

Pols. 601 Political Analysis and Theory Building
Professor Richard W. Chadwick¹

Saunders 641 Tuesdays 5:30-8 pm. CRN 89287. Email: chadwick@hawaii.edu. Phone/voicemail: 956-7180. C.v. <http://www.hawaii.edu/intlrel/>, background: <http://politicalscience.hawaii.edu/faculty/chadwick.html>.

Office hours Saunders 616: January 9-May 3, MW 1:30-3, Tues. 3-5 (except holidays and as necessitated—usually I'll leave a sign on the door to email me) and by appointment.

Catalog description

“POLS 601 Political Analysis and Theory Building (3) Survey of theory-building, approaches and validation techniques.“

Description for this section of Pols. 601²

Let's begin with an interpretation of the above course title as a way of introducing the subject matter for the course: “Political analysis” is about describing, explaining, and modeling political dynamics. “Theory building” is more than constructing explanations for and descriptions of politics as practiced. It is also about *imagining* politics; that is, it can also be about what isn't (e.g., utopian theories), about what might be considered possible but unlikely (e.g., now defunct theories about why Trump would not get elected), and what might be considered impossible at present and how it might be made possible (e.g., a nonkilling political universe), how the world of politics might change or be changed fundamentally, and why. My purpose in offering this course is to engage you in learning about these constructive, deconstructive, and reconstructive facets of political analysis and theory building.

As important as the understanding political analysis and theory building is in and of itself, just as important is inquiry into why particular subjects become political and why subjects become the focus of researchers' and practitioners' sustained attention. Resolving puzzles, paradoxes and dilemmas may intrinsically motivate individual researchers, but extrinsic conditions such as available research funds, political constraints and opportunities, and personal advancement also play significant roles. We will explore these issues as well.

Course organization

About 10 class sessions will consist of lectures and discussions centering around the textbook material (see below for the four texts) and your weekly commentaries. You are expected to write a 3-5 page (double spaced, or equivalent length) commentary on the subjects addressed in the previous week's readings and class discussions. Class participation and written

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2 It is important to note that every faculty member who offers this course offers a different substantive framework. Some specialize in empirical modeling, others in critical thinking, others in philosophy, all focused on politics in one way or another. There is no “standard model” for such courses that I know of, probably because there is no “standard model” of politics.

commentaries will count equally in your final grade. Interspersed between some of these sessions we will have some skill building sessions designing some empirical, philosophical, and applied research projects to be decided upon in class sessions in advance. The last few sessions will be devoted to short student presentations and class reactions on topics selected for final papers (about 10-15 pages). Each student should complete their final paper no later than May 8th (one week after the last class session). Email attachments in .doc or .docx format are preferred, sent to my university email address, chadwick@hawaii.edu. The final paper constitutes about a third of your grade and may include material from your previous commentaries and projects.

Textbooks

I've organized this course around four books that address the above subjects in very different ways, and from which you can branch out into your own areas of interest as you proceed in your readings and written commentaries.

1. Shively's book, *The Craft of Political Research*, now in its 9th edition, typifies introductory texts to mainstream political research; and I use it in my current undergraduate class (Pols. 390).
2. Rarely used, however, is Alford's book, *The Craft of Political Inquiry*; he focuses not on the details of data generation and hypothesis testing, but rather on the thought processes of researchers themselves, from graduate students to practitioners of the profession, primarily in political sociology.
3. Neither Shively's nor Alford's approaches look at actual applications of theory and analysis from a practitioner's perspective. Students of politics rarely have the opportunity to see this perspective. Smith's book, *The Craft of Political Analysis for Diplomats*, is exceptional. His intended audience is the foreign policy analyst in the Department of State (the book itself is the 48th in a series on what diplomats do and think); it is a clear and systematic account of how political analysis is done (two cases studies are provided). Smith inverts the usual focus on data generation to test hypotheses and edit theories, to focus on the application of theories and data generation creatively and proactively to impact politics.
4. The fourth book I selected illustrates a constructivist approach to designing alternative futures. Paige's *Nonkilling Political Science*, is a grand *tour de force* aimed at a thorough reorganization of political and social theory with a normative goal of creating a world without war. He embarks on a theory building effort to transcend the theories Smith uses, the motivation of which is a passion to end political killing.

Your first assignment. In the **first Tuesday of class** we will compare and contrast four short readings, one from each of the four assigned texts—three available at the UHM Bookstore; the fourth book can be downloaded (see link below).

Since our department encourages you to sample classes in the first class session without necessarily registering, to save you the trouble of buying the texts, I've provided links to the Amazon samples of three of these texts; come prepared to discuss at least that portion available online, as well as the above introductory material in this syllabus. The fourth text you can download at no cost.

