

**Interpretive-Qualitative Methods**  
**PolSci 219, Winter 2023**  
**Wednesdays, 10-12:50, SSPB 5206**

**Professor Cecelia Lynch**  
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**Office Hours: Wednesdays from 2-4pm; (2-3 pm is both in-person and online; best to contact me in advance if you want to meet during that hour)**

***Purpose of the Course:***

Pluralism in methods continues to be on the rise in political science, as in all of the social sciences. But what pluralism actually means, and how to conduct research that employs different methods, remains very much a matter of discussion and debate. This course focuses on not simply qualitative methods and methodologies but ones which are also *interpretive*. This is because courses exist in the department and the school which focus on qualitative methods more generally, but no course to my knowledge which focuses specifically on interpretation. While all research engages in interpretation, some methodologies lend themselves more than others to employing concepts that allow exploration of explicitly interpretive research questions. All interpretive methods are qualitative (though they may use quantitative data as evidence), but not all qualitative methods are explicitly interpretive.

We will consider interpretive methods as being characterized by the following features: an awareness of indeterminacy, an emphasis on contextualization, and a focus on expanded notions of causality, including multi-causality, mutual constitution, and contingency, all to zero in on “meaning.” These features move interpretive research beyond the boundaries of strict positivism, in which finding cause-effect relationships, governed by “covering laws,” is the primary goal of research. Positivist methods, which can be quantitative or qualitative in nature, assume that the point of analysis is to specify the relationship between already-constituted variables; interpretivism calls into question the construction of the variables themselves. Positivism prizes parsimony in the expectation that findings can be generalized; interpretivism prizes grappling with complexity and nuance in the expectation that useful insights can be gained and/or “lessons learned” for one or a series of “cases” or historical periods. Focusing on meaning, however, often leads to new questions about intent, ethics, power, and historical and cultural contexts.

The course is designed to achieve several goals:

- 1) Provide students with an introductory background on the philosophy of science and social theory of interpretivism;
- 2) Help students think about kinds of evidence through interpretive frames (archives, texts and text analogs, interviews, ethnographic evidence)

- 3) Help students situate, and justify their use of interpretive methods to analyze evidence;
- 4) Introduce students to work that is conducive to interpretive analysis in different subfields of political science (IR, comparative, American, public policy, etc.).

These goals concern, first, understanding the thinking and value of interpretive research; second, helping students to move forward in operationalizing interpretive concepts and methods. All are necessary components of actually “doing” interpretive work.

My experience with this class thus far indicates that students who take it are at varying points of understanding and using interpretive concepts and methods. As a result, students may choose a final paper that employs an interpretive approach in an ongoing research project, or write a grant application, qualifying paper or dissertation chapter focusing on the use of interpretive methodologies and methods. Students may also talk to me about a final paper that gives an in-depth analysis and evaluation of the Yanow and Schwartz-Shea edited volume for a potential third edition.

***Books and Sources:***

The books below are available at the UCI bookstore (and will also be ordered for the Reserve Room in the Main Library). In addition to these books, you will be required to access articles on-line and read additional volumes in a subfield related to your research interests for your presentation and final paper. These may include, but are not limited to, books in the Routledge Series on Interpretive Methodologies and Methods (which includes volumes such as Lee Ann Fujii. 2017. *Interviewing in Social Science Research*; and Timothy Pachirat. 2017. *Among Wolves*, and a number of others). I will continue to provide suggestions, but I also welcome yours.

1. Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, eds. 2013. *Interpretation and Method, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* Routledge.
2. Peregrine Schwarz-Shea and Dvora Yanow. 2012. *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes.* Routledge.
3. Antonia Darder, ed. 2019. *Decolonizing Interpretive Research: A Subaltern Methodology for Social Change,* Routledge.
4. Cecelia Lynch. 2014. *Interpreting International Politics.* Routledge.
5. In addition, the Interpretive Methods and Methodologies Organized Group of the American Political Science Association has a great bibliographic site: <https://connect.apsanet.org/interpretationandmethod/new-books-podcast/>

***Class Requirements:***

1. Weekly reading and participation. Do the readings **before** class each week, and come prepared to discuss issues and ask questions if anything is unclear. [ Send in questions by Tuesday evening (before 9pm) each week.] Complete and turn in

the in-class exercise for each week. Some will be individual exercises, others will be group exercises. 30% (divided more-or-less equally into attendance, questions, and exercises).

