**Interpretive Methodologies and Methods Conference Group**

**Business Meeting 2014**

**Hilton Hotel, Du Pont Room**

**Friday, 29 August, 12:15-1:15 pm**

**Minutes**

Meeting was convened by Ido Oren, University of Florida, Executive Committee Chair.

Attendance: 23 grown-ups, 1 baby

**1. Report from this year's program chair**: Ido Oren, for Rich Holtzman, Bryant University

* IMM had 15 paper submissions and 2 panel submissions. Thanks to co-sponsorship, we parlayed our two panel allocation (up from one in past years) into three panels. We also co-sponsored the Methods Café, which does not count toward our allocation.

**2. Report on the Methods Cafe**: Peri Schwartz-Shea, Utah, for herself and Dvora Yanow, Wageningen, co-organizers

* The cafe had 48 visitors (at least; tabulation is difficult) speaking with 17 staff at 12 tables this year, though we lost one when Mary Hawkesworth (Rutgers) broke her leg and had to cancel (and Joe Soss, Minnesota, withdrew, also due to a broken leg, but his was a jointly staffed table). Reportedly there were lots of “How does this approach work?” kinds of questions. Thanks to Lahoma Thomas [Ph.D. student, University of Toronto] for serving as host.

**3. Report on Short Course 22**—“The Methods Studio [An Advanced Workshop in Interpretive Methods],” held on August 27, 2014; Lee Ann Fuji, for herself and co-organizers Dvora Yanow and Peri Schwartz-Shea

Part 1. “Masterclass” [roundtable discussion] on “Ethical Questions Your IRB Can’t Answer”

*Presenters*:

Séverine Autesserre [Barnard/Columbia; IR, African Studies, field research (ethnography, interviews), civil war, peacekeeping]

Jim Curry [University of Utah; American Politics, participant-observation, US Congressional office]

Lee Ann Fujii [University of Toronto; Comparative Politics, research ethics, field methods, local-level violence]

Biko Koenig [Ph.D. candidate, New School; American Politics, participant-observation, worker organizations]

Part 2. “Crit”: Exploring Research Projects [open topic]

*Presenters*:

- Lahoma Thomas (University of Toronto): the politicality of violence employed by transnational criminal organizations, in the Caribbean and Latin America

- Jessica L. Anderson (George Washington University): how expertise affects efforts to devolve power in international peacebuilding interventions, in Somaliland

- Adam Koon (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine & Georgetown University) and

Lahra Smith (Georgetown University): Kenyan nurses’ perceptions of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) as both stakeholders in the health system and citizens of Kenya

*Respondents*: Parakh Hoon, Virginia Tech [field research, informal institutions; IR/Comparative, Policy], plus 3 co-organizers and all others in attendance.

* About 15 people attended. Presentations and discussion were excellent. In Lee Ann’s words, “Everyone seemed to get a lot out of the crit sessions, including the ‘critters’.”  We noted that there are ethical issues that are particular to specific research sites, but there are also lots of shared issues across settings and subfields.
* Actionable items as outcomes of discussion:
  + Need a [semi-]institutionalized space in which ethics questions can be discussed, e.g., with senior researchers [a “talk-through” ethics committee]
  + Add an ethics table to the Methods Cafe.
  + Consider publishing the presentations as a PS symposium.
  + Consider publishing them, plus others, as an edited book.

**4. Award presentations**

* Hayward Alker best paper award, presented by Doug Dow, for the committee
* Presentation of the award to **Nicholas Rush Smith** for “Contradictions of Vigilance: Contesting Citizenship in Post-Apartheid South Africa.” The paper was presented at the 2013 annual meeting of the APSA in Chicago. It was self-nominated. Nick was a graduate student at the University of Chicago at the time; he is currently an assistant professor at City College of New York. *Citation attached as Appendix 1*.
* *Award Committee*: Parakh Hoon, Virginia Tech. Chair; Douglas Dow, University of Texas, Dallas; Devorah Manekin, Arizona State University [2013 winner]
* Charles Taylor book award, presented by Robert Adcock, for the committee
* Presentation of the award to **Paul Amar**, University of California, Santa Barbara, for  
  *The Security Archipelago: Human-Security States, Sexuality Politics, and the End of Neoliberalism* (Duke University Press, 2013) . *Citation attached as Appendix 2*.
  + Honorable Mention to: Frank Fischer and Herbert Gottweis, eds. *The Argumentative Turn Revisited: Public Policy as Communicative Practice* (Duke University Press, 2013)
  + *Award Committee*: Tim Luke, Virginia Tech, chair; Robert Adcock, George Washington University; Dennis Galvan, University of Oregon
* Grain of Sand award, presented by Peri Schwartz-Shea, stepping in for an incapacitated Joe Soss and the committee
* Presentation of the award to **Deborah A. Stone** (MIT and Dartmouth), who then responded. *Citation and her comments in response are attached as Appendix 3*.
* *Award Committee*: Lee Ann Fujii (University of Toronto), Joe Lowndes (University of Oregon), Ido Oren (University of Florida; chair), Timothy Pachirat (University of Massachusetts, Amherst), Frederic C. Schaffer (University of Massachusetts, Amherst), Joe Soss (University of Minnesota), Peregrine Schwartz-Shea (University of Utah), Dvora Yanow (Wageningen University)

