

Arguments and Evidence in Political Science

PSC 31113

Fall 2014

Monday and Wednesday 9:30-10:45

NAC 6/213

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Office Hours

Monday 1:00-2:00

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Other times by appointment

Description: What makes an argument a good argument? How should evidence be used to produce a compelling argument and how can we evaluate that evidence? How do political scientists make an argument or approach evidence such that their profession is different from journalism or punditry? The readings in this class collectively address these questions. In doing so, they introduce students to the discipline of political science, both in its positivist and interpretivist traditions. It addresses questions of research design including how to develop a solid research question and how to select methods appropriate to answering that question. Students will also be introduced to some methods frequently used by political scientists including surveying, case studies, interviewing, and ethnographic participant observation.

The primary way through which students will be introduced to research methods in political science is via engagement with two highly regarded recent works that demonstrate excellence in research design: Scott Straus' study of the Rwandan genocide, *The Order of Genocide*, and Lisa Wedeen's examination of nationalism in Yemen, *Peripheral Visions*. Via these two texts, students will be shown how research in both the positivist and interpretivist tradition is crafted. They will also learn how to read work in each of these traditions critically and to analyze problems in the fit between evidence, argument and conclusions.

Course Assignments: The primary assignments for the course are three take home exams. Students will also have occasional, unannounced extra credit opportunities based on extending exercises that will be performed in class.

Grading and Evaluation: The first exam is worth 20 percent of the final grade and the second and third exams are each worth 30 percent. Participation is worth 20 percent of the final grade. Extra-credit assignments can be used to raise the assignment with the lowest grade by one half letter grade (e.g. an exam that originally earned a B would become a B+).

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this course students will be able to

- set up a basic research project
- critically evaluate works of social science
- conduct a basic survey, interview, or ethnographic observation

Attendance and Electronics: Student attendance is crucial to the success of the course and students ability to learn in it. Reflecting this importance, participation is a major component of the grade. To ensure students attend class they will be graded down one full letter grade in their participation grade for each unexcused absence (e.g. A steps down to B). Absences for medical or family emergencies are excusable but must accompanied by a note from a doctor or other relevant authority. Absences for other reasons (e.g. late trains or late work hours) are not excusable. You are expected to attend class, to be there on time, and to participate thoughtfully in class. You should come to class prepared by having read and thought about the material if only because your participation will factor heavily into your final grade.

Just as student attendance is crucial to the success of the course, student attention is also. As such, electronic devices (including tablets, laptops, and cell phones) are not permitted in class. Take notes the old fashioned way with a pen and paper.

Books to Purchase:

- Strauss, Scott. 2008. *Order of Genocide: Race, Power and War in Rwanda*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Wedeen, Lisa. 2008. *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Section I: Studying Politics Scientifically

Week 1 – Course Overview

Class 1 Sept. 1

No Class (Labor Day)

Class 2 Sept. 3 – Course Introduction

No Reading

Week 2 – The Purposes of Political Science

Class 1 Sept. 8 – Political Science, Not Punditry Punditry

Robert Kaplan. 1994. “The Coming Anarchy.” *The Atlantic Monthly* February 1.

Class 2 Sept. 10 – The Discipline of Political Science

Almond, Gabriel. 1966. “Political Theory and Political Science.” *American Political Science Review* 60(4): 869–879.

Howard, Marc Morje and Meir R. Walters. 2014. “Explaining the Unexpected: Political Science and the Surprises of 1989 and 2011.” *Perspectives on Politics* 12(2): 394-408.

Week 3 – Why the Methods You Use Matter to How You See the World

Class 1 Sept. 15 – The Qualitative and Quantitative Traditions

Mahoney, James and Gary Goertz. 2006. “A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research.” *Political Analysis* 14 (3): 227-249.

Class 2 Sept. 17 – Different Methods, Different Outcomes

Coppedge, Michael. 2002. “Theory Building and Hypothesis Testing: Large- vs. Small-N Research on Democratization.” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association.

Week 4 – Why the Evidence You Use Matters to How You See the World

Class 1 Sept. 22 – The Politics of Evidence

Davenport, Christian and Patrick Ball. 2002. “Views to a Kill: Exploring the Implications of Source Selection in the Case of Guatemalan State Terror, 1977-1995.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46 (3): 427-450.

Assignment: Take Home Exam 1 Handed Out

Class 2 Sept. 24

No Class (Fall Break)

Section II: Positivist Political Science

Week 5 – Developing a Research Question

Class 1 Sept. 29 – Asking a Good Question

King, Gary, Robert Keohane and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press: 3-27.

DUE: Take Home Exam 1

Class 2 Oct. 1 – Setting up a Question: An Example

Strauss, Scott. 2008. *Order of Genocide: Race, Power and War in Rwanda*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press: 1-41.

