

Interdisciplinary Methodology

Spring 2012

CLST 2006: Special Topics

Monday, 1:30 – 4:00

2201 Posvar

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Hours: Monday 12:00 noon – 1:00 p.m.,

Course Description

This is a course in interdisciplinary theory and methods for graduate students who have achieved substantial strength in an academic discipline—in the social sciences, humanities and arts, natural sciences, or information sciences—and who wish to develop strength in an additional discipline and in the interplay of disciplines. Each student will read to prepare collaborative presentations describing key aspects of two disciplines; develop statements on the frameworks, assumptions, links, parallels, and contradictions of various theories; and prepare a major paper on a previously unfamiliar methodology. Each discipline will be discussed at an introductory level, but the exercise of comparing and connecting disciplines will require advanced conceptualization. The course works in association with a practical research project to develop a world-historical dataset containing systematic, worldwide data on selected variables and topics.

Course Objectives

The overall objective of this interdisciplinary graduate course is to encourage the development of a multidisciplinary academic discourse at Pitt, particularly emphasizing global perspectives, in which interested graduate students and faculty members participate, under the aegis of the Global Studies Center. The specific course objectives are:

- To introduce students to a wide range of disciplines, theories, and methods. Discussion is to include the framework, data, method, and analysis for each.
- To enable individual students to develop substantial strength in a new discipline and method of their choice.
- To compare and contrast the various disciplines, seeking out links and parallels among them.
- To consider the possibility of creating a global historical dataset reflecting many of these disciplines.

At the end of the course, students should:

- have gained literacy in disciplines in the humanities and arts, social sciences, natural sciences, and information sciences. By “literacy” is meant:
 - familiarity with elements of the scope (subject matter, variables and frameworks), method (types of analysis), and theory of multiple disciplines
 - familiarity with categories of empirical study in the same disciplines
 - familiarity with the similarities, links, complementarities, and contradictions of various disciplines and their theories
- have developed particular strength in one new methodology.

- have developed a language for cross-disciplinary discussion and analysis.
- Have gained experience in the combination of data from different disciplines to construct a global picture of aspects of human society.

During the academic year 2012-2013, two graduate fellowships will be awarded to students who have completed this course. The graduate fellows will work as researchers on the World-Historical Dataverse project, creating a small-scale “demo” version of the projected global dataset.

Students will complete assignments on three levels.

- (1) Each week, students are responsible for completing the assigned reading, exploring optional readings, and gaining familiarity with the elements of the discipline under study in that week.
- (2) Each week, one or two students will select, assign, and lead discussion on readings conveying the nature of the method assigned for that week and the significance of its results. (Students will select their assignments at the start of the semester.)
- (3) Students will prepare to join actively in each week’s cumulative discussion by scrutinizing the epistemology apparent in each method and by working to develop a language for cross-disciplinary discussion.
- (4) Each student will select a method to learn in depth and submit, at the end of the semester, a substantial paper articulating that method and discussing an application. The paper will be posted and discussed.

The instructor will assist students in locating relevant methodological guides and local specialists with whom to consult. Class activities will lead to construction of a website on methodologies applicable to historical studies. All in all, the course can be seen as an academic exercise in Global Studies.

Introductory sessions

The first two meetings will be directed by the instructor, and will introduce the general framework for the seminar: epistemology in Week 1 and philosophy in Week 2. In Week 1 students will select the topics and times of their presentations on disciplines; in Week 3 students will identify the topic of their major methodological paper.

A Discipline a Week

For each week, the instructor has selected one or two concise “core readings” (drawn from the works cited in the Course Schedule below) that provide an introduction to the discipline under study. In the eight meetings from Week 3 through Week 11, pairs of students will identify and present on an agreed-upon discipline or disciplines. In addition to the core reading, assigned by the instructor, the presenters will select and assign readings of no more than 150 pages, and will distribute them (preferably via Courseweb) at least 7 days in advance of their discussion.

Student discussion leaders are to lead discussions during the 100 minutes of discussion in which they present, rather than lecture. To be explicit, the instructor will assess the work of the discussion leaders according to the breadth and depth of the discussion during the time allocated to them.

Topics for possible inclusion in discussion of a methodology:

- Objectives
- Materials
- Methods
- Theories
- Journals

Standard works
Debates
Evolution of the field
Accomplishments
Links to other fields

Cumulative Discussion

Each week, 45 minutes of discussion will be devoted to linking issues and variables among the disciplines explored so far. Issues for discussion in comparison of disciplines:

Categories of data (visual, textual, nominal, ordinal, interval)
Boundary conditions
Scales (micro, macro)
Equilibrium
Conservation of energy; entropy
Perspectives
Systems
Social evolution

Combining Disciplines

In Weeks 12 and 13, led by the instructor, students will summarize the parallels and links they have found among disciplines. These weeks will also include an open-ended review of the readings, with discussion of techniques for learning disciplines and making critiques across disciplinary lines.