**5. Recurring business**

* IMM web site. Thanks to Jeremy Hunsinger (Wilfrid Laurier, VPI), this should be up and running shortly. (Dvora Yanow)
* Resources for interpretive researchers: handed out; *attached as Appendix 4*.

**6. New business**

* New APSA section, Political Epistemology, Jeffrey M. Friedman (University of Texas, Austin, [jeffrey.friedman@utexas.edu](mailto:jeffrey.friedman@utexas.edu)) Collected 307 signatures supporting the creation of a new section. Their first panels will be at APSA 2015 (San Francisco), and he is interested in exploring possible co-sponsorships. *Jeff’s comments and the Call for Papers in Appendix 5*.
* A second iteration of the 2009 NSF workshop (Peri Schwartz-Shea) Is it time? If so, what format, where, when, who, etc.? The 2009 workshop organizers, Dvora Yanow and Peri Schwartz-Shea, are unable to organize it, but they are willing to help others who might be interested, including making all of their 2009 materials available. (Information about the 2009 workshop is still available at <http://www.ipia.utah.edu/imps/>. Also, they met with Brian Humes from NSF, who in principle supports pursuing funding this, and are happy to discuss that meeting with a new (set of) organizer(s). For further discussion, please contact Dvora Yanow and Peri Schwartz-Shea [[dvora.yanow@wur.nl](mailto:dvora.yanow@wur.nl), [psshea@poli-sci.utah.edu](mailto:psshea@poli-sci.utah.edu)).
* An annual volume of IMM research (Dvora Yanow) Peri and I have been thinking about whether there is a need for the publication of conference papers and other works that engage interpretive methods, whether discussions of methods/methodological issues or presenting findings of research using such methods. We are also trying to think about ways to do this that would not be hugely burdensome on one or two people and that would fit the amount of such papers. On the latter, we were thinking, therefore, about an annual volume. On the former, Dvora handed out a copy of the editorial board structure of the *Journal of Management Inquiry*, which has several sections, each with its own editor and editorial board, plus an editor-in-chief. For purposes of such an annual volume, sections might be organized along the lines of specific methods (e.g., ethnography) or political science subfields, or both, or something else. Several people expressed interest; Lee Ann Fujii raised the concern that this would ‘ghetto-ize’ this work, rather than creating conversational opportunities across methods/ologies. The discussion was tabled as we ran out of time. Dvora Yanow and Peri Schwartz-Shea would welcome comments at [[dvora.yanow@wur.nl](mailto:dvora.yanow@wur.nl) and [psshea@poli-sci.utah.edu](mailto:psshea@poli-sci.utah.edu).

**7. Members’ announcements**

* Forthcoming publications and publishing opportunities:
  + University of Michigan Press book series: “Configurations: Critical Studies of World Politics,” edited by Patrick T. Jackson
  + “Routledge Series on Interpretive Methods,” edited by Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow.
    - Published:

* + - * *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (PSS and DY)
      * *Interpreting International Politics*, Cecelia Lynch (UC Irvine)
    - Coming later this academic year:
      * *Analyzing Social Narratives*, Shaul Shenhav (Hebrew University, Jerusalem)
      * *Elucidating Social Science Concepts: An Interpretivist Guide*, Frederic Charles Schaffer (University of Massachusetts, Amherst)
      * *Relational Interviewing for Social Science Research: An Interpretive Approach*, Lee Ann Fujii (University of Toronto)
* The job market: job openings of particular interest to IMM members and job searches were announced.

