Political Science Junior Honors Proseminar

POLSCI 481 | WINTER 2008
WEDNESDAYS, 2–4 PM | 7603 HAVEN HALL

Mika LaVaque-Manty
mmanty@umich.edu
734-615-9142
7640 Haven Hall

Office hours: Mondays, 1–2 p.m., Tuesdays, 2–3 p.m.

DESCRIPTION
This course has two basic aims. One is to expose students to various approaches in social science in general and political science in particular. The other is to provide students with a framework for identifying a problem to tackle in a thesis, placing the problem within the discipline, designing a methodology for investigating the problem, and proposing a tentative outline for an argument. Along the way, each student will need to acquire an advisor for the thesis. The advisor can help identify puzzles or problems, point toward useful literature, tighten analysis, and improve exposition.

FORMAT
The seminar will rely heavily on the active participation of all members. Meetings will typically open with comments or observations from the instructor, followed by general discussion. Each student bears substantial responsibility for the direction, content, and usefulness of discussion. To meet this responsibility, students will need to have read and thought about the materials for each week’s discussion before coming to class. (There are no unexcused absences and at most two excused absences in this course; failure to comply will result in a failing course grade.)

The assigned readings are substantial for eight classes, and you need to read them intensively (perhaps more than once) so that you really understand them. All students should come to class prepared to discuss the readings and their thoughts about them in detail, and to listen carefully to others’ ideas and to talk about their presentations in a respectful and incisive way. The writing assignments are not very long, but they will all be related to your research project, and without hard work they will be of little use to you.

The final prospectus draws from earlier papers and should demonstrate how much more one can learn by wrestling with material a second (or nth) time. The last few classes are devoted primarily to brief presentations, a chance to convince your peers that your formulations make sense, and to get some reactions.
ASSIGNMENTS
You will receive detailed instructions for each of the written assignments. Formal assignments and allocation of grades are as follows:

- **First research proposal** (5%) — due January 29 at 5:00 p.m. in CTools
- **Bibliography** (10%) — due February 12 at 5:00 p.m. in CTools
- **Short writing assignment** (10%) — due February 19 at 5:00 p.m. in CTools
- **Visual evidence assignment** (5%) — due March 4 at 5:00 p.m. in CTools
- **Review of the literature** (20%) — due March 25 at 5:00 p.m. in CTools
- **Final prospectus** (30%) — due April 21 at 5:00 p.m. in CTools
- **Presentation** (20%)
- **Research notebook/journal** (satisfactory/unsatisfactory)

You must submit all written assignments through CTools.

Each student is required to keep a research journal, but the format and content are entirely at the discretion of the student. We will discuss suggestions for journal content in the first class. Journals might range from notes on the readings with commentary about the relevance of the reading for the specific thesis, to draft paragraphs of the introduction, to brainstorm diagrams, to draft outlines, to a record of search terms used in JSTOR on a particular date. The goal of the research journal is to help seminar participants get in the habit of thinking about their research in an integrated way — to think about theory, data collection, and writing at the same time so the larger project becomes less daunting. The journals should help demystify and make participants more comfortable with sharing their experience of the process, not just the final product. I will request the journals periodically throughout the semester and will return them promptly.

SCHEDULE
**January 9:** Introduction and Orientation: Why conduct social science research? What is a topic? What is a question? Where do research questions come from? What constitutes evidence?

- Formulating questions so that the outcome is interesting, regardless of the answer
- Writing and the research process — the interaction of questions, results, and interpretation
- Research journals
- Presentation schedule

**January 16:** Causal Analysis and Explanation

- Little, Varieties of Social Explanation, “Introduction” (pp. 1-9)
- Jack Hexter, “The Cases of the Muddy Pants, the Dead Mr. Sweet, and the Convergence of Particles, or Explanation Why and Prediction in History,” in History Primer, pp. 21-42 (CT — available on CTools)
- Stephen van Evera, Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science, Chapter 1 (pp. 7-48)
January 23: Rational Choice Explanations and Collective Action Theory
- Little, Varieties of Social Explanation, Chapter 3 (pp. 39-67)

<First research proposal due January 29>

January 30: Class Meets in the Shapiro Library Instruction Room (4059 Shapiro) with Grace York, Political Science Librarian

February 6: Interpretation Theory
- Little, Varieties of Social Explanation, Chapter 4 (pp. 68-87)
- Richard Fenno. 1986. “Observation, Context, and Sequence,” American Political Science Review 80:1 (pp. 3-16) (CT)

<Bibliography due February 12>

February 13: Methodological Individualism and Beyond

February 20: Axiomatic and Quantitative Research
- Varieties of Social Explanation, Chapter 7-8, “Economic Anthropology” (pp. 136–158) “Statistical Analysis” (pp. 159–178)

February 27: “Spring” Break — No Class

<Visual evidence assignment due March 4>

March 5: Showing Instead of Telling: Visual Explanations and Rhetoric
March 12: Interviewing, Objectivity, and Qualitative Methods

[CALSS VISIT BY CURRENT SENIOR HONORS]

- Varieties of Social Explanation, Chapters 10 and 11, “Relativism,” (also includes issues of measurement of concepts across cultures) and “Toward Methodological Pluralism” (should social science look like natural science?)

March 19: Comparative Method and What Constitutes a Case

- Little, Varieties of Social Explanation, “Case Study and Comparative Method” (pp. 29-38)
- Van Evera, Guide, “What Are Cases Studies?”

Please choose two of the following four articles to read:

- (CT) Lust-Okar, Ellen and Amaney Ahmad Jamal. 2002. “Rulers and rules: reassessing the influence of regime type on electoral law formation.” Comparative Political Studies 35:3 (April): 337-67. (focuses on the Middle East, combines qualitative, secondary sources, and quantitative methods)

<Review of the literature due March 25>

March 26: Presentations

April 2: Presentations

April 9: Presentations