2. Presentation. Weeks 9 and 10. Individual or group – we will discuss possible parameters during the first weeks of class and finalize during Week 4. Presentation and accompanying materials: 20%.
3. Final paper, tightly conceptualized (10-12 pages, plus bibliography), developed in consultation with me. **Final Papers are due on THURSDAY during exam week.**  
Final paper: 50%.

NOTE: I reserve the right to adjust this syllabus as necessary.

***Important information:***

I am very open to working with students having different abilities/disabilities. While university services can be found here -- Disability Services Center <http://www.disability.uci.edu/> -- it is possible that some issues may fall outside this policy, in which case please feel free to contact me.

Academic integrity and honesty: I take this very, very, very seriously. Read the UCI Academic Senate Policy on Academic Honesty ([http://www.senate.uci.edu/senateweb/default2.asp?active\\_page\\_id=754](http://www.senate.uci.edu/senateweb/default2.asp?active_page_id=754)). It should go without saying that academic dishonesty is NOT TOLERATED. Students who engage in plagiarism or cheating as defined by official university policy will automatically receive a ZERO as their grade on the assignment on which they plagiarized or the quiz or test on which they cheated. Other actions consistent with university policy may also be taken where deemed appropriate.

***Class Schedule:***

**Week 1: Wednesday, January 11**

Introductions to each other and the course.

Why are there debates regarding interpretive/qualitative methods in political science?

How do political scientists think about interpretation, and how does it relate to qualitative and quantitative analysis/ positivism and post-positivism?

**READ:**

1. Charles Taylor, "Interpretation and the Science of Man," *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 25, 1971, also reprinted in many edited volumes, including ones by Dallmayr and McCarthy, Rabinow et al, etc.

2. Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, "Wherefore 'Interpretive'? An Introduction," in Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, eds., *Interpretation and Method*.

Additional background reading:

Kristen Renwick Monroe, ed., 2005. *Perestroika!* Yale University Press (including "Introduction," "The Idea," and "Perestroika and Its Other")

In-class exercise: Write a clear, concise one-sentence statement of a research question you are exploring or would like to explore. THEN put the question in the terminology of hypothesis testing (using a relationship between independent and dependent variables).

OR do this exercise in the inverse order. Does using one or the other kind of terminology help clarify your question? Does it require part of the question to be reinterpreted/lost/widened/narrowed?

## Week 2: Wednesday, January 18

Guest: Prof. Marcos Scauso, Quinnipiac University

How are political scientists thinking about and legitimizing interpretive research?

Distinctions between "positivism" and "post-positivism" and interpretive/positivist terminology. Interpretivism in decolonial and feminist research.

### READ:

1. Dvora Yanow, "Thinking Interpretively," in Yanow and Schwartz-Shea *Interpretation and Method*, 5-26
2. Marcos Scauso, "Interpretivism: Definitions, Trends, and Emerging Paths," Oxford Research Encyclopedia, International Studies, 2020
3. Antonia Darder, Chapter 1, *Decolonizing Interpretive Research*
4. Brooke Ackerly, "Reflexivity in Practice: Power and Ethics in Feminist Research on International Relations," *International Studies Review*, 10, 4 (2008): 693-707

In-class exercise: What are the differences in terminology between positivist and post-positivist orientations and methods? What terms make sense and what terms are confusing to you?

Additional sources:

- Laura J. Shepherd, "In defense of the apparently indefensible (or French intellectuals did not ruin the West and can we please stop postie-bashing because it's not actually terribly helpful thank you), *The Disorder of Things*, April 6, 2017, <https://thedisorderofthings.com/2017/04/06/in-defence-of-the-apparently-indefensible-or-french-intellectuals-did-not-ruin-the-west/>

- Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern, and Jacqui True, eds., *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006
- Kai Jonas Koddenbrock, “Strategies of critique in International Relations: From Foucault and Latour towards Marx,” *European Journal of International Relations (EJIR)*, 21, 2 (June 2015), pp. 243-266
- Kate Manzo, “Critical Humanism: Postcolonialism and Postmodern Ethics,” *Alternatives*, 22, 3 (July-Sept. 1997), pp. 381-408
- Mark Bevir and R.A.W. Rhodes, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Interpretive Political Science*, London: Routledge, 2016
- Andrew Davison and Mark N. Hoffman, *Interpreting Politics: Debating the Foundations and Objectives of Political Analysis*. Cornwall on Hudson, NY: Sloan Publishing, 2020
- Mark Bevir and Asaf Kedar, “Concept Formation in Political Science: An Anti-Naturalist Critique of Qualitative Methodology,” *Perspectives on Politics* 6, No.3 (September 2008), 503-17
- Anne Norton. *95 Theses on Politics, Culture, and Method*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004
- Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and Its Implications for the Study of World Politics*. New York: Routledge, 2011
- Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan, eds. *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader* (1979), and *Interpretive Social Science: A Second Look* (1987). Both are Berkeley: University of California Press