**8. Introducing next year's program chair and the Call for Papers**:

Douglas Dow, University of Texas at Dallas. *See Appendix 6 for CfP*.

Meeting adjourned.

Submitted by Dvora Yanow, with help from Robert Adcock, Doug Dow, Lee Ann Fujii, Ido Oren, and Peri Schwartz-Shea; November 15, 2014.

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**APPENDICES**

**1. Citation: 2014 Hayward Alker Student Paper Award to *Nicholas Rush Smith***

for “Contradictions of Vigilance: Contesting Citizenship in Post-Apartheid South Africa”

‘Contradictions of Vigilance: Contesting Citizenship in Post-Apartheid South Africa,’ by Nicholas Rush Smith, as the title of the paper suggests, interrogates competing notions of citizenship in post-apartheid South Africa through a case study of the meanings that members and leader of a South African vigilante movement ascribe to their activities, in particular the violence against criminals. The paper is methodologically sophisticated in its use of interpretive methods and theoretically innovative. The paper deftly uses ordinary language interviews, participant observation while weaving the author’s first person narrative to excavate the meanings that members of South Africa’s urban vigilante movement Mapogo assign to vigilance and civic engagement. Its theoretical strength is in creatively linking abstract normative concerns in democratic theory with the political ‘on-the-ground’ realities of post-apartheid South Africa. In particular, the author explores the tensions in the meanings of the concept of vigilance and vigilante and its relationship to citizenship in a democracy. The paper takes seriously the meanings that members of the Mapogo movement attach to their own violent actions, and uses their interpretations to advance our understanding of citizenship in post-Apartheid South Africa and elsewhere. That is, rather than viewing citizenship as a bundle of rights, which is one of the dominant perspectives in democratic theory, the paper deploys alternative conceptualization in which citizenship itself is a “terrain of contestation,” a political field of violent claims. In so doing, the paper contributes to a broad array of literatures on citizenship, democratization, and on the contradictory effects of expansion of rights.

Award Committee: Parakh Hoon, Virginia Tech, Chair; Douglas Dow, University of Texas, Dallas; Devorah Manekin, Arizona State University

**2. Citation: 2014 Charles Taylor Book Award to Paul Amar, University of California, Santa** Barbara, for

*The Security Archipelago: Human-Security States, Sexuality Politics, and the End of Neoliberalism* (Duke University Press, 2013).

Presented for the best book in political science that employs or develops interpretive methodologies and methods. This award recognizes the contributions of Charles Taylor to the advancement of interpretive thinking. His 1971 essay “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,” which powerfully critiqued the aspiration to model the study of politics on the natural sciences and cogently explains how “interpretation is essential to explanation” in the human sciences, along with his many other articles, book chapters, and volumes, have long been a source of inspiration for scholars seeking to develop and apply an interpretive approach to the study of politics.

Paul Amar’s *Security Archipelago* exemplifies the rich and innovative potential of interpretive methods and methodology in comparative and transnational research. Bringing together events, practices, and discourses in the global cities of Rio and Cairo, from the landmark United Nations summits held in these cities (in 1992 and 1994, respectively) to the present, Amar interweaves fascinating empirical detail and provocative meta-reflection on the trajectories and paradoxes of militarism, humanitarianism, and sexuality politics in our global age. His book especially stands out for the Taylor award due to its self-reflexive, creative, and confident crafting and pursuit of what Amar terms his “archipelago method.” With this method Amar brings his cases together in a multitude of ways: from charting similarities and differences between cultural heritage urban planning projects in each city, to exploring implications of the structural position of both cities in semiperipheral states, to following transnational flows of security practices and humanitarian rescue discourses, to persuasively interpreting the two cities as generative sites of new forms of human security power and governance. Moreover, Amar skillfully integrates his rich array of comparative moves to advance an invigorating metanarrative that aims to displace narratives of neoliberalism with his own novel narrative of a move from liberalization to securitization. This narrative situates the Global South as the center, rather than the recipient or resister, of global trends and reintegrates events of the 9/11 decade within flows and trajectories that reach from preceding events in the 1990s up to compelling readings of contemporary events, especially the 2011 Egyptian revolution.

