

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>PSC 500</b> <b>POLITICAL INQUIRY</b></p>
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**Department of Political Science**  
**University at Buffalo, SUNY**

**Class website: <http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~mbenson2/PSC500.htm>**

**Park Hall 513**

**Office Hours: R 9-11, F 12:30-2:30**  
**(or by appointment)**

**email: [mbenson2@buffalo.edu](mailto:mbenson2@buffalo.edu)**

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**(e-mail is better than by phone)**

### **Course Description**

PSC 500 is designed to introduce graduate students to the philosophy and logic underlying inquiry and research in the social sciences. This is a very important course in your graduate career. Other courses will provide you with more specific methodological tools and acquaint you with specialized areas of the scholarly literature. This course, on the other hand, will provide you with a solid basis for understanding *why* contemporary political scientists approach research in the way they do.

The course has two principal components. The first is an introduction to the philosophy of social science, where you will be introduced to the philosophical bases of knowledge and the competing logics at work in contemporary science. By the end of the course, students should understand what constitutes “knowledge” and understand what are acceptable and valid means of accumulating this knowledge. We will explore how human decision-making has been examined by political scientists using several competing models—especially the scientific method and thick description. The evolution of theory and of the field of political science overall will also be discussed.

In addition, this course explores important issues that political scientists are faced with when pursuing their research. Most significantly, this course will help students learn to formulate their own research question. An important part of this is gaining a solid understanding of how explanation, law, theory and hypothesis are approached in the physical and social sciences. We will address in detail the topics of necessary and sufficient conditions, levels of analysis, and concepts and measurement. Finally, we will go over several specific research strategies and discuss how values play a role in political science. By the end of this course students should have a solid understanding of how theoretical political science is approached and the myriad issues that must be dealt with in constructing and testing their own theories.

## Readings

The core readings are to be found in the following books which may be purchased at the College Store on 3908 Maple Road (across from the Boulevard Mall) ph. 332-3040.

- Goertz, Gary and Harvey Starr, ed. 2003. *Necessary Conditions*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- King, Gary, Robert Keohane and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Klemke, et al. 1998. *Introductory Readings in the Philosophy of Science*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Kuhn, Thomas. 1996. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition* (however, any edition will do). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Shively, Phillips. 2002. *The Craft of Political Research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- \* Seltzer, Richard. 1996. *Mistakes That Social Scientists Make*. New York: St. Martin's Press. (available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)) –Recommended-a great book to read for your Master's project or dissertation.

In addition to the textbooks, there are several articles assigned throughout the semester. These additional readings fall in to three groups; a) those available online at a specific website, b) those available online at [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org) and c) those available online through UB course reserve materials at [ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries](http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries). It is very easy to access these articles from any computer on campus or on a computer from home. There are handouts at the front desk of the library which explain how to access the course reserve articles. Specific instructions for JSTOR articles are below.

To access the “**JSTOR**” articles take the following steps:

1. Get connected to the internet...
2. Go to <http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries>
3. Find the **Library Databases** heading on the right of the web-page.
4. Click on **Databases by Subject**
5. Click on **Political Science** (or occasionally, Sociology).
6. Click on **JSTOR**
7. Click on **Search JSTOR**
8. Then type in your search terms. For example, for your first article, under SEARCH FOR type in “Bunche” (Make sure the AUTHOR is selected in the box to the right) and below, under SEARCH IN check “**All Political Science Journals**.” Click on “Begin Search” and the link to your article should appear.

## Requirements and Grading

30%: Attendance and Participation (every day of class is worth 2.5% of your total grade. Therefore, two days without excellent participation and a demonstrated familiarity with the readings can substantially decrease your grade).

10% Discussion Leader (see below)

15% Three, short assignments for in-class discussion (5% each)

15% Assignment #1: Methodology

20% Assignment #2: Evolution and Theory

10% Assignment #3: Abstract

1) *Regular class attendance and active participation* (30% of the course grade): First is the expectation that you will be properly prepared to constructively participate in class discussion every day. This means that you will have completed the assigned readings before each class, attend class regularly, and be on time for class (attendance will be taken). Absences from class will substantially reduce this component of your grade. The discussion leader and I will ask questions of all of you during class pertaining to the readings, my lectures, and our discussions. In addition, every student should come to class prepared to independently answer the discussion questions listed on the syllabus. Evidence that a student has not done the readings or that a student has come to class not prepared to discuss the readings will substantially lower their participation grade.

