

POLS 390: Political Inquiry and Analysis

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BusAd: D-203

Important: This is a provisional syllabus designed to give you a good idea about the course, its requirements, readings, grading, expectations, and workload. I will be tweaking it over the summer and making some small but significant changes. Please do not buy the books listed on this syllabus – they are likely to change. Do not worry – you will have plenty of time to buy the books for our actual course once the semester begins.

Course Description: This course on political inquiry and forms of social analysis first looks at a series of readings that focus on the relationship between epistemology (how we know) and methodology (the means by which we produce what we know) within the discipline of Political Science. After an excursion through a series of examples of qualitative research using methods such as semiotics, ethnography, and thick description, we turn to four books that have examined issues of power, class, race, inequality and related issues within the United States. We read these influential works with an eye on how the authors go about doing their analysis, the epistemologies that underlie their approaches, and the methods they have used in their works. As a course on political inquiry and analysis, our focus will be on questions of how one goes about conducting social and political research. (I should state at the very outset that this course is weighted rather heavily towards qualitative methods and does not look at quantitative methods in political inquiry. Students interested in the latter approach should consider signing up for the other section of POLS 390 or for similar courses on methods in Sociology or Economics or Urban Planning.)

Almost since its very inception as a modern discipline, Political Science has been riven by a tension between scholars who emphasize the “Political” in their approach, versus those who emphasize “Science”. Broadly speaking, one end-point of the spectrum of this debate views Political Science as an enterprise that aims to discover the invariant laws that govern our political behavior, actions and outcomes. This view is premised on the notion that the natural sciences present us with the ideal model of inquiry and we ought to base our methodology on a similar desire to discover general patterns that govern socio-political behavior. Explanation and Prediction are seen as flip-sides of the same coin to this view, and a complete explanation of the past is regarded as providing us with the means to make fairly accurate predictions about the future. The emphasis within this approach may be written as Political *Science*.

The opposite end-point of the spectrum, which may be represented as *Political Science*, while not denying the frequent presence of certain broad and generalized patterns within socio-political behavior, or human behavior more generally, tends to emphasize politics as a contested and ultimately open-ended process of change that can never be fully and accurately predicted because it involves the agency and actions of

human beings acting singly and collectively. There will always remain an irreducible element of the unknowable and the unpredictable about social phenomena and this approach accepts that as a reality. It embarks from the dictum that while humans make their own history, they do not make it as they please. In other words, there is an element of contingency, chance, human intentionality, and open-ended-ness that distinguishes the social realm from the physical to a degree that a non-trivial “science” of politics is an impossible venture. From this perspective, humans are seen as social and sentient beings whose more interesting and valuable characteristics are not so much the regularities that govern their behaviors but rather their creative and unpredictable departures from such regularities.

These contrasting approaches are broad stereotypes, or even “ideal types” in Max Weber’s sense of the term, and there may well be no single political scientist who conforms to either description. The tension between the two poles outlined above does run through the discipline, and the ideal types are useful to remember as we go through the readings this semester. We will look at various exemplars from writings about the social and the political (defined very broadly) realms, both within the United States and elsewhere, and see what they enable us to do and how. The purpose of this course is not so much to equip you with “a methodology” to go out into the world with - but rather to familiarize you with a diversity of approaches; to encourage you to read and write critically and reflexively; to read analytically – that is to see how a book or an article or an argument is put together; to think about how we come to know what we think we know; and to make you more aware of the simple fact that the answers you get depend critically on how you frame the question, and where you look for the answers.

Course Readings: There are four books and a number of other readings that we focus we will be reading through the semester. The readings other than the books will be uploaded onto the course’s website on Lualima. For the first few weeks all your readings will be off Lualima so please go to and familiarize yourself with that site thoroughly. The four books are all paperback and are available from the usual big online bookstores such as amazon.com. Together they should cost you way less than the average textbook you encounter in most of your courses. The books we will be using are:

Ira Katznelson, When Affirmative Action Was White, (WW Norton, 2006).

Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, American Amnesia: how the war on government led us to forget what made America prosper (Simon and Schuster, 2017).

Katherine Kramer, The Politics of Resentment: rural consciousness in Wisconsin and the rise of Scott Walker (University of Chicago press, 2016).

Matthew Desmond, Evicted: poverty and profit in the American city (Broadway, 2017).

The schedule of assigned readings is as below. Please remember that you are expected to do the readings prior to class.

Attendance, Participation and Norms: Regular attendance during the course is expected, and roll will be taken every class. If you miss six classes or more, you can expect nothing better than a C, possibly an F. Class participation that evidences having done the readings and that add to the quality of discussions will be rewarded. Together, attendance and class participation will account for 10% of your final grade. Make sure that your cell-phones are switched off, no browsing the internet during class meetings, and please be attentive during lectures and participate in discussions.

Course Evaluation: There will be mid-term exam worth 25% of the grade which will cover the first quarter of the course. After this, you will write four 3-page analyses of the four books we will read in the latter part of the course. Together these four essays are worth 40% of your final grade. 25% of your final grade will come from a 10-page research paper you will work on through the semester and present in class in the final week. The remaining 10% of your grade is for regular attendance and informed class participation.

The research paper invites you to think about the readings, apply the insights therein to real-life social research settings, and asks you to devise ways of inquiring into and coming up with analytical descriptions of “political” life around us. The research paper is essentially the ‘applied’ part of this course – and more will be said about it in class and over the semester.

Please read the sections at the end of this syllabus - on the writing of papers, and on plagiarism - very closely.

Class and Reading Schedule:

Aug 21 (T): Introduction to the course; readings and expectations; attendance, participation and class demeanor; writing assignments; research design and implementation; grading; policy on plagiarism; a discussion of methodology, and the hands-on way in which we hope to understand it this semester.

Aug 23 (R): A brief introduction to the “scientific method”. What is our common sense understanding of acceptable methods of social or scientific inquiry? What do terms like “hypothesis”, “falsification” and “proof” mean? We begin by re-visiting our formative years in high school when the “scientific method” became the norm for most of us. We will also read a brief piece on what an ideal research proposal in the social sciences should look like. Read: “Introduction to the Scientific Method”.

http://teacher.nsr1.rochester.edu/phy_labs/AppendixE/AppendixE.html

Aug 28 and 30 (T, R): What does a cogent and well-written research proposal look like? How does one state the central research question? Some thoughts from two experts who have reviewed hundreds, if not thousands, of proposal seeking research funding. Read: Adam Przeworski and Frank Salomon, “On the Art of Writing Proposals” Social Science Research Council, New York, 1988 (revised 1995).

http://www.ssrc.org/fellowships/art_of_writing_proposals.page Introduction to the idea

of your research design for this course. Use this reading to structure your preliminary efforts in this regard.

Sep 4 and 6 (T, R): Discussion of “ontology”, “epistemology” and “methodology” – and the ways in which different modes of inquiry might be classified. Read: Introduction (pages 1-16) and Marsh and Furlong, “Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science” (pages 17-41) in Theory and Methods in Political Science, Marsh and Stoker. (Laulima: marsh.pdf)

Sep 11 and 13 (T, R):

Submit an abstract – a one-paragraph summarization – of your proposed research topic for the research paper due at the end of the semester in today’s (Sep 11) class.

The limits or allegedly rational thinking in our lives: Read: Dan Ariely, “The Truth about Relativity,” chapter one from his Predictably Irrational (Laulima: Ariely.pdf).

Sep 18 (T): Interpretive and/or narrative approaches to understanding socio-political realities. A foray into ethnography and the discipline of anthropology. Read: Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: towards an interpretive theory of culture. (Laulima: Thick Description.pdf)

Sep 20 (R): Exemplary Thick Description. Read: Clifford Geertz: “Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight” from Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, New York: Basic Books, 1973. (Laulima: Balic.pdf).