Honorable Mention: Frank Fischer and Herbert Gottweis, eds. *The Argumentative Turn Revisited: Public Policy as Communicative Practice* (Duke University Press, 2013)

Award Committee:  Timothy W. Luke (Virginia Tech; Chair); Robert Adcock (George Washington University); Dennis Galvan (University of Oregon)

**3. Citation: 2014 Grain of Sand Award to Deborah A. Stone**

Given by the Interpretive Methodologies and Methods Conference Group (APSA) to honor longstanding and meritorious contributions to interpretive studies of the political.

As a scholar and as a human being, Deborah Stone is a model of how to make a difference in the world. She's a leading constructivist theorist who is deeply involved in the practical world of policy design and implementation and manages to build bridges of understanding across these too-separate worlds. She is a prolific scholar who takes on a broad range of intellectual topics and public issues, using her wit and intellect to denaturalize taken-for-granted assumptions in politics and policy. For those tempted to dismiss interpretive and constructivist work as "theoretical" and unhelpful for practice, Deborah is the empirical evidence we need. She and her insights could hardly be more in demand among practitioners.

To illustrate, consider three of her most well known books. In *The Disabled State* (1984) Deborah analyzes the politics and practice of disability policy through a constructivist lens, showing how contested interpretations of social categories stand at the center of each. It's a truly remarkable work that uses interpretive historical analysis to show how definitions of ability and need are constructed through political conflict and function to regulate the boundary between market-based and need-based systems of provision. In the official pronouncements of the state, to be "disabled" is to be unable to work, and the status of being "disabled" is something we can determine scientifically and apolitically. *The Disabled State* explodes this myth, clarifies how constructed categories underlie all policy operations, and places struggles over interpretation at the center of efforts to explain the politics of public policy.

*Policy Paradox* (first published in 1988*, with a third edition* in 2012 and winner of the 2002 Wildavsky Award) is a path-breaking work of constructivist scholarship that challenges central pillars of graduate training in policy analysis and public affairs. Deborah frames the book in opposition to "the rationality project" – a tidy linear understanding of the policy process as a rational mode of problem-solving rooted in policy analysis and program evaluation. At the same time, she demonstrates the perils of mistakenly conceiving of the polis as a realm of action that is analogous to the market. In place of these misguided efforts to place politics in a tightly bounded role, Deborah elaborates a model of "political rationality" in which efforts to reason pervade political processes and political processes pervade efforts to reason (even in the most scientifically analytic forms). The range of the book is remarkable, and each chapter serves as the occasion for an incisive constructivist analysis that places meaning-making at the center of politics and policy. *Policy Paradox* has been so widely assigned and discussed that no exaggeration is required to say that few other books have done as much to bring the benefits of constructivist and interpretive scholarship to students and practitioners of public policy.

Deborah's most recent book is an exemplary work of publicly engaged scholarship. In *The Samaritan’s Dilemma*: *Should Government Help Your Neighbor?* (2008), she mounts a defense of altruism as a basic human trait and an attack on the dominant narratives of "economists, social scientists, conservatives, and free-market ideologues" that have fooled so many among us into believing "that greed is good…. that help is harmful [because] it undermines ambition and makes people dependent and helpless.” Drawing on the everyday experiences of Americans, she illuminates the vast chasm that separates prevailing political discourses from the moral truths we know in our bones—that we care about other people and go out of our way to help them. *The Samaritan’s Dilemma* is a sustained critique of political discourses that elevate self-interest as a moral good and urge citizens to become bystanders in the presence of suffering. It is a brilliant analysis of how social scientific concepts (e.g., moral hazard) and political arguments work together to define our beliefs about reality, cause and effect, and ethical living in the world.

Deborah Stone’s scholarship is widely recognized and rightly celebrated. She has been an inspiration to generations of academics who have heeded her call to participate in public life and place human meaning making at the center of their scholarly endeavors. Her body of work helps us all to understand the many ways we can see a world in a grain of sand.

Award committee: Lee Ann Fujii (University of Toronto), Joe Lowndes (University of Oregon), Ido Oren (University of Florida; chair), Timothy Pachirat (University of Massachusetts, Amherst), Frederic C. Schaffer (University of Massachusetts, Amherst), Joe Soss (University of Minnesota), Peregrine Schwartz-Shea (University of Utah), Dvora Yanow (Wageningen University) (Washington, DC, August 29)

**Grain of Sand Award Acceptance Talk**

Deborah Stone

American Political Science Association, August 29, 2014

I’m touched and tickled to receive this award. To be honored for playfulness and imagination in a world where people take themselves all too seriously and admonish students to fit themselves into a framework of proven ideas—well, this is such a refreshing capstone for me, and such a warm welcome into a community of like-minded playmates.