1. W. Phillips Shively, *The Craft of Political Research*; read through p. 32 [end of ch. 2; for a quick look see [Amazon's excerpt \(only goes to p. 8\)](#)]. Shively takes you into both the philosophical and practical details of developing grounded (empirical) political theory. Unlike Alford's metatheory of multivariate, interpretive and historicist paradigms, Shively distinguishes between applied vs. "recreational" and empirical vs. non-empirical paradigms to construct four different paradigms focused on politics: those that produce normative vs. positive theory, and those focused on constructing reality (engineering) vs. understanding (theory-oriented research). In his text, he focuses principally on the latter, the theory oriented research paradigm.
2. Robert R. Alford, *The Craft of Inquiry: Theories, Methods, Evidence*; read through p. 20. (for a quick look, check out [Amazon's excerpt \(only goes to p. 16\)](#)). Alford is quite critical of social science in general but in a constructive way, and focuses on the challenges and academic life experiences of graduate students, faculty and research scientists. His general orientation is to focus on paradigms or subcultures of inquiry; he defines three: the multivariate, the interpretive, and the historical. Each is differentiated by type of explanation, method of data generation, and interpretative goals. Since Alford's approach is sociological, you might wonder what if anything significantly differentiates political science from a sociological orientation to politics. Let's discuss that. Also in this first reading, Alford uses the examples from Durkheim's, Weber's, and Marx's works to illustrate the wide gaps that exist between theories and evidence.
3. Ray F. Smith, *The Craft of Political Analysis for Diplomats*; read through p. 24. [for a quick look, see [Amazon's excerpt \(only goes up to p. 5\)](#)]. Smith is a retired, very experienced diplomat who describes and theorizes about the life of actual State Department analysts as they function on the job, using cases studies of major events. His paradigm is quite different from those Alford describes and evaluates. His is a paradigm about application, meaning the production of analytic products intended for decision makers to use in efforts to change or control political action and/or understandings of others involved in politics and decision making. The purpose of this particular paradigm (subculture) is "to protect and promote his country's interests" (p. 3). Applied paradigms use fruits of multivariate, interpretive and historicist paradigms—all three of those discussed by Alford. Their end products, theory (understanding) and data (information), are used to craft actionable models of contemporary politics, not the actual decisions and implementations but rather the information structure supporting those decisions and actions. This tradition of applied politics paradigms is an ancient one (e.g., see [Quintus Tullius Cicero, How to Win an Election](#), circa 64 BC), and not usually taught in academic circles, despite its practical value.
4. For those in the alternative futures program, Glenn Paige provides an interesting effort to envision an alternative political future, one without people killing each other, and then goes about constructing a theory in which it appears to be possible. [Glenn Paige's](#) book (download link → [Nonkilling Political Science](#)) is provided free of charge by his [Center for Global Nonkilling](#). You may wish to consider this as a critical theory option to study carefully. Read at least the online description and introduction. For a similar view arrived at through very different considerations, see Howard Bloom, [The Lucifer Principle](#); incidentally, Bloom explicitly rejects the very paradigmatic basis of sociology that Alford discusses, the influence of Durkheim, Weber, and Marx, in favor of a constructivist paradigm. Both of these texts employ what I refer to as a philosophical paradigm, distinct from applied ("engineering" in Shively's sense) and grounded theory

paradigms. I'll contrast my three paradigm framework with Shively's four and Alford's three, and suggest where Smith's, Paiges, and Bloom's work fit.

Your first written assignment: As mentioned earlier, you should read the above text excerpts, compare these authors' self-described motivations for writing their texts, the different audiences they aspire to reach, the nature of the core problems they prepare to address, and your own interests relative to their differences in orientation. After the first class session, write a short commentary (3-5 pages double spaced) reacting to the readings and class discussions. The central focus of the commentary should not be a review or summary, but rather your reaction to what you've read and heard class discussion (you may include a review or summary for your own purposes in addition to your 3-5 pages of "reaction"). For instance, do you find the efforts of these writers useful to clarify your own understanding of the varieties of research on politics, and how they can or do relate to each other? Would you consider other criteria for typologizing paradigms? Do you see these efforts at "metatheory" as premature relative to the "state of the art?" What paradigm would you prefer to adopt in your own work for this course, for research and papers you might write? **Email or paper copy me this your first commentary for the course, to me before the second class session.** It would be preferable if you could get it to me the Monday before class so I have time to read it over and comment. Generally I intend to share my comments with the whole class.