Week 6 – Variation and Research Design

Class 1 Oct. 6 – Comparison in a Research Design

Przeworski, Adam and Henry Teune. 1970. *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry*. New York: Wiley-Interscience: Chapter 2.

Class 2 Oct. 8 – A Comparative Research Design: An Example

Strauss, Scott. 2008. *Order of Genocide: Race, Power and War in Rwanda*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press: 65-94.

Week 7 – Survey Research: A Primer

Class 1 Oct. 13

No Class (Columbus Day)

Class 2 Oct. 15 – An Overview of Surveys

Guest Speaker: Prof. Calvert Jones

Reading TBD

Week 8 – The Benefits of a Big Number

Class 1 Oct. 20 – A Primer to Statistics

Whelan, Charles. 2013. *Naked Statistics*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company: 15-33, 58-65.

Class 2 Oct. 22 – An Example of a Large-N Survey in Practice

Strauss, Scott. 2008. *Order of Genocide: Race, Power and War in Rwanda*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press: 122-174.

Week 9 – Correlation Is Not Causation

Class 1 Oct. 27 – Process Tracing

George, Alexander L. and Andrew Bennett. 2004. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press: 205-232.

Strauss, Scott. 2008. *Order of Genocide: Race, Power and War in Rwanda*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press: 176-200.

Assignment: Take Home Exam 2 Handed Out

Class 2 Oct. 29 – Coming to Conclusions through Mixed Methods

Strauss, Scott. 2008. *Order of Genocide: Race, Power and War in Rwanda*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press: 200-224.

Section III – Interpretive Research Designs

Week 10 – Ethnography is More than Soaking and Poking

Class 1 Nov. 3 – Thick Description

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Thick Description: Towards and Interpretive Theory of Culture." In *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books.

DUE: Take Home Exam 2

Class 2 Nov. 5 – An Ethnographic Research Question

Wedeen, Lisa. 2010. "Reflections on Ethnographic Fieldwork in Political Science" *Annual Review of Political Science* 13: 255-272.

Wedeen, Lisa. 2008. *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: Introduction.

Week 11 – Interpreting Performance in Politics

Class 1 Nov. 10 – Performance Theory

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. “Deep Play: Notes from a Balinese Cockfight.” In *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books.

Class 2 Nov. 12 – An Interpretive Research Design

Wedeen, Lisa. 2008. *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: Chapter 2.

Week 12 – Conducting Ethnographic Fieldwork I

Class 1 Nov. 17 – The Practice of Fieldwork

Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: Chapters 1.

Fujii, Lee Ann. 2012. “Shades of Truth and Lies: Interpreting Testimonies of War and Violence.” *Journal of Peace Research* 47(2): 231-241.

Class 2 Nov. 19 – Qat Chews

Wedeen, Lisa. 2008. *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: Chapter 3.

Week 13 – Conducting Ethnographic Fieldwork II

Class 1 Nov. 24 – The Practice of Fieldnotes

Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: Chapters 6.

Class 2 Nov. 26 – Conducting Ethnographic Observations

Ottenberg, Simon. 1990. “Thirty Years of Fieldnotes: Changing Relationships to the Text.” In *Fieldnotes: The Making of Anthropology*. Roger Sanjek, ed. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Week 14 – Reflexivity in Ethnographic Fieldwork

Class 1 Dec. 1 – Reflexivity in Theory

Pachirat, Timothy. 2009. “The Political in Political Ethnography: Dispatches from the Kill Floor.” In *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Politics*. Edward Schatz, Ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Davenport, Christian. 2014. "Researching While Black: Why Conflict Research Needs More African Americans (Maybe)." *Political Violence @ A Glance*.

<http://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2013/04/10/researching-while-black-why-conflict-research-needs-more-african-americans-maybe/>

Class 2 Dec. 3 – Is Reflexivity Necessary?

Wedeen, Lisa. 2008. *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: Chapter 4.

Week 15 – Fieldwork Ethics

Class 1 December 8 – Ethics 101

Fujii, Lee Ann. 2012. "Research Ethics 101: Dilemmas and Responsibilities." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 45(4): 717-723.

Wood, Elisabeth Jean. 2007. "Field Research During War: Ethical Dilemmas." In *New Perspectives in Political Ethnography*. Joseph, Lauren et al. eds. New York: Springer.

Class 2 December 10 – Ethics 102

Hodge, G. Derrick. 2013. "The Problem with Ethics." *PoLAR* 26(2): 286-297.

Week 16 – Rethinking the Scientific Study of Politics

December 15 – Politics and Performative

Wedeen, Lisa. 2008. *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: Conclusion.

Assignment: Take Home Exam 3 Handed Out

DUE December 22 by noon: Take Home Exam 3