Major Papers

Each student will write a paper of no more than 25 pages in length, presenting a critical exploration and defense of a methodology likely to be of importance to his or her future research. The first two pages of each paper are to be a summary of the entire paper aimed at facilitating discussion among students in the course. The methodology may be that of a single discipline or sub-discipline, or a combination of techniques from different disciplines. The papers must reflect substantial reading and reflection, and must convey the logic and the relevance of the problem to significant research issues. This is not a research paper, but an articulation and defense of a methodology which could readily be applied to research.

Presentations

Papers are due in Week 13. Each full paper, beginning with the two-page summary, is to be posted on Courseweb. Papers are to be presented orally to the seminar as scheduled during Week 14 and Week 15.

Bibliography

In addition to the readings listed in the Course Schedule below, the course will be accompanied by a relatively extensive bibliography addressing the disciplines to be addressed in this course with works in the following categories:

- Condensed statements of scope, theory, and method
- Introductory textbooks
- Advanced handbooks
- Scholarly journals
- Outstanding recent works
- Studies including or applicable to historical data

Course Schedule

Week 1 (January 9). **Introduction: Epistemological dynamics** [Manning]

Reading: King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, pp. i-xi, 1-33.
Wilson, E. O., *Consilience* (New York: Knopf, 1998), chapters 1 and 2.

Week 2 (January 16). **Philosophy:** Positivism, Post-modernism & Realism; causation and feedback [Manning]

Reading: King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, pp. 34-114
Campbell, Donald T., *Methodology and Epistemology for Social Sciences*, vii-xix
Thompson, Willie, *Postmodernism and History*, 6-26, 56-73

Week 3 (January 23). Social Science 1. **Economics.**

Presenters 1, 2 & 3

Reading: King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, pp. 115-230
Wikipedia, "Economics," <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economics>
Humphries, Jane. "Rational Economic Families? Economics, the Family, and the Economy." In Joanne Cook, Jennifer Roberts, and Georgina Waylen, eds., *Towards a Gendered Political Economy*. London: MacMillan Press, 2000.

Week 4 (January 30). Social Science 2. **Political Science.**

Presenters 4, 5, & 6

Reading: Schramm, S. F.; Caterino, B., eds. *Making Political Science Matter: Debating Knowledge, Research, and Method* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

Week 5 (February 6). Social Science 3. **Sociology.**

Presenters 7, 8 & 9

Reading: Smith, Philip (ed). *The New American Cultural Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
Alford, Robert. *The Craft of Inquiry. Theories, Methods, Evidence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Week 6 (February 13). Social Science 4. **Anthropology.**

Presenters 10, 11 & 12

Reading: Barth, Fredrik, et al., *One Discipline, Four Ways: British, German, French and American Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Week 7 (February 20). Humanities and Arts . **Literature.**

Presenters 1, 2, & 3.

Reading: Castle, Gregory. *The Blackwell Guide to Literary Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007)

Week 8 (February 27). Humanities and Arts 2. **Visual Arts.**

Presenters 4, 5, & 6

Reading: Smith, Terry, *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

Week 9 (March 5). Natural Sciences 1. **Environmental studies.**

Presenters 7, 8, & 9

Reading: Scoones, I. "New Ecology and the Social Sciences: What Prospects for a Fruitful Engagement?" *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 28 (1999) pp. 479-507.

Week 10 (March 19). Natural Sciences 2. **Health sciences.**

Presenters 10, 11 & 12.

Reading: Ulin, Priscilla R., et al. *Qualitative Methods in Public Health* (New York: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

Week 11 (March 26). **Information Sciences.**

Presenters to be selected

Reading: Bawden, David, "Smoother Pebbles and the Shoulders of Giants: The Developing Foundations of Information Science," *Journal of Information Science* 34 (2008): 415-426.

Saracevic, Tefko. *Introduction to Information Science* (New York: Bowker, 1970).

Week 12 (April 2). Combining Disciplines 1. **Systems.**

General discussion

Reading: Bentley, Jerry, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of World History* (2011).

Week 13 (April 9). Combining Disciplines 2. **Social evolution.**

General discussion

Reading: Carneiro, Robert L. "Stellar Evolution and Social Evolution: A Study in Parallel Processes," *Social Evolution & History* 4 (2005).

Week 14 (April 16). Presentations 1.

Presentation of main papers (first half)

Reading: paper summaries circulated by authors

Week 15 (April 23?). Presentations 2.

Presentation of main papers (second half)

Reading: paper summaries circulated by authors