I hope you don’t mind my reading my remarks. Given the name of the award and its celebration of the poetic, it seemed disrespectful to ad lib. Your description of the award moved me to do a little exegesis on Szymborska’s poem, “View with a Grain of Sand,” as a statement of the interpretive approach. Both her poem and interpretive studies make us watch our own minds at work.

“We call it a grain of sand, but it calls itself neither grain nor sand…

Our glance, our touch mean nothing to it.”

Szymborska immediately calls our attention to our relation with the world, first to that primal experience of NAMING. Naming something, finding a word for it, is the way we begin to process our experience and incidentally, usually the way we begin to use our native language. “Mama.” “Papa.” Naming is also the primal act of social science: everybody’s got to make up a new name for their concept.

The poem goes on:

“The window has a wonderful view of a lake, but the view doesn’t view itself.”

Then Szymborska, through a series of examples about the natural world, tells us that the world doesn’t exist—lakes, shores, waves, splashes, pebbles, the sky, the sun—they are each and all only what we make of them. Well, of course lakes and pebbles exist as *matter*, but that sense of existence is not *what matters* to us as social animals. Szymborska says in a few lines what I have never managed to convey to skeptical readers of *Policy Paradox*.

The poem makes us question what the most ordinary everyday experiences mean. What is a “view”? It’s our experience of something, but how do we characterize it? And *why* do we *want* to characterize? I asked myself that question and my first thought was: To share the experience with others. But quickly I realized that no, I need to put words to an experience in order to appreciate it for myself before I can share it.

I’m an amateur naturalist. I can sit for an hour or two on the edge of a bog seeing what a carnivorous Pitcher Plant is eating for dinner; or on the edge of a marsh, watching how a Great Blue Heron stalks a fish; or on a beach trying to understand how a flock of Seagulls and a Bald Eagle work out their political accommodations. While I’m watching, I’m making up stories about what I think is happening, then later I find a place to make notes in my journal, then at home, I search through my nature library to see what others have said about my experience. Call it theories, call it science. The important thing to me is that I like to approach nature fresh, ignorant of what the scientists have had to say. And during all this back and forth between me, nature, and books, I’m already percolating an essay to share my wonder and amazement. [See, e.g., her essay “Picking pebbles: The morality of choice,” Boston Review May-June 2013, 36-41—DY.] That’s what life’s all about.

This kind of nature observation is exactly what I like to do as a social scientist: Observe, puzzle about what I’m seeing and feeling, make up stories to explain it all to myself, and then take my stories public. Only now my stories get dignified with labels like “explanation,” “hypothesis,” and “theory.”

So here’s what I specially treasure about you, the interpretive community who could come up with such a joyful, playful award: While objectivity and science are rampaging through our profession, sucking the fun out of it, the interpretive approach puts our selves, our precious humanity, back at the center.

Thank you.

**4. Resources for interpretive researchers**

**Interpretive Methodologies and Methods (IMM) Conference-Related Group @ APSA**

APSA Connect Page [APSA membership not required, but registration required]: <http://community.apsanet.org/Communities1/ViewCommunities/GroupDetails/?CommunityKey=2d63fe2c-d008-4f65-9e26-99781fb0b047> OR via [www.apsanet.org](http://www.apsanet.org)

**Interpretation and Methods (I&M) listserve**

Irregularly active; venue for posting questions, inviting discussion, exchanging information about workshops, conferences, publications, etc.

[**http://malagigi.cddc.vt.edu/mailman/listinfo/interpretationandmethods**](http://malagigi.cddc.vt.edu/mailman/listinfo/interpretationandmethods)

**Interpretation and Method Section @ WPSA**  <http://wpsa.research.pdx.edu>

Will be held in Las Vegas, April 2–4, 2015

Paper/panel submission deadline: September 15, 2014

Interpretation and Method Program Chair: Douglas Dow, University of Texas, Dallas ([dougdow@utdallas.edu](mailto:dougdow@utdallas.edu))

**5. New ‘Political Epistemology’ Section @ APSA –**

**a. Comments from Jeff Friedman, Section initiator, at the IMM Business Meeting**

**b. Call for Papers 2015**

**a. Comments from Jeff Friedman, Section initiator, at the IMM Business Meeting**

The scholars who created the Political Epistemology (PE) organized section tend to define “political epistemology” roughly as the study of political ideas and putative political knowledge—as factors that affect political action, as objects of political disputation, and as products of political behavior and institutions. In all of these respects, we think, ideas and knowledge have both empirical and normative implications that haven’t been sufficiently studied by political scientists and political theorists. Speaking for myself, I would like to see political science transformed into a discipline in which a recognition that it’s “ideas all the way down” resulted in the intensive study of the cultural sources of political actors’ ideas, e.g., popular culture, high culture, formal education.

