

GOVT 749

Interpretive Social Science

(Spring 2014)

Please report nonperforming links to kingch@georgetown.edu

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Class sessions: Tuesday, 9:30-12 noon, White-Gravenor 203

Prof. King's office hours: Please email me for an appointment, since I have found that pre-set office hours do not work well for students with busy schedules. I will also usually be in class a bit before and after each session and am happy to speak with you then if you have urgent issues.

1. What Do I Need to Know About This Course?

OVERVIEW

This Ph.D.-level seminar explores the interpretive tradition in the social sciences—qualitative political science, comparative sociology, and social-scientifically oriented history. Interpretive research stresses historical context, qualitative evidence, an actor-based ethic of research practice, and the narrative expression of findings. Students should come away from the course with an appreciation for the major work of interpretive social scientists as well as an ability to incorporate interpretivist approaches in their own research. Readings are drawn from thinkers such as Eric Hobsbawm, Ernest Gellner, Charles Tilly, Clifford Geertz, James Scott, Lisa Wedeen, Theda Skocpol, Karen Barkey, and Rogers Brubaker, among others. Requirements include two short writing assignments and one longer research paper. Ph.D. students only.

LEARNING GOALS

The interpretive tradition in political science stretches back at least to Max Weber, but in recent years the dominance of inference-based research design has sometimes clouded our ability to appreciate different approaches to positivist (and non-positivist) theory-building and research practice. Part of this tradition involves different linguistic habits: it privileges evidence and persuasion, for example, rather than data and proof. But this language reflects some fundamental features of interpretivist approaches. This tradition sees the goal of social science as being broadly interpretive rather than narrowly explanatory, that is, it seeks to integrate the perspectives of the agents of political and social action into the very theories that purportedly account for their behavior. This actor-centered ethic of research practice involves seeing humans

as more than simply data-generators but—like quantum physicists—tries to incorporate an appreciation of the system effects of the act of research itself. Moreover, as part of the persuasive art of research communication, interpretivists privilege the task of writing. Rather than being a simple write-up of an analytically separate research project, the text itself—especially in narrative form—is integral to the research process.

These distinctions do not map differences between inductive and deductive work, between the theoretical and the empirical, or between qualitative and quantitative methods. Interpretivists can be found engaging in all these approaches. This course will explore this rich vein of social science writing. Readings are drawn from political science, historical sociology, and history. By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Appreciate the common threads within, as well as the diversity of approaches among, communities of scholars writing in the interpretive frame
- Write a book review of the type seen in major academic journals or para-scholarly periodicals
- Write an article manuscript review in a style suitable for a major academic journal
- Compose an article-length piece that incorporates elements of the interpretive tradition

TOOLS OF ASSESSMENT

1. **Attendance and informed participation** (roughly 20 percent of course grade).
2. **Two short writing assignments** (roughly 15 percent each), with rewrites if necessary.
3. **One research paper** (roughly 50 percent). The largest proportion of this grade will be based on the final product, but a substantial portion will come from the initial draft of the paper and its presentation in class.

We will go over the details of the writing assignments in class, but here are some general guidelines:

Book review: Choose any book on this syllabus that is not featured under the “required reading” sections and write a review of no more than 1,000 words. Consult any major political science journal that has a book review section in order to understand the format and style of short reviews. Better yet, consult the [New York Review of Books](#), the [Times Literary Supplement](#), the [London Review of Books](#), or [World Politics](#) for excellent examples of sophisticated “review essays” that do far more than provide a narrative account of a book’s table of contents.

Simulated manuscript review: Choose any article on this syllabus and write a review of it as if it were a manuscript submitted to a major political science journal. The total review should be no more than about 1,000 words.

Research paper: The paper should be a substantial (20-30 pages) piece of research in which you apply one or more of the theories or methods discussed in this course to a particular case or cases. The paper should be more than a “literature survey”—although that is a good place to start—and should aim at using an interpretive approach and some

form of primary sources (archives, participant observation, ethnography, or the analysis of other printed or social “texts”).

Deadlines

Review essay: Tuesday, Feb. 18

Article review: Tuesday, Mar. 25

Research paper final: Friday, May 9

Format for papers

All essays and papers should be typed, double-spaced, on plain white 8.5 x 11 paper. Pages should be numbered consecutively. The typescript should be secured with a staple or clip. Do not submit the paper in a loose-leaf binder, plastic report cover or other folder.

Evaluation of papers

Grades on research papers will be based on the following criteria:

Overall argument: Is there a strong and clear argument running throughout the paper? Is the argument stated clearly at the beginning and then developed throughout the text? Does the paper address a clear and important question?

