

Theoretical Perspectives in Political Science

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Course Description:

This course is intended to provide students with an overview of the discipline of political science. There will be some discussion of the scope of the discipline (i.e., current trends in the various fields and subfields) but the emphasis will be on methodology. That is, the course will be an invitation to reflect on the reasons why certain methods are used in the contemporary study of politics. The course does not emphasize the methods and techniques used by political scientists but rather their epistemological justifications, although a discussion of the methods themselves may occasionally be needed in order to better evaluate their epistemological import. The course begins with a survey of the epistemological challenges facing political scientists. This sets the stage for all the other topics, which include:

- choosing a research design: identifying the research problem, justification of the proposed methods of analysis, choice of hypotheses, etc.;
- quantitative and formal methods (e.g., game theory): underlying premises, fundamental concepts, applications;
- qualitative methods: are qualitative methods epistemologically distinct from quantitative ones? What sets apart interpretive and critical approaches?

Assignments:

Students will write a major research paper (4,000 words) on a topic of their choice (but the submission of a detailed proposal is required); a short paper (1,200 – 1,600 words) expanding on their oral presentation of an assigned text from the reading list; and another short paper (1,800 - 2,000 words) on what they identify as the major challenges associated with a specific approach, method or topic (based on the readings assigned for a given week).

Required Texts:

David Marsh and Gerry Stoker, eds. *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, 3rd ed. Palgrave, 2010.
G. Pyrcz, *The Study of Politics: A Short Survey of Core Approaches*. U. of Toronto Press, 2011.
Other texts will be made available in the Reserve section of the Library or on WebCT..

Assignments/Evaluation:

Research paper	40%
Participation	10%
Short paper	30%
Oral presentation & Written follow up--	20%

The Department of Political Science strictly enforces a policy on plagiarism. For details, see http://www.sfu.ca/politics/undergrad/ug_plag_pol.html, or pick up a paper copy outside AQ 6072.