Sep 25 (T): Semiotics as a mode of analysis: how does one understand and interpret the built- and natural world around us? What is semiotics and how does one do it? Read: Ferguson and Turnbull, excerpted chapter from their “Oh Say Can You See?” (Minnesota, 1998) on the Arizona Memorial. (Laulima: Oh Say Can You See.pdf).

Sep 27 (R): Read: chapter on Punchbowl Memorial from Ferguson and Turnbull.

Oct 2 (T): Embedded ethnography: what does a meat-packing plant look like when you actually work in one? Read: Timothy Pachirat, “The Political in Political Ethnography: dispatches from the kill floor,” in Edward Schatz, ed. Political Ethnography: what immersion contributes to the study of power (University of Chicago.)

Oct 4 (R): **In Class Mid Term Exam worth 25% of your final grade.**

Oct 9, 11, 16 and 18 (T, R, T, R): How do political scientists actually go about their job? How do they write books? How do they analyze public policy and its outcomes? We look at a compelling recent example and break it down in terms of narrative, strategy, analytical and rhetorical techniques and normative stakes. Read: Ira Katznelson, When Affirmative Action Was White. **3-page report on Katznelson (worth 10% of final**

grade) due on Oct 23rd.

Oct 23, 25, 30 and Nov 1 (T, R, T, R): So you think we are a democracy, and that the preferences of our public translate into policies enacted by our legislative representatives? A robust critique of the limits of American democracy from a recent influential work in mainstream political science. Read: Hacker and Pierson: American Amnesia. **3 page report on Hacker and Pierson (worth 10% of final grade) due on Nov 6th.**

Nov 6, 8, and 13 (T, R, T): What is it like to be in the American underclass in a big city? And a minority? What does the struggle to rent a home look like? How can social scientists understand the experience of being evicted and convey it to readers? Read: Matthew Desmond, Evicted. **3 page report on Desmond (worth 10% of the final grade) due on Nov 15th.**

Nov 15, 20, 27 (R, T, T): who are the people supporting Trump? What is it like to feel left out of a political system? Read: Katherine Kramer, The Politics of Resentment. **3 page report on Kramer (worth 10% of your final grade) due on Nov 27th.**

Nov 29 (R): Wrapping up the course.

Dec 4 and 6 (T, R): Class presentations of final research paper drafts. Students will make oral, 5-minute presentations of their research papers during the final two class periods of this course. **Attendance is mandatory for these two sessions.**

Final Research Papers for this course are due on Dec 11th (T) by 4:00 pm.

Writing Guidelines

All papers should be:

- Double spaced
- Typewritten
- Spell-checked, proof-read, edited for punctuation, grammar and coherence
- Turned in by the dead-line; late papers will be assessed a grade cut

Plagiarism

An important consideration when writing papers is plagiarism. For your information, the University of Hawai'i Student Conduct Code defines plagiarism as follows:

Plagiarism includes but is not limited to submitting, in fulfillment of an academic requirement, any work that has been copied in whole or in part from another individual's work without attributing that borrowed portion to the

individual; neglecting to identify as a quotation another's idea and particular phrasing that was not assimilated into the student's language and style or paraphrasing a passage so that the reader is misled as to the source; submitting the same written or oral or artistic material in more than one course without obtaining the authorization from the instructors involved; or "drylabbing", which includes obtaining and using experimental data and laboratory write-ups from other sections of a course or from previous terms.

Any student found guilty of plagiarism in this course will immediately receive a failing grade and will be referred to the Dean of Students. One easy rule of thumb to keep out of harm's way in this area: if you're not sure, cite it! (More on citations below).