2) *Discussion Leader* (10% of the course grade): Each day of the course, one or more students will lead the class discussion. You should come to class prepared to lecture and lead class discussion on the day's assigned readings. Students must provide *at least* two weeks notice for a replacement for discussion leadership or find their own replacement for the presentation. (See below for further details.) Students who spend the majority of their presentation reading from their notes will receive a *maximum grade of B-* for their presentation.

3) *Short assignments* for in-class discussion (5% each, 15% of the course grade). These assignments are described, below in the syllabus. All assignments should refer to class readings. All assignments should include a reference section. Late assignments will not be accepted.

4) *3 Assignments* (45% of the course grade): There are three longer assignments for this course. All assignments should take into account that week's *and* the previous weeks' readings. All assignments should include a reference section. Late assignments will be penalized one letter grade with an additional letter grade deduction for every late day after that.

a) The first and second long written assignments for the course will involve detailed examinations of several articles from political science journals. You must choose a single topic of interest for these two assignments (e.g., judicial review, democratization, the democratic peace, deterrence). The articles examining your topic must be from peer-reviewed political science journals (e.g., *The American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *Comparative Politics*, *World Politics*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Journal of Politics*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *Political Research Quarterly*...) or from books or appropriate reference sources. You must have a copy of all articles used for the assignments and have them available to present for review if requested.

## Notes for Course Presentations

The presentation is worth 10% of your course grade.

You, the presenter, are responsible for 1 ½ hours of the class. You may organize your time any way you see fit. However, be aware that during your presentation, I will be assessing your ability to

- a) understand the material
- b) present the material in a clear, well organized manner
- c) relate the material to readings from this and other courses
- d) elicit questions and direct discussion on the material and topic in general
- e) make it an interesting and enjoyable 1 ½ hours for the class.

You may work from either a power-point presentation or from notes (please contact Maggie to use the department's projector). You may NOT read the entire presentation directly from your notes. This always makes for an extremely uninteresting day in class. I highly recommend that you practice your presentation and prepare how you plan on organizing class discussion beforehand. Students who spend the majority of their presentation reading from their notes (including from the power-point presentation) will receive a *maximum grade of B-* for their presentation.

In eliciting class discussions, you have the right to ask questions of any student in the class. Ideally, you would have time to engage each student in the class. Students' responses to your questions will make up part of their overall participation grade in the course.

### **Special note to foreign students with English as a second language:**

It is expected that you have a fluent written and spoken command of the English language. I studied abroad during graduate school so I empathize with the difficulties of foreign language students. However, I must grade you on the same criteria as the other students in this class. This means that you may have to work much harder than the native English speakers in the class to complete your readings, to write your papers, and to prepare your presentation. As mentioned above, you may *not* read your presentation to the class. You may *briefly* refer to your notes. However, for the bulk of your presentation, you must address the class directly. This means you will almost certainly have to rehearse your presentation several times beforehand and that you may need to obtain a tutor to make sure that your presentation is clearly understandable.

## Extensions and Incompletes

Regular progress towards a graduate degree is severely impeded when past assignments hang over one's head. Incompletes and extensions are not an entitlement. In the event that a serious problem emerges that you feel necessitates an incomplete, you must speak with me *before* the due date regarding this request. Please see me when problems develop rather than wait until they become intractable.

## SECTION I: According to the Experts....

Week 1 (August 31st) NO CLASS: Professor Benson will be at the American Political Science Association Conference.

Week 2 (September 7<sup>th</sup>) Political Science and Political Scientists

\*Please complete each week's readings before the beginning of class.

- Ralph Bunche. 1954. "Presidential Address." *American Political Science Review* (Hereafter APSR) 48: 961-971. (available at [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org))
- David Truman. 1965. "Disillusion and Regeneration: The Quest for a Discipline." *APSR* 59: 865-873. (available at [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org))
- Robert Putnam 2002. "The Public Role of Political Science." available at <http://www.apsanet.org/imgtest/presaddressputnam.pdf>
- 11:00-12:20: Library Resource Presentation by political science librarian Charles D'Aniello (in the library)

Week 3 (September 14<sup>th</sup>): Political Science as a Discipline ...

- Almond. "Separate Tables: Schools and Sects in Political Science" in *A Discipline Divided* (available on course reserve)
- Chapter 1 (pp. 11-59) "The Political Science Discipline." David Laitin with commentary by Keohane, Shapiro, and Weingast.