### Week 3: Wednesday, January 24

Philosophy of Science issues at stake in interpretive research (continued). Classic discussions of concepts, interpretation, language, and power.

### READ:

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations*, pp.1-41 of English text, [https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/4294631/mod\\_resource/content/0/Ludwig%20Wittgenstein%2C%20P.%20M.%20S.%20Hacker%2C%20Joachim%20Schulte.%20Philosophical%20Investigations.%20Wiley.pdf](https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/4294631/mod_resource/content/0/Ludwig%20Wittgenstein%2C%20P.%20M.%20S.%20Hacker%2C%20Joachim%20Schulte.%20Philosophical%20Investigations.%20Wiley.pdf)
2. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” [https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8ef4/754a50d813b847ce8bd52ed52b1493cc2977.pdf?\\_ga=2.132291655.817182882.1578095150-1089930484.1578095150](https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8ef4/754a50d813b847ce8bd52ed52b1493cc2977.pdf?_ga=2.132291655.817182882.1578095150-1089930484.1578095150)
3. Keith Topper, “Hermeneutics.” <https://www.academia.edu/10500229/Hermeneutics>

In-class exercise (in groups): What are the differences between positivist and post-

positivist orientations and methods? Draw up two tables to illustrate.

Additional sources on philosophy of science/ related critical issues at stake in interpretivism:

- Mary Hesse, “Theory and Value in the Social Sciences,” in C. Hookway and P. Pettit (eds), *Action and Interpretation: Studies in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978
- Peter Winch, *The Idea of Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958
- Richard Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978
- Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas A. McCarthy, eds. *Understanding and Social Inquiry*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977
- Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes, eds., *Rationality and Relativism*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989
- Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language, Philosophical Papers 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988
- Donna Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016
- Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge, 1997
- Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*. New York: Vintage, 1972.
- Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991
- Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007
- Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition. New York: Continuum, 2004.
- Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999

#### Week 4: Wednesday, February 1

Philosophy of Science issues in political science – moving towards practice. Using interpretive insights to think about concepts and methods. How to justify interpretive questions/ frameworks/ methods. What makes a “good” interpretive analysis?

1. Mary Hawkesworth, “Contending Conceptions of Science and Politics,” in Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, eds., pp. 27-49
2. Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, “Judging Quality,” in Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, eds.,

pp. 120-146

3. Lynch, *Interpreting International Politics*, pp. 1-26
4. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design*, pp. 1-44
5. Bibinaz Pirayesh, "Epistemological Disruptions," in Darder, *Decolonizing*, pp. 83-103

In-class exercise: Continue with tables from Week 3.

Additional sources:

- Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History," 1977 article (reprinted in several collections)
- Joseph Lowndes, Julie Novkov, and Dorian T. Warren, *Race and American Political Development*, Routledge, 2008: pp. 1-21 (available as on-line preview).
- Lisa Wedeen, "Conceptualizing Culture: Possibilities for Political Science," *American Political Science Review (APSR)*, 96, 4 (December 2002), pp. 713-728
- Dvora Yanow and Merlijn van Hulst, "From Policy 'Frames' to 'Framing': Theorizing a More Dynamic, Political Approach," *American Review of Public Administration*, 2016; 46 (1):92-112

## Week 5: Wednesday, February 8

Research design and the breadth of interpretive work.

### READ:

1. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design*, pp. 49-139
2. Lynch, *Interpreting International Politics*, pp. 27-93
3. Kortney Hernandez, "Centering the Subaltern Voice," in Darder, *Decolonizing*, pp. 39-50

In-class exercise: group discussion of major issues in research design for either interpretive or non-interpretive projects

Additional reading:

Frederic Charles Schaffer, 2016, *Elucidating Social Science Concepts*, Routledge

## Week 6: Wednesday, February 15

Generating Data

What is the relationship between conceptualizing interpretation, on one hand, and gathering and using evidence on the other? What situations require innovations in data-gathering techniques?

