Political Science 7961: Approaches to the Study of Politics
Fall 2008
Class Meeting: Tuesday 9:10-12:00
Class Location: 218 Stubbs
Instructor: David Sobek
Office Hours: Monday 9:30-10:30
Wednesday 9:00-10:00
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Summary:

This course is an introduction to the study of politics. Given the breadth of topics that could be covered, this course is necessarily quite broad. With this in mind, the class has three main goals. First, it introduces you to the basic concepts and debates within the philosophy of science. This is important because you need to understand how to ask and answer questions before you can conduct research. Second, the class will highlight some of the more common ways in which political scientists conduct research. While it is unlikely that you would use every method discussed in the course, it is likely that you will be required to understand research that uses these methods. Finally, the class will help you develop the skills needed to conduct independent research. While this is a multi-year process, you should leave the course with a basic understanding of research design and implementation.

Since this class is most likely one of your first experiences of both graduate school and political science at the graduate level, it is quite natural to feel a little overwhelmed. As such, feel free to ask questions not only about this course, but anything that comes up as the semester progresses. I will make an effort to highlight and explain the idiosyncrasies of graduate school, but there may be a topic/issue that I do not cover. If this occurs, then please bring it to my attention (either in class or outside of class) and I will be more than happy to discuss it.

Assignments:

Attendance and Participation (10%): It will be critical that you come to class prepared and participate in discussions. Simply attending class will not be sufficient. You are required to be actively involved in the class discussions.

Discussion Leader(s) (10% each time, 20% total): Twice in the semester you will be required to act as a discussion leader. On these days you need to identify the most critical aspects of the readings and develop a way to communicate this to the class. This could range from developing a series of discussion questions to the preparation of a short presentation.

Reaction Paper (20%): For this you are required to write a short (7-9 page, double-spaced) paper that addresses one of the key questions examined in the philosophy of science literature. I will distribute to you a list of questions later in the semester and you will choose to write on one of those questions. This paper is due November 18th.
Research Paper (40%): You will be required to prepare a research paper that will be completed in a number of parts. First, you will develop a research question (due September 23rd). Second, you will write a literature review and theory section (due October 21st). Finally, you will create a research design that tests your theory (due November 4th). The final copy of the paper is due on the final day of class (December 2nd).

Presentation of Research Paper (10%): The last two weeks of the course are set aside for the presentation of your papers. These presentations should be about 15 minutes in length.

Books:


Section I: Understanding Science
Week 1, August 25th: Introduction

Week 2, September 2nd: What Makes Someone A Scientist?
Nummedal, Tara. 2007. *Alchemy and Authority in the Holy Roman Empire*.

Week 3, September 9th: The Scientific Method and Falsificationism
Hoover, Kenneth and Todd Donovan. 1995. *The Elements of Social Scientific Thinking: Chapters 1-2*
Chalmers, A.F. 1999. *What is this Thing Called Science?: Chapters 1 through 7*

Week 4, September 16th: Science as Non-Scientific
Chalmers: Chapters 8 and 9

Week 5, September 23rd: Against Method
Chalmers: Chapters 10 and 11

Research Question Due

Week 6, September 30th: What is Science?
Chalmers: Chapters 12 through 16

Week 7, October 7th: What is Truth?

Section II: Understanding Political Science
Week 8, October 14th: The Basics of Research
Hoover, Kenneth and Todd Donovan. Chapters 3-6.

Week 9, October 21st: The Case for Case Studies

Literature Review and Theory Section Due

Week 10, October 28th: Understanding Rational Choice

Week 11, November 4th: Developing Theory
Most, Benjamin and Harvey Starr. 1989. *Inquiry, Logic, and International Politics: Chapters 1-3*.

Research Design Due
Section III: Understanding How to Do Research in Political Science

Week 12, November 11th: What to Ask and How to Ask it.
Read the Introduction, Literature Reviews, and Theory Sections of Every Article:

International Relations

Comparative Politics

American Politics

Political Theory

Week 13, November 18th: What to Test and How to Test it.
Finish reading the articles from Week 12.
Reaction Paper Due

Week 14, November 25th: Presentations

Week 15, December 2nd: Presentations