DISCUSSION LEADER: \_\_\_\_\_

Week 4 (September 21<sup>st</sup>): Clouds or Clocks Part I: The Interpretive Critique

- Clifford Geertz. "Thick Description: Toward and Interpretive Theory of Culture." *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Chapter 1. (available on course reserve)
- Clifford Geertz. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Chapter 15. (available on course reserve)
- Murdock Pencil. "Salt Passage" (unpublished manuscript available on course reserve)
- Diesing, Paul. Hermeneutics: The Interpretation of Texts." In *How Des Social Science Work: Reflections on Practice*. pp. 104-145. (available on course reserve)

DISCUSSION LEADER: \_\_\_\_\_

Week 5 (September 28<sup>th</sup>): Clouds or Clocks Part II: The Physical Science Model

- Gary W. Cox “Lies, damned lies, and rational choice analysis.” In *Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics*. pp. 167-185. (available on course reserve)
- John Vasquez. “Introduction” and “The Steps to War.” In Vasquez, John A. and Marie T. Henehan, eds. 1999. *The Scientific Study of Peace and War*. Oxford, UK: Lexington Books. (available on course reserve)
- Almond, Gabriel, A. “Clouds, Clocks, and the Study of Politics.” In *A Discipline Divided*.

DISCUSSION LEADER: \_\_\_\_\_

Assignment #1, Due on Monday October 1<sup>st</sup> by 1pm in my office or e-mailed to me at mbenson2@buffalo.edu

**Methodology:** Pick the area of interest you will focus on throughout the semester (e.g., supreme court decision-making, institutional design and economic development, trade and conflict, institutional design and conflict, human rights development, etc.). Skim over the last three decades of literature on your chosen area of interest. Find a sample of articles or books that is as methodologically diverse (e.g., purely descriptive, case studies vs. simple statistics, vs. large-*n* statistical vs. expected utility vs. game theory, etc..) as possible. In a 10 page essay (maximum), *briefly* categorize this work and explain which of these articles/books you judge to be the best. Be sure to explain your criteria of judgment and address how your preference is shaped by the employed methodology. Also, be sure to refer to this week’s and prior weeks’ readings in providing justification for your choices. Papers that do not specifically cite the readings in the body of the paper *and* the reference section will receive a failing grade on the paper (this applies to *all* written assignments for this course).

## SECTION II: The Philosophy of Science...

Week 6 (October 5<sup>th</sup>): What is science? ...

- Klemke: Introduction and Part 1: “Science and Pseudoscience,” Chapters 1-5.
- Klemke. Part 2: Chapters 8-10.

DISCUSSION LEADER: \_\_\_\_\_

Short Assignment #1, Due at the beginning of class.

**Is Political Science a Science?:** In a brief 2-3 page essay, explain whether or not *you* consider political science to be a science. Include in your response the reasons why scholars might argue that political science is a science and why it might not be a science. As always, be sure to *refer to the readings* in providing justification for your answer.

Week 7 (October 12<sup>th</sup>) Explanation & Law & Theory and Observation

- Klemke. Part 3. "Explanation and Law."
- Klemke. Part 4. "Theory and Observation." pp. 309-351.

DISCUSSION LEADER: \_\_\_\_\_

Assignment #2 due on Monday October 15<sup>th</sup> by 4pm e-mailed to me at [mbenson2@buffalo.edu](mailto:mbenson2@buffalo.edu).

**Abstract:** Write an approximately 250 word abstract of your research. Be sure to briefly describe your theory, the methodology used to test the theory, a summary of your findings and their implications. Besides describing your work, your abstract should also provide information on why your work is important. Please e-mail me a copy of your abstract and bring one copy to class. All abstracts will be posted on the course web site for students to read and critique for next class.

Week 8 (October 19<sup>th</sup>): The Evolution of Science

- Thomas Kuhn. *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*. (all)
- Lakatos, Imre. "Science and Pseudoscience." Read the contents of the following two pages: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/lakatos/scienceAndPseudoscience.htm>  
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/lakatos/scienceAndPseudoscienceTranscript.htm>  
(Be sure to read carefully about degenerative and progressive research programs.)

DISCUSSION LEADER: \_\_\_\_\_

Assignment #2, continued: Read all of the abstracts posted on the course web page at :

<http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~mbenson2/PSC500.htm>. Abstracts will be posted by Tuesday morning. By 8:30pm on Thursday, e-mail me your choice of the top two abstracts. Be sure to be able to justify your choice (in terms of clarity, theory, contribution, etc) when you come to class.

