysis,” *Polity*, 38/1 (January 2006): 72–100
 - Ido Oren, “The Unrealism of Contemporary Realism: The Tension between Realist Theory and Realists’ Practices.” Forthcoming in *Perspectives on Politics*.
- April 3** **Applying Science Studies**
- Pamela Brandwein, “Studying the Careers of Knowledge Claims: Applying Science Studies to Legal Studies,” pp. 228–43 in *Interpretation and Method*.
 - Pamela Brandwein, *Reconstructing Reconstruction: The Supreme Court and the Production of Historical Truth* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).
- April 10** **Interpreting Space**
- Dvora Yanow, “How Built Spaces Mean: A Semiotics of Space,” pp. 349–66 in *Interpretation and Method*.
 - Dvora Yanow, “Supermarkets and Culture Clash: The Epistemological Role of Metaphors in Administrative Practice,” *American Review of Public Administration* 22 (1992), 89–110.
 - Dvora Yanow, “Space Stories, Or, Studying Museum Buildings as Organizational Spaces, While Reflecting on Interpretive Methods and Their Narration,” *Journal of Management Inquiry* 7 (1998), 215–39.
 - Dvora Yanow, “Reading Policy Meanings in Organization-Scapes,” *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 10 (1993), 308–27.
 - Ellen Pader, “Seeing with an Ethnographic Sensibility: Explorations Beneath the Surface of Public Policies,” pp. 161–75 in *Interpretation and Method*
 - Margaret Kohn, *Brave New Neighborhoods: The Privatization of Public Space* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1–22.

April 17

Student Presentations

- Presentations and discussion of students' research project prospectuses.

April 23

Research project prospectus due at Noon