Political Science 7961: Approaches to the Study of Politics

Fall 2009

Class Meeting: Monday 1:40-4:30
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 present them to the class using a short presentation (10 to 15 minutes). In addition, you will be required to write a short summary of the reading(s) (about 3-5 pages, double-spaced).

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 question later in the semester and you will choose to write on one of those questions. This paper is due November 9th.
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 21st). Second, you will write a literature review and theory section (due October 26th). Finally, you will create a research design that tests your theory (due November 16th). The final copy of the paper is due on the final day of class (November 30th).

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 10 minutes in length.

Books:


Section I: Understanding Science

Week 1, August 24th: Introduction

Week 2, August 31st: What Makes Someone A Scientist?
Nummedal, Tara. 2007. *Alchemy and Authority in the Holy Roman Empire*.

Week 3, September 7th: Labor Day-No Class

Week 4, September 14th: 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 5, September 21st: Science as Non-Scientific
Chalmers: Chapters 8 and 9
Research Question Due

Week 6, September 28th: Against Method
Chalmers: Chapters 10 and 11

Week 7, October 5th: What is Science?
Chalmers: Chapters 12 through 16

Week 8, October 12th: What is Truth?

Section II: Understanding Political Science

Week 9, October 19th: The Basics of Research
Hoover, Kenneth and Todd Donovan. Chapters 3-6.

Week 10, October 26th: The Case for Case Studies

Literature Review and Theory Section Due

Week 11, November 2nd: Understanding Rational Choice
Week 12, November 9th: Developing Theory
Reaction Paper Due

Section III: Understanding How to Do Research in Political Science

Week 13, November 16th: What to Ask and How to Ask it.
International Relations

Comparative Politics
Research Design Due

Week 14, November 23rd: What to Test and How to Test it.
American Politics

Political Theory

Week 15, November 30th: Presentations
Research Paper Due