Interpreting a Text and Making an Argument

Political science is a "social science," which means that it is difficult, if not impossible, to "prove" one person's point of view or "falsify" another's. Given this, you have every right to expect that your viewpoint or your interpretation of a text is just as valid as anyone else's. However, you should also be aware that some interpretations are much weaker than another either because they are not supported by the acceptable academic norms of a discipline ["rotting fruits produce life-forms such as insects and maggots" would not go over too well in any university department] or because there is not enough persuasive evidence to support such an interpretation ["I believe most Americans are democratic because my parish priest told me so"] or the logic is simply wrong ["Julius Caesar's Rome was greatly weakened by the bubonic plague"]. Weak interpretations are often seen as opinions, whereas political science most often validates good arguments. In this course, while I am interested in your opinions, I am more interested in how you marshal evidence to support your opinions and how you structure your arguments to persuade me that your opinion is logical, plausible and worthy of taking seriously.

The difference between an argument and an opinion, then, lies in the evidence which must be provided. Arguments are sustained by evidence and examples, rather than guesses, hunches or intuition, even though the latter may be critical components of the creative process and invaluable at the initial stages of any inquiry. You are expected to advance an argument in your papers. Since we are not scientists in a strict sense, this does not mean that you have to "prove" beyond doubt what you are saying. Rather, you must support your argument with evidence from texts, logic and further research if you deem it necessary. To use texts persuasively, you should provide quotations of major points in the author's argument, and sustain those quotes with your interpretation and then your support or disagreement. This allows the reader to see that you understand the text, that you have evaluated it according to apparent standards of review, and that you can use it in a sustained argument. You certainly do not have to agree with the authors you read; on the contrary, your quotations might show how the author is unfair, inconsistent, illogical, unpersuasive, or just plain wrong. In short, you must always say why you think what you think and provide appropriate support.

Your paper grades will derive partly from how well you support your argument and how

skillfully you build it. An argument without evidence is little more than an opinion, and while it may be a valid opinion, and you have every right to hold it, it is not adequate for the purposes of writing a paper. I will also grade you on such things as spelling, grammar, syntax, sentence structure, and elegance or style. It is important that you review your papers carefully for these kinds of issues. The most brilliant argument can become unintelligible when not articulated clearly.

Citations

Given the importance of supporting your work, here are some guidelines. When you quote from a text, you must indicate that you have done so (failure to do so constitutes plagiarism). In addition to placing cited material within quotation marks, you must also make some kind of note as to the title of the quoted work and the page number. For our purposes, this can be as simple as: (Madison, *Federalist 10*:65) or (Marx and Engels, 1848: 21) – with the full bibliography appearing at the end of the paper. Or, references can be put into footnotes where the full citation resides. Additionally, anything you paraphrase, or any idea you borrow, should be attributed to the author and cited in the very same manner. For more examples and information on how to cite different kinds of sources, consult the [MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers](#) or the [Chicago Manual of Style](#). Cite World Wide Web sources with the appropriate URL and the date when you contacted the site. With web citations, the rule is the same as with other citations: using the information provided in your citation, I should be able to access the exact same material that you claim to have accessed.

Helpful Hints

Writing is not always easy and is a skill that requires time and practice to develop and sustain. You are certainly not alone if writing is something you not only dread but find difficult. Some suggestions: start your papers well in advance of the deadline. Letting ideas simmer for a day or two and then returning to them later can do wonders. Starting early also gives you time to think through your argument prior to turning your paper in. Let someone else proof-read your paper. This is good for catching grammatical and spelling errors, and can be a valuable source of feed-back for you. Remember, no spell-check in the world can help distinguish between “to” and “too” or “were” and “where” – not to mention “ordinary” and “ornery” or “split” and “spilt”. Spell checks are limited in what they can do – you will still need to proof-read your papers carefully. Try to work with someone who won’t just say “this is great” and leave it at that. You want honest, constructive criticism. Also, try reading your paper out loud to yourself. Any sentence that is too difficult to speak smoothly is just as hard to read and should be reworked. Feel free to submit drafts of your papers to me for review and comments. I will be happy to take a look at your written work before the deadline – however, the sooner the better.