INTERPRETIVE FIELDWORK IN POLITICAL SCIENCE, PHD, 2 CREDIT

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SEMINAR DESCRIPTION
Interpretive research puts the meaning-making of those studied at the centre of a research project. Often guided by the abductive logic of inquiry, such research is commonly not driven by formal hypotheses or variables. Based on constructivist ontology and intersubjectivist epistemology, interpretive research generates data through talk, observation, and/or document selection and analyses them through a wide array of methods. The rationale and the readings in this seminar accordingly focus on the study of politics ‘from below’ and ‘from within’ to make sense of power relations in particular political settings. The seminar thus discusses examples of research questions that require an investigation into the meanings of specific political practices, and of concepts and processes to situational actors in order to illuminate wider-ranging or more theoretical issues of political concern. The methodological aim of this seminar is twofold. First, it explains the vocabulary, processes, and quality standards consistent with the interpretive emphasis on meaning-making. In this sense, it helps prepare interpretive research proposals in a systematic way. Second, it engages interpretive research practice by looking at how interpretive researchers think of and do fieldwork.

The seminar is open to all researchers but will be most suitable to those that are currently planning empirical research or those who will do so in the future and intend to conduct fieldwork that requires interpretive sensibility and includes various modes of in-situ interviewing (e.g., conversational interviewing, ordinary language interviewing), different degrees of participant observation, and the reconstruction of policy meanings. Those who have completed field research and are in the “writing up” stage will also benefit from several parts of the course, such as understanding and communicating (e.g., to reviewers) what the appropriate quality standards are for assessing interpretive work. While no extensive prerequisite knowledge of interpretive tradition is required for this seminar, general familiarity with, openness to and curiosity about different ways of doing research are necessary in order to have productive and mutually enriching discussions.

EVALUATION
1. Seminar contribution – 10 %
2. Preparation, conduct, and reflection in class of an interview simulation – 20 %
3. Field notes from a site observation/participation – 20 %
4. Essay on methods ca. 2500 words= 50%

SEMINAR BREAKDOWN
1. Introduction 11 Jan

2. The concept of method. The concept of objectivity. Political ethnography. 18 Jan

**Additional:**
• Fenno, R (1986) ‘Observation, context, and sequence in the study of politics’, *American Political Science Review* 80/1: 3-15;

3. **Interpretive sensibility** 25 Jan
The basic premises of interpretive inquiry and interpretive research design

• Geertz, C (1973) ‘Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture’ in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, ch 1;
• Yanow, D and P Schwartz-Shea (2012) *Interpretive Research Design*, London and New York: Routledge, ch 2 (henceforth IRD);

**Additional:**

4. **Abduction and concept development** 1 Feb
Elements of abductive reasoning and concept formation

• IRD, ch 3;
• Schaffer, F Ch (2016) *Elucidating Social Science Concepts. An Interpretivist Guide* (entire), Routledge;

**Additional:**
5. Reflexivity as methodology 8 Feb
What is reflexivity? How it features in interpretive research design? What does it mean to see reflexivity as methodology?


Additional:
- Pillow, W (2003) ‘Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research’, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 16(2);
- Finley, L (2002) ‘Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice’, *Qualitative Research* 2(2);

6. IR departmental seminar 15 Feb [change of hour: 15.30p.m]

7. NO CLASS – INTERNATIONAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING 22 Feb

8. Narrative 1 Mar


9. Constructing the field/ fieldwork and theory 8 March

The notion of the field and its generation. Theory and evidence in interpretive fieldwork.

- IRD, chs 4 and 5 (background reading)
- Bueger, Ch, ‘Conducting ‘field research’ when there is no ‘field’. Some notes on the praxiographic challenge’, draft chapter for *The political anthropology of internationalized rule*, edited by S Bieker, J Kajoro, and K Schlichte, forthcoming;
- Feldman, G (2011) ‘If ethnography is more than participant observation, then relations are more than connections: the case for a non-local ethnography in a world of apparatuses’, *Anthropological Theory* 11(4).
Additional:


10. Subjectivity 15 Mar – to be rescheduled due to holidays

The notion of subjectivity as site and fodder of analysis.


Additional:


11. Talking with people: conversation and interrogation 22 Mar


**Additional:**

12. **Interview simulation session** 29 Mar