

**POS 6933: Interpretive Approaches to Political Science, Graduate Seminar  
Fall 2016**

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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, autoethnographic research, discourse analysis, and reflexive/critical historical analysis. The course readings largely 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 many cases with brief essays 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 (1,500–2,500 words), to be presented in class; and (3) a research project prospectus (10–15 pages), to be presented at the course’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: By September 7, in consultation with me, select a book that features interpretive analysis (and is not already part of the syllabus). Prepare a 5–10 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 1,500–2,500 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 minute presentation of your proposed project for the term's final session (December 7) and submit the prospectus to me no later than Monday, December 12, at 12:00 pm. It will account for 40 percent of the final grade.

Required Readings: A key 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*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2014)—an e-book version of this volume is accessible via the UF Libraries. Additionally, there are a number of books that we will read in their entirety (or large sections thereof), by Joe Soss, Lisa Wedeen, Frederic Schaffer, Katherine Cramer Walsh, Timothy Pachirat, Oded Löwenheim, Lene Hansen, Cecelia Lynch, and Robert Vitalis—the titles and full citations of these books are listed in the course schedule below. These books have been placed on 2-hour reserve at Library West, but I recommend that you purchase as many of them as you can. Other readings consist of journal articles and relatively short excerpts from books. Some of these excerpts are available electronic reserves (e-reserves). At the beginning of each class session, I will briefly explain where you may find the readings assigned for the following week.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

**August 24**      **Course Overview**

**August 31**      **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

**Sept. 7**      **Max Weber's Methodological Contributions: “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)
- “*Wissenschaftslehre*,” chapter 4 (pp. 73-115) in Sam Whimster, *Understanding Weber* (Routledge: 2007). [e-reserves]

Sept. 14

**Philosophical Underpinnings of Interpretive Social Science**

- Charles Taylor, “Interpretation and the Science of Man,” pp. 101-31 in Fred Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy, *Understanding and Social Inquiry* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1977). [e-reserves]
- 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-Naturalist Critique of Qualitative Methodology.” *Perspectives on Politics* 6/3 (September 2008): 503–517.
- Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (New York: Routledge, 2012), chapter 2 (pp. 24–44). [e-reserves]
- Read the following selections from *Interpretation and Method*
  - “Introduction.” (pp. xiii–xxxii)
  - 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.” (80–96)
  - Dvora Yanow, “Neither Rigorous Nor Objective? Interrogating Criteria for Knowledge Claims in Interpretive Science.” (97–119)

II. DOING IT

Sept. 21

**Unstructured Interviewing**

- Joe Soss, *Unwanted Claims: The Politics of Participation in the U.S. Welfare System* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000). Read entire book minus (skip or skim) chapters 6–7.
- Read the following selections from *Interpretation and Method*
  - Joe Soss, “Talking Our Way to Meaningful Explanations: A Practice Centered View of Interviewing for Interpretive Research.” (pp. 161–182)
  - Frederic C. Schaffer, “Ordinary Language Interviewing.” (183–193)

Sept. 28

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

- Lisa Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
- Lisa Wedeen, “Ethnography as Interpretive Enterprise,” pp. 75–93 in Edward Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). [e-reserves]
- Samer Shehata, “Ethnography, Identity, and the Production of Knowledge,” pp. 209–227 in *Interpretation and Method*.

Oct. 5

**A “Meet the Author” Session with Frederic C. Schaffer: Conceptualization in Interpretive Research; Ordinary Language Interviewing:**

- Read the following works by Fred Schaffer
  - *Democracy in Translation: Understanding Politics in an Unfamiliar Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), chaps. 1–3.
  - *Elucidating Social Science Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

**October 12**    **No class (Yom Kippur)**

**October 19**    **Ethnographic Research: Participant Observation in the US**

- Katherine Cramer Walsh, *Talking about Politics: Informal Groups and Social Identity in American Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 1–81 and 195–209.
- Timothy Pachirat, *Every Twelve Seconds: Industrialized Slaughter and the Politics of Sight* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), pp. 1–84 and 233–256.
- Timothy Pachirat, “The Political in Political Ethnography: Observations from the Kill Floor,” pp. 143–61 in Edward Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

**October 26**    **Autoethnographic Research**

[Nail Tanrioven will participate via Skype from Turkey]

- Oded Löwenheim, *The Politics of the Trail: Reflexive Mountain Biking Along the Frontier of Jerusalem* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), pp. 1–56, 139–169, and 194–207.
- Oded Löwenheim, “The ‘I’ in IR: an Autoethnographic Account,” *Review of International Studies* 36 (2010): 1023–1045.
- Elizabeth Dauphinee, “The Ethics of Autoethnography,” *Review of International Studies* 36 (2010): 799–818.
- Nail Tanrioven, *Ordinary Othering and Rediscovery of the Self: Living and Unveiling the Presentation of the Other Among Ordinary Turks*. PhD Dissertation, University of Florida, 2016. Selection TBA.

**November 2**    **Discourse Analysis**

- Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (London: Routledge, 2006).

**November 9**    **Critical Historical Interpretation**

- Cecelia Lynch, “Critical Interpretation and Interwar Peace Movements,” pp. 300–308 in *Interpretation and Method*.
- Cecelia Lynch, *Beyond Appeasement: Interpreting Interwar Peace Movements in World Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

**November 16**    **Reflexive Historical Analysis; Archival Research**

[Prof. Robert Vitalis will participate via Skype]

- Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), pp. 1–128 and 169–181.
- Read the following articles/chapters by Ido Oren:
  - “Political Science As History: A Reflexive Approach,” pp. 309–321 in *Interpretation and Method*.
  - *Our Enemies and US: America’s Rivalries and the Making of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), read Introduction and Conclusion. [e-reserves]
  - “A Sociological Analysis of the Decline of American IR Theory,” *International Studies Review*. First published online: 31 July 2016. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/isr/viw028>

**November 23** No class (Thanksgiving)

**November 30** A “Meet the Author” session with Kevin Funk, a “survivor” of this seminar

- Readings TBA (including a selection from Dr. Funk’s 2016 dissertation, *Between National Attachments, Rooted Transnationalism, and Borderless Utopias: Searching for Imagined Communities in Latin America’s Booming Economic Relations with the Arab World*)

**December 7** **Student Presentations**

- Presentations and discussion of students’ research project prospectuses.

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**December 12** Research project prospectus due at 12 Noon