

University of Toronto
Department of Political Science
POL 2810Y
2010-2011
MA Research Seminar

Instructor: Michael Stein
Office: Sidney Smith 3120
Tel: 416-946-0184
Fax: 416-978-5566
E-mail: michael.stein@utoronto.ca
Office Hours: Fridays, 13:00-15:00 hrs. or by appointment
Class Hours: Fridays, 10:00-12:00 hrs.
Classroom: Trinity College 22

Objectives:

The primary purpose of this MA Research Seminar is to provide an opportunity for students to design and carry out an independent research project over the course of the year on a topic within the broad theme outlined in the course description or on another question of particular interest to them. Students are encouraged to choose cases, issues, approaches and methods within the proposed seminar theme as they frame their research topics. But they may also select their cases outside this theme, with the approval of the instructor, if they prefer to do so.

A second goal of the seminar is to provide a collegial setting in which students can develop their research skills, gain experience in making oral and written presentations, and develop their critical capacities both with respect to their own work and that of others.

The course is therefore designed to assist students at each stage of their research; this includes choosing their research topic, designing their research proposal, acquiring the tools to conduct their research, drafting their research essay, and finally presenting their research results to other students in the seminar.

At each stage, students will be expected to discuss their progress with their seminar colleagues and with the instructor. Beginning with Seminar 10 on Research Proposals, they will also be assigned to smaller working groups of 3-4 students, selected on the basis of their common or similar research methods, theoretical approaches, or numbers of cases studied. The seminar will also include a special session on use of electronic library resources, to be held just before the end of the first term. In conjunction with this session, seminar students will be expected to submit a brief report on their library research activity, together with their final essay, at the end of the course.

This report is intended both for the instructor and for the Faculty Liaison Coordinator, Robarts Library, Jenny Mendelsohn. A panel of PhD students will also be invited to describe their research experiences to the MA seminar students at another special session on November 13, 2010..

Because the course will include students of a wide variety of backgrounds and interests, and because the theme of the seminar is defined in a very broad and inclusive manner, its content should be of interest to most students. Since the instructor has a varied degree of expertise in the different research areas selected by the students, they (the students) will be encouraged to consult with other faculty members when developing and carrying out their particular projects. They will also be permitted to complement, but not duplicate, research they are conducting in other courses.

Format and Themes:

As stated above, the seminar is structured to provide ongoing support to students as they develop and complete their research projects. In the first few weeks of the fall term, we will debate the relative merits and shortcomings of naturalist (positivist/ empiricist) versus interpretivist (culturalist/constructivist) theoretical perspectives and related theoretical approaches and methods. This debate will be conducted in a balanced manner, and is not intended to give priority to any one theoretical perspective or approach.

We will then consider the applicability of these perspectives, approaches and methods to the broad themes of the seminar. These themes are: 1) the impact and significance of alternative factors shaping democratization (democratic transition and consolidation) in different political systems, particularly “new” democracies, and 2) the impact and significance of alternative factors shaping institutional reforms designed to address the “democratic deficit” in other political systems, such as the “mature” or “older” democracies. We will first assess the perspectives, approaches and methods that have been adopted and applied in some leading publications covering these thematic areas. Then in the final weeks of the fall term students will begin to formulate and develop their own specific research proposals. They will first consider which approaches and which research methods they believe are most applicable to their projects, which bibliographical and internet sources they plan to use, and which research procedures they are likely to follow. In the final week of the fall term, students will meet in separate group sessions consisting of 4-5 individuals, which will be devoted to the presentation of their research proposals. Each presentation will be limited to 10 to 15 minutes, which should encompass a brief summary of the written research proposal and comments and criticisms offered by the instructor and the other students in the group.

In the first weeks of the second (winter) term, students will meet informally with other students in their groups in an effort to expand and develop their research proposals, report on their research progress, and discuss their research problems. They will also arrange intermittent meetings with the instructor and seek to obtain his advice and guidance in their research. Hopefully, they will incorporate some of the suggestions and criticisms of both these sources into their research proposals. They should also request the assistance of the Reference staff in Robarts Library in their search for electronic and other library source materials.

After the mid-term study break, students should begin to convert their research findings into drafts of major research papers of about 30 to 35 double-spaced typewritten pages in length. These drafts should be made available to the instructor and to the other students in their group just before the series of group sessions comprising the April workshop, scheduled for the first week of that month. These workshop sessions will be organized on the model of an academic mini-conference, in which students present an oral summary of their written draft paper, and one other student acts as a discussant or commentator on the paper. Students will then have approximately two weeks to revise these draft papers and submit them as their final research essays. They must be submitted in the third week of April if they wish to graduate in the spring.