I hope the PE section might make scholars of American politics, in particular, more sensitive to the interpretive basis of political action. It does not seem to occur to many of them that “interests” and “values” must be interpreted to become motives for action. More promisingly, though, scholars of public opinion often wrestle with interpretive methodological issues (e.g., in understanding survey responses), which might be a good opening. I think a great deal of positivist momentum in political science is due to widespread unawareness of what interpretivists are saying and a large dose of unreflective absorption in positivist “methods.”

So I’d like the PE section to sponsor panel after panel in which interpretivists and other ideationally oriented scholars challenge mainstream scholars, not so that the latter will abandon the methods to which they are so accustomed, but so that some of the younger auditors of these panels might come away with open minds.

Therefore, I hope that our 2015 APSA program co-chairs, Paul Gunn of Goldsmiths, University of London, and Jacob Roundtree of Harvard, hear from a great many of you in the next few months! [[p.gunn@gold.ac.uk](mailto:p.gunn@gold.ac.uk) or [jroundtree@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:jroundtree@fas.harvard.edu)]

Jeffrey Friedman

Executive Council, Political Epistemology section

[jeffrey.friedman@utexas.edu](mailto:jeffrey.friedman@utexas.edu)

**b. Call for Papers, APSA 2015**

[for section program chair and contact information, see above]

Political epistemology is based on the recognition that to understand people's political decisions, we need to study the sources and content of their political beliefs; and that to assess these decisions normatively, we need to study whether the beliefs are accurate. Why do different people interpret the political world in different ways? How do they interpret either their own interests or the public interest; from what sources are these interpretations drawn; and how do these interpretations motivate political action? Given political actors' imperfect knowledge, how do they try to approximate full knowledge of the likely consequences of their actions-and how successful are these attempts? Under what conditions do political beliefs tend to be true? These epistemological questions have often been neglected within political science, and research on them is frequently scattered in different subfields, with researchers unaware of their peers' compatible work.  
  
Inasmuch as the Political Epistemology section was only recently approved by APSA, the APSA meetings in San Francisco will mark our first opportunity to hold panels and roundtables explicitly aimed at illuminating questions of political epistemology. We encourage contributions from any of the four subdisciplines on such topics as (for example) media and cultural influence on the beliefs of ordinary citizens or political elites, canonical political theorists' epistemological views, or methods of assessing the accuracy of political beliefs or drawing normative implications from possible inaccuracy. Panel and roundtable proposals that include both normative theorists and empirical researchers will be especially welcome.

**6. Interpretive Methodologies and Methods Conference Group Call for Papers APSA 2015**

**Program Chair:** Douglas C. Dow, University of Texas at Dallas ([dougdow@utdallas.edu](mailto:dougdow@utdallas.edu))

**Deadline**: same as APSA Conference deadline [December 15, 2014]

This Conference-related Group provides a forum for the discussion of methodologies and methods related to interpretive research, as well as issues arising from their location within contemporary political science.

Interpretive methodologies and methods are informed by philosophical traditions such as hermeneutics, phenomenology, pragmatism, and symbolic interaction. Notwithstanding their differences, these traditions presuppose that the meaningfulness and historical contingency of human life sets the social realm apart from nature. Although diverse in their modes of identifying, accessing and analyzing data, research processes in the interpretive tradition are typically characterized by A) an empirical and normative prioritizing of the lived experience of people in research settings; B) a focus on the meaning(s) of acts, events, interactions, language, and physical artifacts to multiple stakeholders; and C) a sensitivity to the historically-contingent, often-contested character of such meanings.

We call for papers, panel, and roundtable proposals that explore interpretive methodological issues or that apply interpretive methods (e.g., political ethnography, ethnomethodology, discourse analysis) in ways that demonstrate their “comparative advantage” for empirical research across all subfields of political science. Especially welcome are proposals that reflect on how political science itself is situated in the webs of meaning and historical context that it studies.