This class is intended to give graduate students across fields a thorough grounding in the different logics of social scientific research. The class stresses logics (and the fact that there are multiple ones) over
particular methods insofar as varying theoretical stances (for example, historical institutionalism) tend to ‘carry’ accompanying methodological baggage – that is, a particular method of investigation – within them. Thus, rather than focus on different methods of research we shall attempt to uncover the different logics and strategies of argument and evidence encountered in political science. In order to do so the class is divided into three sections covering what might be called the macro, meso, and micro, of asking questions and getting answers.

The first section, the macro, focuses on the objects (and subjects) of investigation and has the issues of epistemology and ontology very much in the foreground. Here we shall tread warily upon spaces traditionally occupied by philosophers of science. Here we shall introduce different – and somewhat stereotypical – models of what science (with a capital S) is and is not. In particular, the positions of positivism, realism, hermeneutics, and critical theory will be investigated to give us a macro level ‘map’ of what it means to ask “meaningful” questions, and what counts as “adequate” explanations within such frameworks.

The next level down – unimaginatively called the meso – examines different perspectives on what our peers tell us we should be doing. In this section we examine the debates around the ‘orthodoxy’ of the Keohane King and Verba volume and follow this with other ‘classic’ pieces on the logic and methods of political investigation from both supporters of orthodoxy (in its various guises) and its critics.

Finally, on the micro level we examine discreet examples of these explanatory projects drawn from IR, American, and Comparative Politics. Specifically, rational choice, new institutionalisms, realism, and constructivism will in turn be examined. Here the point is not to critique these works on their own terms, as we usually do, but to examine them in the terms set out in the first part of the course.
There are two pieces of work for class credit and both are due at the end of term.

The point of structuring the coursework in this way is three fold. First, I’m no philosopher – so I don’t want to grade on it – and that rules out all of us writing on subjects we really don’t know all that well at the start of the class. Second, I suspect that most of us will only really have much of substance to say on this topic once we have read a bit – so why rush it? Third, the two pieces I have in mind compliment each other and should perhaps be done concurrently – though I leave that choice to you.

The first piece of work is a short eight to ten page essay any one of the final part of the course. In short, pick a topic and really dive into it. For example, if you are doing IR you may want to take the week on constructivism (and realism) and go into depth on what the logical, analytic, and explanatory issues in constructivism actually are. Personally, the choice is yours – but the essay must integrate the concerns of the first half of the course with an in-depth reading of the substance of the second half.

The second piece of work is a research design. Borrowing from Mimi Keck’s syllabi – she notes that “[A] research design should be a credible proposal to do a piece of research that sets out and situates a problem, the approach, the strategy for collecting information, and the expected contribution of the work. This may be a trial run for a draft dissertation prospectus, or it may not. Although the assignment does not suppose you have actually

done the research in question, it does assume that you’ve done enough background work to set it up. We will discuss research design throughout the course, and I would encourage each of you to meet with
me individually on this.” And this is exactly what we will do beginning week seven with an open discussion of topics (which you should have prepared by then) and in week twelve when you will present them. The presented research design should be no longer than 5000 words and will conform to the SSRC dissertation fellowship guidelines (which we will discuss in class nearer the time.)
Books and Articles:

Almost everything is in the library and copies of all articles and individual book chapters (for photocopying only) are in the departmental office on a sign-out basis (such readings are marked*). In terms of buying books we will use a lot of the following so I will order the following (though some may be out of print.)


Kenneth Waltz The Theory of International Politics (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co. 1979)

Alexander Wendt The Social Theory of International Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998)
Part One: Macro-Level Issues: What Is It We Are Meant To Be Doing?

Class One: Tuesday Jan 30th

Introduction: No readings
Class Two: Tuesday Feb 6th.

Is the Study of Capital ‘S’ Science relevant for the study of politics?

Reading:


Class Three: Tuesday Feb 13th

What is an Argument, and what Counts as an Explanation?

Reading:


Distribution and discussion of SSRC grant application forms
Part Two: Meso Level Issues: What is it we Think that we are doing?

Class Four: Tuesday Feb 20th

So what do our peers tell us we should be doing? The New Orthodoxy

Reading:


Class Five: Tuesday Feb. 27th

So what do our peers tell us we should be doing? The Old Orthodoxy

Reading:


Lijphart, Arend, “Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method” American Political Science Review 65 (September 1971) 682-693.*


Class Six: Tuesday March 6th

Does Anyone Have a Problem with any of this?

Part One: Questioning the logics of the orthodoxy

Reading:


Charles C. Ragin The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies, (California; Berkeley, 1987) pp. 1-84* (Photocopy)


Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas A. McCarthy, (eds.) Understanding and Social Inquiry (Notre Dame, 1977) (Introduction and the article by Taylor)*


Discussion of Research Proposals (informal)

Class Seven: Tuesday March 13th:

Does Anyone Have a Problem with any of this?
Part Two: Questioning the Payoff from the Orthodoxy in the ‘Social Science versus Area Studies’ Debates.


NB: March 19th – 25th Spring Break: No Class

Class Eight: Tuesday March 27th

No Reading:

First Week of research proposal discussions – in class presentations.

Part Three: Micro Level Issues: What do we actually do?

Class Nine: Tuesday April 3rd:

Rational Choice

Reading:


NB: Tuesday April 10th: No Class

Class Ten: Tuesday April 17th

The NIE and the other New Institutionalisms

Reading:


Theda Skocpol et al., (eds.) Bringing the State Back In (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985). Chapter 1.*


Class Eleven: Tuesday April 24th

Realism and Constructivism

Reading:

Kenneth Waltz The Theory of International Politics (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co. 1979)

Alexander Wendt The Social Theory of International Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998)
Class Twelve: Tuesday May 1st

Presentation of Research Designs and paper due.