Week 9 (October 26<sup>th</sup>): Theory in Political Science

- King, Keohane, and Verba. Chapter 1.
- Ian Shapiro. "Problems, methods, and theories in the study of politics, or: what's wrong with political science and what to do about it." Pp. 19-41 in *Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics*.
- Shivley, Chapters 1, 2, and 10.
- Polsby. "Kuhn" from Annual Review of Political Science Vol. 1

DISCUSSION LEADER: \_\_\_\_\_

Assignment #3 Due on Tuesday, October 30<sup>th</sup> by 1pm in my office or e-mailed to me at [mbenson2@buffalo.edu](mailto:mbenson2@buffalo.edu).

Please turn in a 15 page essay (maximum) on the following issue:

**Evolution and Theory:** Skim over the previous three decades (i.e., from the mid-1970's until now) of journal articles on your phenomenon of interest. Referring to a sizable body of literature on your topic of interest as well as course readings, explain in a 15 page essay (maximum) whether or not there has

there been an evolution in theory and/or methodology over the last three decades (i.e., over time). Does your field of study provide evidence for a research program or program shift (or a prevailing paradigm or paradigm shift)? What is the most promising theory in your field of study? *Why* (i.e., *what* makes it better than other theories)? Please be sure that your paper is well organized, well written, and concise. Papers over 15 pages (not including references) will be penalized. As always, be sure to refer to the course readings in your paper.

Week 11 (November 2<sup>nd</sup>): NO CLASS (Professor Benson will be at the Peace Science Society Conference)

Week 11 (November 9<sup>th</sup>): Necessary Conditions, cont.

- Goertz and Starr. Chapters 1-4.
- Goertz and Starr. Chapters 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 13.

DISCUSSION LEADER: \_\_\_\_\_

Short Assignment #2 due at the beginning of class. Please turn in a 2-3 page paper addressing the following issue:

**Necessary Conditions:** What are potential necessary and/or sufficient conditions that might apply to your topic of interest? Have these conditions been adequately tested in your field? If so, how? If not, how could they be tested? Be sure to refer to the readings in your answer.

Week 12 (November 16<sup>th</sup>): Levels of Analysis

### Week 11: Levels of Analysis

- David Singer. 1961. "The Levels of Analysis Problem in I.R." *World Politics*, 16, pp. 77-92. (available at [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org))
- Hans Morgenthau. "A Realist Theory of International Politics" From John Vasquez, ed. *Classics of International Relations*. (available on course reserve)
- Tammen et al. "Power Transition Theory for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." From Tammen et al. 2001. *Power Transitions*. Chatham House. (available on course reserve)
- Nils Petter Gleditsch. 1998. "Armed Conflict and the Environment: A Critique of the Literature." *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Special Issue on Environmental Conflict. (May), pp. 381-400. (available at [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org))
- Putnam, Robert D. "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games." *International Organization*, Vol. 42, No. 3. (Summer, 1988), pp. 427-460. (available at [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org))

DISCUSSION LEADER: \_\_\_\_\_

Prepare for class: What levels of analysis are used in your topic of study? Which one is used most prominently? Why? Do any studies blend levels of analysis? Be sure to be ready to discuss specific examples in the literature.



Week 13 (November 23<sup>rd</sup>): NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Holiday

Week 14 (Nov 30<sup>th</sup>): Concepts and Measurement

- Giovanni Sartori. "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics" *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 64, No. 4. (Dec., 1970), pp. 1033-1053. (available at [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org))
- Adcock & Collier. "Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research." *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 95, No. 3. (Sep., 2001), pp. 529-546.(available at [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org))
- Shivley. Chapters 3-5
- Jones, Bremer, and Singer. 1996. "Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1816-1996: Rationale, Coding Rules, and Empirical Problems." *Conflict Management and Peace Science*. Pp. 163-183 (available on course reserve)

DISCUSSION LEADER: \_\_\_\_\_

**Short Assignment #3 due at the beginning of class. Please turn in a 5 page essay on the following issue.**  
**Measurement:** In research on your topic of interest, what are some of the main variables employed and how are they measured? Compare and contrast measurements of key independent and dependent variables. Your paper should include a table of key dependent and independent variables, their operationalization and measurement, and the studies in which they are found. Are there any problems with the operationalizations and measurements? Which of these is superior? Why? Please be sure to refer to this weeks readings in your essay.

Week 15 (December 7<sup>th</sup>): Values in Political Science

- Klemke. Chapters 29, 30, 31, 33.

DISCUSSION LEADER: \_\_\_\_\_