Writing style: Do you write in an interesting yet formal style? Have you eliminated clichés? Have you reined in your metaphors?

Thoroughness of research: Does the paper demonstrate a good knowledge of the literature on the topic at hand? Does the paper distill the major issues in a key debate? Have you made creative use of primary sources?

Originality of ideas: Is the paper more than a literature review? Have you engaged critically with the literature and arrived at your own interpretation of an important issue?

Based on these criteria, papers will be assigned grades according to the [standard university grading scale](#).

2. What's the Fine Print?

The following texts have been ordered for this course and may be purchased at the Georgetown University Bookstore in the Leavey Center:

- Gambetta, Diego, and Heather Hamill. *Streetwise*. Russell Sage Foundation, 2005. 0871543087

- Hobsbawm, Eric. *Bandits*. Rev. ed. New Press, 2000. 1565846192
- Scott, James. *Seeing Like a State*. Yale University Press, 1999. 0300078153
- Scott, James. *The Art of Not Being Governed*. Yale University Press, 2010. 0300169175
- Wedeen, Lisa. *Ambiguities of Domination*. University of Chicago Press, 1999. 0226877884
- Pachirat, Timothy. *Every Twelve Seconds*. Yale University Press, 2013. 0300192487

These texts will be supplemented by readings from journals, books, and other sources. Two additional sources that you may wish to purchase and refer to on your own are:

- Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, eds., *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2006).
- Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

Both these works are important “how to” guides to interpretive work and will make useful supplements to the more applied readings in this course.

BLACKBOARD

A Blackboard site has been established for each section of this course.

POLICY ON OTHER TECHNOLOGY

Please do not use laptops, cell phones, or other mobile/electronic devices during class. For the short time we are together each week, I want you to engage with the discussions, rather than multitasking or attempting to create a written transcript of the class. I will of course accommodate diagnosed conditions that require use of electronic devices and have been registered with the [Academic Resource Center](#).

POLICY ON MAKE-UPS, EXTENSIONS, INCOMPLETES, AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

In principle, deadlines cannot be changed. However, allowance will be made for cases in which genuine emergencies prevent students from completing work on time. Such emergencies might include medical treatment or bereavement. Having a heavy work load, impending deadlines for other courses, job interviews, extra-curricular commitments, or family holidays cannot normally be considered emergencies. Each instance will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Students should let the instructor know as far in advance as possible about any potential problems. Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be handled according to university policy.

POLICY ON GRADE COMPLAINTS

If you feel your work was graded unfairly, please arrange to speak directly with me. Note that if you request that I review your work for re-grading, I may either raise or lower your grade, depending on my reassessment of your work. That grade will be final.

3. What Will We Be Doing in This Course?

The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the readings during the course of the semester.

Jan. 14 Introduction to the course

Part I. Theory, Method, and Communication

Jan. 21 Classic texts and contemporary debates

1. Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation." Available [here](#) and at many other locations.
2. Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: BasicBooks, 1973). BLACKBOARD.
3. Robert Darnton, "Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Severin," in Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*. New York: Vintage, 1984. BLACKBOARD
4. [Mark Bevir and Asaf Kedar, "Concept Formation in Political Science: An Anti-Naturalist Critique of Qualitative Methodology," *Perspectives on Politics* 6, no. 3 \(2008\): 503-517.](#)
5. [Amel Ahmed and Rudra Sil, "When Multi-Method Research Subverts Methodological Pluralism—or, Why We Still Need Single-Method Research," *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 4 \(Dec. 2012\): 935-953.](#)
6. [James Mahoney, "After KKV: The New Methodology of Qualitative Research," *World Politics* 62, no. 1 \(Jan. 2010\): 120-147.](#)

Recommended:

1. Schatz, Edward, and Elena Maltseva, "Assumed to be Universal: The Leap from Data to Knowledge in the *American Political Science Review*," *Polity* 44, no. 3 (Jul. 2012): 446-472.
2. Mark Neufeld, "Interpretation and the 'Science' of International Relations," *Review of International Studies* 19, no. 1 (Jan. 1993): 39-61.
3. Joan W. Scott and Debra Keates, eds., *Schools of Thought: Twenty-Five Years of Interpretive Social Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
4. Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan, *Interpretive Social Science: A Second Look* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
5. Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, eds., *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2006).
6. Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, "'Reading' 'Methods' 'Texts': How Research Methods Texts Construct Political Science," *Political Research Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (Jun. 2002): 457-486.

7. Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, "Perestroika Ten Years After: Reflections on Methodological Diversity," *PS: Political Science and Politics* (Oct. 2010): 741-745.
8. Kristen Renwick Monroe, ed., *Perestroika! The Raucous Rebellion in Political Science*
9. Check in periodically for new titles in the [Routledge Series in Interpretive Methods](#) and [Chicago Studies in Practices of Meaning](#)

Jan. 28 History as a variable

1. [Paul A. David, "Clio and the Economics of QWERTY," *American Economic Review* 75, no. 2 \(1985\).](#)
2. [S. J. Leibowitz and Stephen Margolis, "The Fable of the Keys," *Journal of Law & Economics* 33 \(1990\).](#)
3. [Ian S. Lustick, "History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias," *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 3 \(1996\).](#)
4. [Forrest McDonald, "The Relation of the French Peasant Veterans of the American Revolution to the Fall of Feudalism in France, 1789-1792," *Agricultural History* 25, No. 4 \(Oct., 1951\), pp. 151-61.](#)
5. [Charles King, "Can There Be a Political Science of the Holocaust?" *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 2 \(Jun. 2012\): 323-341.](#)
6. [James Mahoney and Daniel Schensul, "Historical Context and Path Dependence," in Robert E. Goodin and Charles Tilly, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis* \(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006\).](#)

Recommended:

1. Charles Tilly, "How (and What) Are Historians Doing?" in David Easton and Corinne S. Schelling, eds., *Divided Knowledge: Across Disciplines, Across Cultures* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1991).
2. Mark Bevir, "The Role of Contexts in Understanding and Explanation," *Human Studies* 23, no. 4 (Oct. 2000): 395-411.
- 3.

Feb. 4 Method and evidence

1. [Paul Krugman, "How I Work."](#)
2. Dvora Yanow, "Interpretive Empirical Political Science: What Makes This Not a Subfield of Qualitative Methods," *APSA Qualitative Methods Section Newsletter* (Fall 2003). BLACKBOARD
3. [Edgar Kiser and Michael Hechter. "The Role of General Theory in Comparative-Historical Sociology." *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 97, No. 1. \(July 1991\): 1-30.](#)
4. [Markus Haverland and Dvora Yanow, "A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Public Administration Universe: Surviving Conversations on Methodologies and Methods," *Public Administration Review* 72, no. 3 \(May/June. 2012\): 401-408.](#)

5. [John S. Dryzek and Simon Niemeyer, "Discursive Representation," *APSR* 102, no. 4 \(Nov. 2008\): 481-493.](#)
6. [Lee Ann Fujii, "The Puzzle of Extra-Lethal Violence," *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 2 \(Jun. 2013\): 410-426.](#)

Recommended:

1. Elster, Jon. *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
2. Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (London: Routledge, 2011).
3. Kiser, Edgar, and Michael Hechter. "The Debate on Historical Sociology: Rational Choice Theory and Its Critics." *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 104, No. 3 (November 1998): 785-816.
4. Simon Glendinning, "Argument All the Way Down: The Demanding Discipline of Non-Argumento-Centric Modes of Philosophy," in Jack Reynolds, James Williams, Ed Mares, and James Chase, eds., *Postanalytic and Metacontinental: Crossing Philosophical Divides* (London: Continuum, 2010).
5. James Mahoney and Gary Goertz, "A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research," *Political Analysis* 14, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 227-249.

Feb. 11 Ethnography and actor-based ethics

1. [Elisabeth Jean Wood, "The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones," *Qualitative Sociology* 29 \(2006\).](#)
2. Jessica Allina-Pisano, "How to Tell an Axe Murder: An Essay on Ethnography, Truth, and Lies," in *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*, ed. Edward Schatz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
BLACKBOARD
3. [Lisa Wedeen, "Reflections on Ethnographic Work in Political Science," *Annual Review of Political Science* 13 \(2010\): 255-72.](#)
4. Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," in Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: BasicBooks, 1973). BLACKBOARD
5. [Gianpaolo Baiocchi and Brian T. Connor, "The Ethnos in the Polis: Political Ethnography as a Mode of Inquiry," *Sociology Compass* 2, no. 1 \(2008\): 139-155.](#)
6. [Lee Ann Fujii, "Research Ethics 101: Dilemmas and Responsibilities," *PS: Political Science and Politics* \(Oct. 2012\): 717-723.](#)

Recommended:

1. James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, 2010).

2. Edward Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
3. Sierk Ybema, Dvora Yanow, Harry Wels, and Frans H. Kamsteeg, eds., *Organizational Ethnography: Studying the Complexity of Everyday Life* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009).
4. Carolyn J. Dean, "Minimalism and Victim Testimony," *History and Theory* 49, no. 4 (Dec. 2010): 85-99.
5. Symposium on "[Ethnographic Methods in Political Science](#)," in [APSA QMMR Newsletter, Fall 2009](#).
6. Special issue of *Qualitative Sociology* 29, no. 3 (Sept. 2006) on political ethnography
7. [Elizabeth Levy Paluck, "The Promising Integration of Qualitative Methods and Field Experiments," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 628, no. 1 \(Mar. 2010\): 159-171.](#)

