**POLS4047/8047**
**Interpretation, method, critique**
Graduate seminar for Honours, Masters and PhD students
Australian National University

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### Course description

This course offers an introduction to the long tradition of Interpretive Social Science. It mirrors exciting new trends occurring in the US and Europe where interpretivist and critical scholars are drawing together the long and complex tradition of methodological scholarship focussed on meaning, communication, social construction and the politics of knowledge production. The 20th Century witnessed profound challenges to classical knowledge paradigms in the social sciences. Approaches to the study of society and politics diversified. Critical, social, post-structuralist, post-colonial and 'post-modern' interventions drew attention to structures and practices of meaning-making and to the relationship between knowledge paradigms and power. The aim of this course is to invite students to consider how interpretivism's theoretical claims might inform their own epistemological and methodological decisions. The course offers practical training for students interested in modes of enquiry into the increasingly communicative, media driven, institutional and text-based world in which we live that are not covered by conventional quantitative and qualitative approaches. In addition to equipping students with skills for interpretivist research design, data generation, analysis, inference, interpretation and critique, it addresses fundamental questions about the logic, conduct and significance of social scientific inquiry and the politics of knowledge in the 20th and 21st Centuries.

### Learning outcomes

Upon successful completion, students will have the knowledge and skills to: (1) engage in epistemological debates that relate to methodological approaches; (2) assess the diverse range of strategies and approaches available to scholars in the social sciences; (3) develop techniques and skills appropriate to the design and conduct of interpretivist research; and (4) assess the logics that distinguish methodologies and the creative possibilities for their assembly.

*Workload*

Total of 130 hours comprising 36 hours of contact over 12 weeks, being a three-hour seminar per week, and 94 hours of independent student research, reading and writing.

*Assessment*

1. Research Paper 40% 4000 Words
2. Weekly Reading Response, 30% 200 Words each X 10 (3% each)
3. Oral Presentation, 20% 10 Minutes and a one-page write up
4. Participation 10%

1. **The Research Paper** comprises the major written assessment and is designed to immerse course participants in a summative piece of research devised in dialogue with the course convener. It should demonstrate their ability to synthesise and integrate ideas obtained over the duration of the course with their own research interests and goals. It MUST comprise a substantive piece of research and/or analysis and/or theoretical exposition. If it's a theoretical exposition, it MUST state explicitly what research problem/question/design it relates to.

2. **Weekly Reading Responses** will constitute an intermediate task building towards the final goal of the course. They will enable students to develop and evaluate their reading comprehension skills which are a vital component of interpretivist methods. Students and convener will post comments on weekly reading responses and this will contribute to course participation. You are assessed on your comprehension and evaluative engagement with the reading.

3. **The Oral Presentation** is a form of peer-reviewed summative assessment designed to involve all course participants. Presentations will be on research that demonstrates some aspect of interpretivist methods in practice. Students will be provided with a working list of possible texts. Students may locate their own text to present upon in consultation with the convener so long as a PDF can be provided. Presenters will be assessed on their ability to succinctly engage with and present a reading that demonstrates 'interpretivism in action' and to lay out for students the components of the approach, research design and analysis with a focus on the strengths, limitations and contributions of the research under discussion. They will be asked to lead the class in formulating and discussing methodological and analytical questions that arise from the research.

4. **Participation** will be assessed on student overall engagement with the course. This includes weekly preparedness for class, timely submission of all assessment, engagement with online discussion in weekly reading responses and engagement in discussion during presentations.

*Topics and reading list*

**Seminar 1. Introduction and course overview**

Bevir, Mark, and RAW Rhodes, eds. 2016. *Routledge handbook of interpretive political science.* London: Routledge. Introduction.

Rabinow, Paul, and William M. Sullivan, eds. 1979. *Interpretive social science: A reader.* Berkeley: University of California Press. Introduction.

Yanow, Dvora. 2003. "Interpretive empirical political science: What makes this not a subfield of qualitative methods." *Qualitative Methods* 1 (2):9-13.

Yanow, Dvora, and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, eds. 2006. *Interpretation and method: Empirical research methods and the interpretive turn*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe. Introduction.

*Visit:* https://connect.apsanet.org/interpretationandmethod/

**Seminar 2. Philosophical foundations of Interpretive Social Science**

Bevir, Mark, and Jason Blakely. 2018. *Interpretive social science: An anti-naturalist approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harding, Sandra. 2015. *Objectivity and diversity: Another logic of scientific research.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wedeen, Lisa. 2020. "Anti-Naturalism and Structure in Interpretive Social Science." *Critical Review* DOI: 10.1080/08913811.2019.1730591

*Podcast:* https://newbooksnetwork.com/mark-bevir-and-jason-blakely-interpretive-social-science-an-anti-naturalist-approach-oxford-up-2018

**Seminar 3. The sociology of knowledge**

Berger, Peter, and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. London: Penguin. Part I.

Hay, Colin. 2006. "Political ontology." In *The Oxford handbook of contextual political analysis,* Goodin, Robert E., and Charles Tilly, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 3.

Schaffer, Frederic Charles. 2016. *Elucidating social science concepts: An interpretivist guide.* New York: Routledge.

