This course is required of all first year students in the Ph.D. program. Other students must have my permission to register. The course aims to provide a general road map of the discipline and an interpretation of its aims. Since there is no hope of being comprehensive I make no pretension to being so. This course is decidedly not neutral - it aims to establish the central role of causal explanation in political science and it offers a particular interpretation of that enterprise. In particular I hope to persuade you that substantive research - whether it involves empirical observation, quantitative analysis, or mathematical modeling - remains incomplete unless it is conceptually well-founded and theoretically informed. Toward this end we will examine a range of prominent examples of the different “varieties” of social explanation from the perspective of the philosophy of science. And we will see that this is an area of enduring and intense controversy. I hope the course will provide some of the background that you need to reach defensible views on matters of explanation, methods, and theory in political science.

**Grading:** The course combines some lecture with seminar discussion. I prefer to lecture less and argue more. I expect all students to be active participants. I expect students to come to class prepared. That means that you should not only have done the assigned reading, you also should have thought about it, and have comments, criticisms, and so forth. I will describe my plan for inducing something like equilibrium levels of preparation in class on the first day. Participation is important! The regularity of your participation and especially your willingness to stick your neck out in seminar discussion will constitute 20% of your grade for the course.

The remainder of your grade will reflect your performance on a series of written assignments. These will be of two sorts:

**Regular Short Papers:** Over the course of the term each student must submit 5 short papers that address in a critical way some aspect of or problem with the assigned reading. These papers are due in class on the day that the relevant reading has been assigned and *I will not accept them at any other time*. They may be no more than three typed pages long. Your performance on these papers will account for 30% of your grade for the course. You can write on whichever topics you like (or that interfere least with your other commitments) but should scatter these papers over the course of the term - *do not* wait until the last five weeks of the course!

**Two Longer Assignments:** These will be due in class on Weeks 6 and 15. Each will require that you write roughly ten to fifteen typed pages in response to one or more questions that I will distribute in class on the preceding Wednesday. I will provide more specific instructions when I distribute the questions. Each of these assignments will account for 25% of your grade. I frown upon late assignments. Fair warning.
Class Organization: In *Monty Python & the Holy Grail* there is a famous scene where King Arthur engages in heated debate over the notion of sovereignty with very contentious, muddy peasants. The peasants announce that they belong to an “autonomous collective,” a “self-governing anarcho-syndicalist commune” and so have little regard for the pretenses of centralized monarchical authority. (See: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Xd_zkMEgkI if you are unfamiliar with this canonical argument.) This course will operate as just such a collective. Each week you students will “take it in turns” (by some method of your own devising) to insure the availability for the following week of any of the relevant reading materials not available through the library via e-journals. This will require that the chosen ones ascertain which readings are not easily available on the web, obtain those readings from me, copy them (at my expense), and make sure that they are placed on electronic reserve at Rush Rhees Library.

Class Format: The course will be run primarily as a seminar. Given the nature of the undertaking it is imperative that students be *active* participants in class. That means that I expect students not only to keep up with the reading but to read with care and to demonstrate this in class discussions. I encourage this effort in the following way. Each week, at the start of class, I ask one student (selected at random) to initiate and help direct the discussion for that day. This will require that she or he be able to summarize and raise critical questions about the major points of the assigned readings. Each student should anticipate being asked to do this more than once during the course of the semester but, as should be clear, you will receive no forewarning of when that will be.

Required Reading

A list assigned readings follows on this and subsequent pages. You will note that the reading load is quite heavy. With one exception it does not take the form of pre-digested textbook presentations. I have *not* ordered books (marked *) through the University Bookstore since most students prefer to buy from one or another e-purveyor. (You ought to be able to find used copies of nearly all of these books on line.) Note that many of the journal articles may be available online from the library (via e.g., JSTOR, etc). Those that are not will be made available via the process I described above.

Week One - Scientific Explanation (September 3)


Week Two - Understanding & Misunderstanding Causality (September 10)


**Week Three - Experiments (September 17)**


**Week Four - Rational Choice I (September 24)**

Little, *Varieties of Social Explanation*. Chapter 3.

**Week Five - Interpretation (October 1)**

 First Assignment Distributed

Little, *Varieties of Social Explanation*. Chapter 4.

**Week Six - Functionalism (October 8)**

First Assignment Due

Little, *Varieties of Social Explanation*. Ch. 5.

**Week Seven Statistical Explanation (October 15)**


**Week Eight - Structural Explanations (October 22)**

* Theda Skocpol. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions*. Cambridge.

Week Nine - Rational Choice II (October 29)


Week Ten - Pathological Debates (November 5)


Week Eleven - Theories of Institutions and How We Assess Them (November 12)


**Week Twelve - Power (November 19)**


**NO CLASS WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 26 - Thanksgiving**

**Week Thirteen - Social Constructionism (December 3)**


**Week Fourteen (December 10)**

Make up, if necessary and

**Second Assignment Distributed.**

**Week Fifteen (December 17)**

**Second Assignment Due**