Requirements:

Students are expected to cover the required readings for each seminar session in the fall, and to participate actively in the seminar discussion of each topic. They are also expected to make their oral presentations and submit written materials at regular intervals, as described in the format above. Their final overall seminar grades are a composite evaluation of their fall term oral reports and written presentations (25%), their winter term oral reports and written presentations (25%), and their final written Major Research Paper and overall seminar participation (50%). There will be no specific grades assigned to their library research activity reports, but students will be penalized for late (or non-) submission of these reports. There will also be a penalty for any unexplained or unjustified late submission of essays.

Texts:

Due to the anticipated great variation in perspectives, approaches, methods and topics in this research seminar, there will be no assigned or required texts for the seminar. However, a few general books on theoretical and applied (research) approaches and methods have been ordered as Recommended readings for the University of Toronto Bookstore. They are:

Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patrice Leavy, eds., *Approaches to Qualitative Research: A Reader on Theory and Practice* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). In addition, a number of assigned book chapters and journal articles will be collected in a coursepack; it is recommended that students purchase this coursepack from Canadian Scholars' Press Inc. (CPSI), 180 Bloor Street West, Suite 801, Toronto M5S 2V6 (Tel: 416-929-2774).

Most books of general use will be placed on Short-Term Library Loan in the reserves section of Robarts Library. The books that have been placed on reserve are the following:

Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970);

Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba (KKV), *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994);

Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan, eds., *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979);

Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997);

Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy, eds., *Approaches to Qualitative Research: A Reader on Theory and Practice* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004);

Laurence Whitehead, *Democratization: Theory and Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002);

Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996);

Arendt Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984);

James E. Mauch and Jack W. Birch, *Guide to the Successful Thesis and Dissertation: Conception to Publication: A Handbook for Students and Faculty*, 3rd ed. (New York: M. Dekker, 1993);

B. Guy Peters, *Comparative Politics: Theories and Methods* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

FIRST TERM

September 17: No class (instructor is away)

Seminar 1, September 24: Introductory presentation by the instructor on the purposes, content, format, requirements and texts of the seminar. There will also be brief presentations on the design and format of the seminar by a PhD student who was a former student in this MA Research Seminar (Evan Rosevear), and by the Faculty-Library Liaison Coordinator (Jenny Mendelsohn).

Seminar 2, October 1: The relative merits and shortcomings of naturalist versus interpretivist paradigms and perspectives in the philosophy of science and of the social sciences

Readings:

Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 2nd ed. enlarged (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), esp. chapters I, III, VI, IX, XIII and Postscript (on library reserve). See also Erich von Dietze, *Paradigms Explained: Rethinking Thomas Kuhn's Philosophy of Science* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001), chapters 1-2, 6 (on library reserve).

King, Keohane and Verba (KKV), *Designing Social Inquiry* (1994), chapter 1 (on library reserve).

David R. Hiley et al., eds., *The Interpretive Turn: Philosophy, Science and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), Introduction (in coursepack/on library reserve).

Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan, eds. *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), essays by Rabinow and Sullivan, Taylor, Geertz, Kuhn (on library reserve). See also Michael T. Gibbons, ed., *Interpreting Politics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), Introduction (in coursepack/on library reserve).

Seminar 3, October 8: The relative merits and shortcomings of mainstream (positivist/empiricist) versus alternative (post-positivist, constructivist) theoretical approaches and methodologies.

Readings:

Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), Introduction, chapter 1 (on library reserve).

King, Keohane and Verba, (KKV) *Designing Social Inquiry*, chapters 2-3 (on library reserve).

Egon G. Guba and Yvonna S. Lincoln, “Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues” in Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy, eds., *Approaches to Qualitative Research: A Reader on Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Part I, chapter 1 (in coursepack/on library reserve). See also Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy, “Distinguishing Qualitative Research”, in Hesse-Biber and Leavy, eds. (2004), Part I, Introduction (on library reserve).

Houghton, D.P., “Positivism vs. Post-modernism: Does Epistemology Make a Difference?” *International Politics*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2008), pp. 115-128 (in coursepack/on library reserve).