I try to adjust the content and pace of the course based on students' interests, prior education (including life experience in general), talents, and time made available for study. For instance, I am planning to give you an option during the last half of the course to begin learning how to use a statistical analysis program, STATA (see <http://www.ats.ucla.edu/stat/stata/>), should you wish to try you hand at quantitative analysis of one sort or another. I'll also introduce you to Ifs (the International Futures simulation) under continuous improvement by Barry Hughes (see <http://pardee.du.edu/>; you can actually run the model online and examine data).

Syllabus outline with tentative dates

The syllabus below does not include specific times for class discussion and exercises. These will depend on students interests and how I work them into the class schedule. Expect such additions to this schedule.

Week Readings and Topics

1. see above for first week of class.
2. January 17, 2017 – assigned reading and lecture notes
 - Shively Ch. 2 "What Does Good Theory Look Like?" (read detailed comments below)
 - Alford Ch 2 "Designing a Research Project" (compare with Shively pp. 28-32)
 - Smith Ch 2 "The Objectives of Diplomatic Analysis" [inform, explain, influence; how different from Shively's "elegant" theory criteria (see below)?]
 - Paige "Introduction" by James Robinson, pp. 13-18 (Compare/contrast Paige's theory building and analysis purposes with Smith's, Shively's "Machiavellian" approach, and Alford's focus on the mental gymnastics of the individual researcher-to-be. Are the paradigm typologies of Shively and Alford—from their first chapters—

helpful?)

Here are my lecture notes, reacting mostly to Shively:

- Shively on theory: compare his concept of causation (p. 15) with these three criteria for characterizing a relationship as causal:
 - time precedence (cause x precedes effect y),
 - manipulation ($\Delta x \rightarrow \Delta y$, that is, a change in x will be followed by a change in y),
 - explanation (rationale for expecting the $x \rightarrow y$ relation to be consistent with future observations).
- These are the conditions under which social scientists appear to be comfortable with using the term causation—so I inferred some decades ago from reading Arthur Stinchcomb’s text, [Constructing Social Theories](#).
- Note Shively’s criteria for evaluating a theory as elegant: *simplicity, prediction, importance*. How might they be related to time precedence, manipulation, and explanation? Let’s think about these criteria a bit.
 - Shively claims that elegant theory should *simplify*. He suggests that an explanation for some political phenomenon should contain “no more than a few” factors (p. 16).
 - Shively and others claim that good theory is *predictive*. Consider a couple of common sense qualifications:
 - Theory is language used to describe conditions under which something is *possible*, the idea that $\Delta x \rightarrow \Delta y$ does not assert that Δx exists, only that if it exists, Δy will occur. Only when it is applied to data about whether those conditions exist or not does it become predictive of the behavior of y.
 - The statement that $\Delta x \rightarrow \Delta y$ may itself be further qualified. Unqualified it would imply that the change in x is both necessary and sufficient to cause the change in y. But the statement may be qualified to say that Δx is necessary but not sufficient, or that Δx is sufficient but not necessary, or that the relationship is probabilistic, or that it is interactive (amplified or attenuated in the presence of some other factors), or that it is normative (following constructivist philosophy), or some combination of these.
 - Consider some possible meanings of *importance*:
 - improving understanding of politics (e.g., puzzle solving, see pp. 25-28),
 - aiding achievement of some political decision (e.g., resolving “[prisoner dilemma](#)” type situations; for extensive research on this dilemma see [Rapport and Chammah](#)), and
 - transcendence (e.g., resolving a paradox, such as the [voting paradox](#)).Examples: explaining war, reducing financial corruption while minimizing bureaucratic regulation, or transcending the “prisoner’s dilemma”
 - Research strategies:
 - Standard empirical research pattern myth: theory \rightarrow hypothesis \rightarrow data \rightarrow analysis.
 - Problem selection (“Machiavellian”) criteria: generalizability, weakness, clarity in design and in presentation.

3. January 24, 2017.

- Shively Ch. 3 “Importance of Dimensional Thinking”
- Alford, Ch. 3 “The Construction of Arguments”
- (May add chapters or portions thereof from Smith and Paige here. Look for update.)

- “Usefulness” of research related to agreement on its meanings
- Multiple (contextual) meanings of natural language are problematic for research in all paradigms (science, practice, philosophy)
- Beyond multidimensionality; recalling [Korzybski](#)'s “the map is not the territory”
- Reassessing causality and the “standard model” for “recreational” research (Theory→Hypothesis→Data→Analysis→ΔTheory...) in empirical research
- Discussion of potential student research topics

* * * To be completed this week, before classes start. I'm integrating new material into the schedule. * *

4. ...