

**POS 6933: Interpretive Approaches to Political Science, Graduate Seminar  
Spring 2020**

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Office Hours: Tue 5-6 pm, Thu 12-1 pm, or by appointment

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 semi-structured 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 some 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 January 23, 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 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 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 (April 16) and submit the prospectus to me no later than Friday, April 24, 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 portal. Additionally, there are a number of books that we will read in their entirety (or large sections thereof), by Lee Ann Fujii, Katherine Cramer, Lisa Wedeen, Oded Löwenheim, Lene Hansen, Cecelia Lynch, and Robert Vitalis—the titles and full citations of these books are listed in the course schedule below. Two of these texts—by Fujii and Wedeen—are available as e-books via the UF Libraries portal. The other books have been placed on 2-hour reserve at Library West. Still, I recommend that you purchase as many of the assigned books 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

**January 9**      **Course Overview**

**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 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]

**January 30**

**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–xxxi)
  - 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

**Feb. 6**

**Interviewing: Relational and Ordinary language Approaches**

- Lee Ann Fujii, *Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach* (Routledge, 2018). [E-book available via the UF Libraries portal]
- Lee Ann Fujii, “The Power of Local Ties: Popular Participation in the Rwandan Genocide,” *Security Studies* 17 (2008): 568-597.
- Frederic C. Schaffer, *Democracy in Translation: Understanding Politics in an Unfamiliar Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 1–20. [e-reserves]
- Frederic C. Schaffer, “Ordinary Language Interviewing,” pp. 183-193 in *Interpretation and Method*.

**Feb. 13**

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

- Katherine J. Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

**Feb. 20**

**Ethnographic Research Overseas**

- Lisa Wedeen, *Authoritarian Apprehensions: Ideology, Judgment, and Mourning in Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019). [E-book available via the UF libraries portal]
- 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*.

- Feb. 27**      **More on Interviewing and Ethnographic Research Overseas**  
 [Dr. Kevin Funk will participate via Skype from Washington DC]
- Readings TBA (including work adapted from Dr. Funk’s 2016 UF dissertation: *Between National Attachments, Rooted Transnationalism, and Borderless Utopias: Searching for Imagined Communities in Latin America’s Booming Economic Relations with the Arab World*)
- March 12**      **Autoethnographic Research**  
 [Dr. 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.
- March 19**      **Discourse Analysis**  
 [Guest speaker: Taylor McDonald]
- Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (London: Routledge, 2006).
  - Taylor McDonald, *Brother, Neighbor, Bully: Rhetorical Ambiguity and the American Other in Canadian Parliamentary Debate on Afghanistan and Iraq*. PhD Dissertation chapter, University of Florida, 2019. [Will be circulated via email]
- March 26**      **Critical Historical Interpretation**
- Cecelia Lynch, *Beyond Appeasement: Interpreting Interwar Peace Movements in World Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).
  - Cecelia Lynch, “Critical Interpretation and Interwar Peace Movements,” pp. 300–308 in *Interpretation and Method*.
- April 2**      **Reflexive Historical Analysis**
- Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), pp. 1–54 and 169–181.
  - 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), pp. 1–22. [e-reserves]
  - 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*. 18 (December 2016): 571-96.

**April 9**      **No class (Passover)**

**April 16**      **Student Presentations**

- Presentations and discussion of students’ research project prospectuses.

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**April 24**      Research project prospectus due at 12 Noon