Seminar 4, October 15: Theoretical Approaches and Methods Applied to the Research Problem or Theme (I): The Impact of Alternative Factors in Shaping Democratization in “New” Democracies

Readings:

Laurence Whitehead, *Democratization: Theory and Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), chapters 1-4, 8, 10 (on library reserve).

Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*, 2nd ed., (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), Introduction, chapters 11-13 (on library reserve).

Todd Landman, *Issues and Methods in Comparative Politics: An Introduction* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003), chapter 7 (Transitions to Democracy). (in coursepack/on library reserve)

Seminar 5, October 22: Theoretical Approaches and Methods Applied to the Research Problem or Theme (II): Institutional and Cultural Patterns, Democratic Deficits and Political Reform in “Mature” Democracies: The Relative Merits of Different Factors and Competing Strategies

Readings:

Arendt Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), chapters 1-2, 5 (on library reserve).

Landman, *Issues and Methods in Comparative Politics* (2003), chapter 8 (Institutional design and democratic performance) (on library reserve)

Marc F. Plattner and Larry Diamond, “Democracies in the World: Tocqueville Reconsidered”, *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 11, no. 1 (January 2000), Introduction (pp. 1-5) (in coursepack/on library reserve).

Susan J. Pharr, Robert D. Putnam, and Russell J. Dalton, “Trouble in the Advanced Democracies: A Quarter Century of Declining Confidence”, *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 11, no. 2 (April 2000), pp. 5-24 (in coursepack/on library reserve). See also Putnam, Pharr and Dalton, Introduction, in Susan J. Pharr and Robert Putnam, eds., *Disaffected Democracies: What’s Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) (in coursepack/on library reserve).

Seminar 6, October 29: Planning Session (I): Students will provide a brief initial statement of their proposed topic and its relationship to their previous and concurrent studies

Readings:

Van Evera , *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (1997), Introduction and chapter 1 (reread), chapter 4 (esp. Topic Selection) (on library reserve).

James E. Mauch and Jack W. Birch, *Guide to the Successful Thesis and Dissertation: Conception to Publication: A Handbook for Students and Faculty*, 3rd ed. (New York: M. Dekker, 1993), chapters 1, 3-4 (on library reserve).

King, Keohane and Verba (1994), chapter 4 (on library reserve).

Seminar 7: November 5: Planning Session (II): Students will describe the Preliminary Steps that they plan to take in formulating their Research Project and in deciding on their Research Issues, Cases, and Methods

Readings:

Van Evera (1997), chapter 2 (What Are Case Studies?) (on library reserve).

King, Keohane and Verba (1994), chapter 1 (reread “Major Components of Research Design”) (on library reserve).

B. Guy Peters, *Comparative Politics: Theories and Methods* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), chapters 5-6, 9 (on library reserve).

Seminar 8: November 12: Panel of PhD Students on their Dissertation Research Experience

November 19: No formal class session. Students are asked to use their regular seminar preparation time to look for library resources for their research proposals and papers, and to draft and submit copies of a written preliminary library report on these resources to the Faculty-Library Liaison Coordinator (Jenny Mendelsohn jenny.mendelsohn@utoronto.ca) and to the seminar instructor. The report should contain requested information about the resources, the research process used to identify them, a description of previous library classes attended, and where these classes were held.

Seminar 10, November 26: Use of the Library and its electronic resources in conducting research (Jenny Mendelsohn). Students will be asked in class to identify what process worked for them in their search for research information, and what they would like to learn in this session and in the future to be more successful in this search.

Seminar 11, Week of November 29 to December 3: Group Meetings on Research Proposals. Students will present 5-10 minute oral summaries of the thematic issues, research questions and sources, theoretical approaches and methods they have described in their written Research Proposals. Other students in their groups and the instructor will offer their comments on and criticisms of these Research Proposals.

December 6-January 9: Intersession break. Students should engage in preliminary intensive research activities and revision of their research proposals during this period.

SECOND TERM

January 10-February 18: Informal meetings of students in their groups and scheduled consultations with the instructor.

February 20-25: Reading Week: no class

February 28-March 4: Group Meetings: Reports on Research Progress

March 28-April 1: Final group sessions (Workshop sessions). Students should post draft versions of their research essays on the course website prior to these sessions. The format and organization of the sessions are described briefly on page 3, paragraph 2 of this syllabus. There will be further elaboration of them later in the seminar.

April 2-22: Revision of draft papers and their submission as final essays by students planning to graduate in the spring. Students unable to do so may apply to the Departmental Graduate Office for a summer extension, with the instructor's permission.

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