Feb. 18 Narrative and the art of scholarly communication

1. Hobsbawm, *Bandits*
2. [J. D. Watson and F. H. C. Crick, "A Structure for Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid," *Nature* \(April 25, 1953\).](#)—for a superb and classic example of clear writing

Recommended:

1. Charles Tilly, "The Trouble with Stories," in Ronald Aminzade and Bernice Pescosolido, eds., *The Social Worlds of Higher Education* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 1999).
2. Robert H. Bates, et al., *Analytic Narratives*—as an example of a narrative-driven but decidedly non-interpretive model

Feb. 25 Research practice and autobiography

1. [Elinor Ostrom, "A Long Polycentric Journey," *Annual Review of Political Science* 13 \(2010\): 1-23.](#)
2. Timothy Pachirat, "The Political in Political Ethnography: Dispatches from the Kill Floor," in *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*, ed. Edward Schatz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). BLACKBOARD
3. [Kate Brown, "A Place in Biography for Oneself," *American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 \(2009\): 596-605.](#)
4. [Georgi Derluguian, "A Tale of Two Cities," *New Left Review* \(May-June 2000\).](#)
5. [Robert O. Keohane, "Political Science as a Vocation," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 42 \(2009\): 359-63.](#)

Part II. Interpretive Approaches to Core Problems in Political Science

Mar. 4 Social groups and mobilization

1. Rogers Brubaker, "Ethnicity without Groups" and "Beyond 'Identity,'" in Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).
BLACKBOARD
2. [Rogers Brubaker and David Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 24 \(1998\).](#)
3. [Mala Htun, "Is Gender Like Ethnicity? The Political Representation of Identity Groups," *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 3 \(2004\): 439-58.](#)

Recommended:

1. Tilly, Charles. *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978.
2. McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*
3. Hallagan, Michael P., Leslie Page Moch, and Wayne te Brake, eds. *Challenging Authority: The Historical Study of Contentious Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
4. Steinberg, Marc W. "The Talk and Back Talk of Collective Action: A Dialogic Analysis of Repertoires of Discourse among Nineteenth-Century English Cotton Spinners." *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 105, No. 3. (November 1999): 736-780.
5. Frédéric Volpi, *Political Islam Observed: Disciplinary Perspectives*

Mar. 18 Political order

1. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*

Recommended:

1. Lisa Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen*

Mar. 25 The state

1. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*

Recommended:

1. Barkey, Karen, and Ronan Van Rossem, "Networks of Contention: Villages and Regional Structure in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 102, No. 5 (March 1997): 1345-1382.
2. Leonard Wantchekon, "The Paradox of 'Warlord' Democracy: A Theoretical Investigation," *American Political Science Review* 98, no. 1 (2004).
3. Ernest Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas*
4. Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*
5. Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats*

6. Georgi Derluguian, *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus*
7. Samer Shehata, *Shop Floor Culture and Politics in Egypt*

Apr. 1 Formal institutions

1. Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*

Recommended:

1. Mark Bevir, R. A. W. Rhodes, and Patrick Weller, "Traditions of Governance: Interpreting the Changing Role of the Public Sector," *Public Administration* 81, no. 1 (Mar. 2003): 1-17.
2. Adam Ashforth, *Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa*

Apr. 8 Informal institutions

1. Gambetta and Hamill, *Streetwise*

Recommended:

1. Samuel Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979.
2. Lichbach, Mark I. "What Makes Rational Peasants Revolutionary? Dilemma, Paradox, and Irony in Peasant Collective Action." *World Politics*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (April 1994): 383-418.
3. Diego Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia*

Apr. 15 Violence

1. Pachirat, *Every Twelve Seconds*

Recommended:

1. Elisabeth Jean Wood, "Armed Groups and Sexual Violence: When Is Wartime Rape Rare?" *Politics and Society* 37, no 1 (2009).
2. Bill Buford, *Among the Thugs*
3. Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men*
4. Jan Gross, *Neighbors*
5. Jan Gross, *Fear*
6. Diego Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense of Suicide Missions*
7. Lee Ann Fujii, *Killing Neighbors: Webs of Violence in Rwanda*
8. Paul Brass, *Theft of an Idol*
9. Kimberly Theidon, *Intimate Enemies*

Apr. 22 Swing day (readings TBA)