Political Science 516  
Introduction to Political Inquiry  
State University of New York at Albany  
Fall 2014

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Course Description

This course is designed to provide students with a solid intellectual foundation for conducting political inquiry across the subfields in the discipline of political science. The first part of the course examines the classic ontological and epistemological debates that underpin and shape contemporary social science methodology. It covers some of the major works in philosophy of social science that are most relevant to the discipline of political science. The second part of the course starts with concept formation and measurement, and then exposes students to a wide range of methods most frequently employed by contemporary political scientists, including formal models; large-n statistical analysis; historical case studies; content analysis; field research and ethnography; and interview and survey research. The third part of the course introduces students to some of the most salient ongoing debates on political science methodology, such as the call for unified standards for social science research, and the recent ascendance of multi-method approaches. This course is required in the Political Science doctoral program curriculum. Upon completion of this course, students should be able to identify the foundational assumptions of various research traditions and methods; evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a wide range of methods in different research settings; and construct original research designs employing appropriate research methods.

Course Requirements

Your grade in this course will be determined in the following manner:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seminar participation</td>
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<td>Oral presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-page research design</td>
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Class attendance and active, informed participation are mandatory. Students must complete the assigned readings prior to the seminar meetings. The oral presentations require each student to analyze and report on a number of assigned readings for a given week. The exact number of the presentations will depend on the number of students enrolled in the seminar. The written assignments will include a midterm take-home exam and a double-spaced 10-page research design addressing a topic within each student’s subfield. The final draft of the research design will be due and presented in the last class on Tuesday, December 9. Later papers without university approved reasons will be penalized a third of a letter grade per day late.
Readings

There is no required book for this course. All the required readings are available on Blackboard. Those marked with “available on-line” can be retrieved by the on-line links provided on the syllabus or by clicking on “E-Journals” from the Libraries web page and typing in the title of the journal in the search box.

August 26: Introduction - Is Political Science Possible?

- Course syllabus

PART I: FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL INQUIRY

September 2: The “Science” in “Social Science” and Absolute Standards

- Karl Popper, The Logic of Scientific Discovery (London: Taylor & Francis e-library, 2005), 3-26

September 9: “Progress” in Social Sciences

September 16: The Relativist Challenge and the Varied Responses of Social Sciences

- Ernst Haas, “Reason and Change in International Life: Justifying a Hypothesis,” *Journal of International Affairs* 44:1 (Spring/Summer 1990): 209-240 [available on-line]

**PART II: CONDUCTING POLITICAL INQUIRY**

September 23: Concept Formation and Measurement


September 30: Formal Models

**Guest Lecturer: Professor Bryan Early**

October 7: Experiments and Quasi-Experiments

Guest Lecturer: Professor David Rousseau


October 14: Large-N Statistical Analysis

Guest Lecturer: Professor Victor Asal


October 21: Historical and Case Studies


October 28: Content Analysis and Discourse Analysis


November 4: Survey and Interview Research


November 11: Field Research and Ethnography

Guest Lecturer: Professor Meredith Weiss


November 18: Research Ethics

Guest Lecturer: Professor Julie Novkov

- The University at Albany’s on-line human subjects training module for “Group 3: Graduate Students” [accessible from the UAlbany research web page (http://www.albany.edu/research/) under “Research Compliance” or directly at UAlbany Research Compliance page (http://www.albany.edu/research/compliance/). Look for the “training link” in the left hand menu and then scroll down until you see the “Collaborative IRB Training (CITI)” link (http://www.citiprogram.org/)]

PART III: RECENT DEBATES ON POLITICAL INQUIRY

November 25: Unity and Plurality


**December 2: Is Multi-Method Research the Answer?**


**December 9: Research Design Reports**