*Podcast:* https://newbooksnetwork.com/frederic-c-schaffer-elucidating-social-science-concepts-an-interpretivist-guide-routledge-2015

## Seminar 4. Interpretive research design

Schaffer, Frederic Charles. 2012. "What is it we do when we ask questions about causes?" Political Methodology, No. 35, Mexico City.

Tavory, Iddo, and Stefan Timmermans. 2014. *Abductive analysis: Theorizing qualitative research.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 3-6.

Yanow, Dvora, and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea. 2012. *Interpretive research design: Concepts and processes*. New York & London: Routledge. Chapters 1 and 2.

*Podcast:* https://newbooksnetwork.com/peregrine-schwartz-shea-and-dvora-yanow-interpretive-research-design-concepts-and-processes-routledge-2012

## Seminar 5. Political ethnography

Geertz, Clifford. 1983. "'From the native's point of view': On the nature of anthropological understanding." In *Local knowledge: Further essays in interpretive anthropology*, 55-70. New York: Basic Books.

Pachirat, Timothy. 2009. "The political in political ethnography: Dispatches from the kill floor." In *Political ethnography: What immersion contributes to the study of power*, edited by Edward Schatz, 143-161. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Shehata, Samer. 2006. "Ethnography, identity and the production of knowledge." In *Interpretation and method: Empirical research methods and the interpretive turn*. Yanow, Dvora, and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, eds. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe. Chapter 13.

*Podcast:* https://newbooksnetwork.com/sarah-marie-wiebe-everyday-exposure-indigenous-mobilization-and-environmental-justice-in-canadas-chemical-valley-ubc-press-2016

**Seminar 6. The interpretive approach to interviewing**

Fujii, Lee Ann. 2015. "Five stories of accidental ethnography: turning unplanned moments in the field into data." *Qualitative Research* 15 (4):525-539.

Fujii, Lee Ann. 2018. *Interviewing in social science research: A relational approach.* London: Routledge.

*Podcast:* https://newbooksnetwork.com/interviewing-in-social-science-research

**Seminar 7. Hermeneutics**

Olesen, Jens. 2016. "Hermeneutics." In *Routledge handbook of interpretive political science.* Bevir, Mark, and RAW Rhodes, eds. London: Routledge. Chapter 4.

Mueller-Vollmer, Kurt. 1988. "Language, mind, and artifact: An outline of hermeneutic theory since the enlightenment." In *The hermeneutics reader*, Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, ed. New York: Continuum. Introduction.

Prasad, Anshuman, and Raza Mir. 2002. "Digging deep for meaning: A critical hermeneutic analysis of CEO letters to shareholders in the oil industry." *Journal of Business Communication* 39 (1):92-116.

*Podcast:* https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/hermeneutics

**Seminar 8. Sociolinguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis**

Bernard, Taryn. 2020. "Corporate social responsibility in postcolonial contexts:A critical analysis of the representational features of South African corporate social responsibility reports." *Critical Discourse Studies*. doi: 10.1080/17405904.2020.1798797.

Fairclough, Norman. 1993. "Critical discourse analysis and the marketization of public discourse: The universities." *Discourse and Society* 4 (2):133-168.

Van Dijk, Teun A. 1993. "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis." *Discourse and Society* 4 (2):249-283.

**Seminar 9. CDA, Part II**

Fairclough, Norman. 1992. "Intertextuality in Critical Discourse Analysis." *Linguistics and Education* 4:269-293.

Farrelly, Michael. 2020. "Rethinking intertextuality in CDA." *Critical Discourse Studies* 17 (4):359-376.

Kress, Gunther. 2011. "Multimodal discourse analysis " In *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, James Paul Gee and Michael Handford, eds. London: Routledge. Chapter 3.

Wodak, Ruth. 2001. "The discourse-historical approach." In *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, edited by Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, 63-95. London: Sage.


**Seminar 10. Virtual ethnography**

Read the following chapters from *The Routledge companion to digital ethnography*, Larissa Hjorth, Heather Horst, Anne Galloway and Genevieve Bell, eds. London: Routledge.

Hine, Chapter 2.
Burrell, Chapter 5.
Postill, Chapter 6.
Geismar, Chapter 30.
Knox, Chapter 32.

*Podcast:* https://newbooksnetwork.com/authoritarian-apprehensions


**Seminar 11. Genealogy**

Bevir, Mark. 2008. "What is genealogy?" *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 2 (3): 263-275.

Foucault, Michel. 1977. "Nietzsche, genealogy, history." In *Language, counter-memory, practice: Selected essays and interviews*, Donald F. Bouchard, ed. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 139-164.

Mitchell, Timothy. 1991. "The limits of the state: Beyond statist approaches and their critics " *American Political Science Review* 85 (1):77-96.

Shiner, Larry. 1982. "Reading Foucault: Anti-method and the genealogy of power-knowledge." *History and Theory* 21 (3):382-398.

*Seminar 12. Conclusion*

No readings. We wrap up the course by inviting discussion about the future and challenges for interpretivist research. Students will discuss their essay topics and plans for research.