## READ:

1-6. Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, eds., *Interpretation and Method*, Section II, chapters by Soss, Schaffer, Pader, Shehata, Weldes and McHenry, Jr., pp. 147-254

7. Robert Vitalis, "The Noble American Science of Imperial Relations and Its Laws of Race Development," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2010: 52 (4), pp. 909-938.

In-class exercise: You are working through the concepts and evidence/data you will use to examine your research question. What are these concepts and evidence/data? Specify any potential or actual problems.

Additional sources:

- Lee Ann Fujii. *Interviewing in Social Science Research*.
- Timothy Pachirat, *Among Wolves*, Routledge
- Carol Cohn, "Motives and methods: using multi-sited ethnography to study US national security discourses," in Ackerly, Stern and True (eds), above
- Tami Jacoby, "From the trenches: dilemmas of feminist IR fieldwork," in Ackerly, Stern and True (eds), above
- Edward Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009
- Christine Sylvester, "Bringing art/museums to feminist International Relations," in Ackerly, Stern and True (eds) above

- Samuel Gerald Collins and Matthew Slover Durlington, *Networked Anthropology: A Primer for Ethnographers*. New York: Routledge, 2014

## Week 7: Wednesday, February 22

### Analyzing Data

#### READ:

1. Kamal Sadiq, "The Challenges of State-Generated Data in Developing Countries," *Perestroika!*, 181-199
6. Chapters by Oren, Schmidt, Maynard-Moody and Musheno, Danjoux and Wilkinson, in Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, eds.

In-class exercise: You are writing up the methodology section of your qualifying paper or dissertation, focusing on how you will analyze your data. List some of the major points you will make to justify and explain either a) your use of an explicitly interpretive approach to research, or b) your use of an explicitly positivist approach to research.

Additional subfield sources on/examples of interpretive work:

- Subfield chapters in Mark Bevir and R.A.W. Rhodes (eds) cited above
- Laura Schmidt, *Using Archives: A Guide to Effective Research*. Society of American Archivists, [www2.archivists.org/usingarchives](http://www2.archivists.org/usingarchives)
- Margaret Note, *Archival Research Methods*. [slideshare.net/margotnote/archival-research-methods](http://slideshare.net/margotnote/archival-research-methods), 2011
- Special Issue, "Interviewing Methods in Political Science," *PS: Political Science & Politics*, XXXV, 4 (December 2002)

## Week 8: Wednesday, March 1

### Intersectional Considerations and Reflexivity

#### READ:

1. Darder, *Decolonizing*, TBA
2. Elizabeth Dauphinee, "The Ethics of Autoethnography," *Review of International Studies*, 2010, 36: pp. 799-818
3. Oded Löwenheim, *The Politics of the Trail: Reflexive Mountain Biking Along the Frontier of Jerusalem*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014
4. Lihi Ben Shitrit, "Intersectionality Theory and Working with 'Both Sides'"
5. Xymena Kurowska, TBA

Additional reading:

- Christine Sylvester, *Art/Museums: International Relations where we least expect it*,

Routledge, 2016, pp. 1-24

- Helen Haste, Jennifer Jones, and Kristen Monroe, “Political psychology,” in Bevir and Rhodes (eds) above
- Mark Bevir, “How Narratives Explain,” *Interpretation and Method*, 281-290
- H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002
- Jennifer Milliken, “The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods,” *European Journal of International Relations* 5, 2 (1999), 225-54
- Martha Feldman, *Some Interpretive Techniques for Analyzing Qualitative Data* Beverly Hills: Sage, 1995
- Saul Shenhav, *Analyzing Social Narratives*. New York: Routledge, 2015

### Week 9: Wednesday, March 8

Putting Interpretivism into Practice: Class presentations

### READ:

Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design*, 8

In-class exercise: discuss presentations

### Week 10: NOTE: THIS MEETING WILL BE ON ZOOM (I will be at the ISA in Montréal on March 15<sup>th</sup>)

Putting Interpretivism into Practice: Class presentations part 2.

Recap of interpretive issues and more questions: justification, choice of method, data/evidence collection and use, and INTERPRETATION of/as findings.

### READ: TBA

**FINAL PAPER DUE THURSDAY, MARCH 23, 2023!**

