Research in social science aims to understand phenomena that are human constructions. Ideas such as ‘country,’ ‘democracy,’ ‘voting,’ ‘power,’ and ‘market’ refer to things or practices that come from how people think and behave. Social inquiry therefore has to consider both that the subjects of the inquiry depend on social phenomena and also that the observer understands what he or she is looking at by reference to social phenomena. Both the subject and the scholar are making sense of the world through interpretation. This class introduces students to methodological issues raised by interpretation in political science scholarship. It considers both sides of this ‘double-interpretation’ and considers practical methodological strategies for political science students. It gives students a foundation on which to formulate their own research with a well-chosen match between research methods, the questions being asked, and the subject under study.

**Teaching assistants**

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**Class talisman**


**Theme song**


**Required text**


plus one more book as discussed below.

**Assignments**
Participation in section 20%

Response paper, Sept. 28, 500 words 10%  (D. Immerwahr)

Response paper, Oct. 12, 700 words 10%  (J. Scott)


Book analysis of problematique, Nov 9 20%

Final paper, Dec. 5, 10am 40%

The course assignment is to read a recent book in political science and comment on its research methods. Choose one of the following books and write an essay that describes its research goals and its approach to methods and that gives your thoughts on the connections between the two. The paper should be 8 to 10 pages long and is due on Tuesday December 5th at 10am.

There are two goals. The first is to describe what the author thinks needs explaining, what they presume in order to see the problem that way, what resources they bring to bear to make that point, and what they see as the implications. The second is to place yourself in the conversation and expand down that path.

You will also submit a short preliminary analysis of the book’s problematique - that is, how the author motivates the work, what they see as the problem or issue that needs exploring with the book and what the presumptions are that make that problem or issue stand out.

The books are:


Schedule of Topics and Readings

Tuesday Sept 19 - What is the goal of political science?


Thursday Sept 21 - Meaning and action: Humanitarian rescue in the Bosnian War


II.

Tuesday Sept 26 - Sense-making by agents


Thursday Sept 28 - Meaning and observation

*** response paper #1 due ***


further reading


III.

Tuesday Oct 3 - Interpretivism as research method


Thursday Oct 5 - Making sense of the world

further reading


IV.

Tuesday Oct 10 - Social science and the double hermeneutic


further reading

Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, “Neopositivism,” Ch. 3 in Jackson, The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and its Implications for the Study of World Politics (Routledge, 2011).


Thursday Oct 12 - Planning and control, formal and informal, power and diagnosis

**** response paper #2 due ****


further reading


V. Cases

**Tuesday Oct 17 - Thinking about discourse**


**Thursday Oct 19 - Anarchy as discourse**


Further reading


VI.

**Tuesday Oct 24 - Thinking about law**


Judith Shklar, Ch. 1 of Legalism. Harvard University Press.

Further reading: 2 approaches to studying international law


Thursday Oct 26 - Samples Day

**** deadline to decide on a book to analyze ****

Rosa Brooks, interview with Isaac Chotiner, Slate, 2016.


VII.

Tuesday Oct 31 - Thinking about categories: markets and the state


Further reading


Thursday Nov 2 - Thinking about categories: Social power and Marxism


Further reading


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VIII.

**Tuesday Nov 7 - Thinking about categories: consequences**


Further reading


**Thursday Nov 9 - Book discussions**

**** problematique assignment due ****

IX.

**Tuesday Nov 14 - Thinking about practices**


Further reading


**Thursday Nov 16 - Book discussions**

No reading
X.

Tuesday Nov 21 - Wrapup