

POLITICAL SCIENCE 5242 / 4242**POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR: REASON, PASSION, BIOLOGY**

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 Class Wednesday 2:30 p.m. – 5:15 pm. LSCP 5208
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Abstract

Political behavior is the study of the private roots of public action. To understand how and why people act politically, we delve into psychology, family life, sexuality, and genetics. In addition to these individual characteristics, economics, geography, and class drive political behaviour. Topics include: public opinion, political polarization, culture wars, elections, modernization theory, populism, democratization and the resource curse. The final unit considers big data and commercial applications of social science research in political practice. Although this material is inherently comparative, we principally want to investigate how it applies in Canada.

Extended overview

Is political behavior driven by reason, passion, biology, or some combination of the three? As a first approach, we assume that it is based on rational judgments made through some sort of cost / benefit analysis, and we assume that our calculation of utility is informed by knowledge about public affairs. To test if this assumption operates in practice, we study public opinion, class, partisanship, and “culture wars” in North America.

The second approach is modernization theory, which is the intellectual descendent of structural Marxist and Weberian theory. This approach assumes that societies (and the individuals within them) change socially and psychologically in ways that correspond to change in the structure of the economy. These changes are rational, but they are large-scale, predictable, and independent of human volition.

The third approach assumes that political behavior is based principally on passion, as driven by biology. Much of what people do politically corresponds to their genetic heritage which has its own rational calculus. When research from biology and psychology is applied to political practice, the result is political marketing which appeals to voters’ emotions. Election campaigns are the height of applied social science in this regard.

Together, these three approaches enable students to reflect in a more profound way on how their own decision-making processes operate and how they arrive at their own personal loyalties. As a result, they become better equipped to become professional practitioners of politics.

UNDERGRADUATE GRADING SCHEME (option to do grad scheme)		DUE
Participation and response to student presentation	10%	throughout
3 analytical papers @ 20% each (2000 words <i>maximum</i>)	60%	one per Jan, Feb, March
Take home exam assignment	30%	Early April (48 hours)
GRADUATE GRADING SCHEME		DUE
Participation and response to student presentation	10%	throughout
2 analytical papers @ 10% each (2000 words <i>maximum</i>)	20%	throughout
Oral presentation	40%	throughout
Take home exam assignment	30%	Early April (48 hours)

Oral presentation

Graduate students are required to deliver a presentation based on the readings from one week. The oral presentation is the centrepiece of graduate student work in the course; consider it to be equivalent to a major research paper. The presentations should take a decisive stand on the contributions of the readings to our understanding of the particular problem under study for that week and the larger themes of the course more generally. More specifically, the presentations should:

1. Take a decisive stand on the contribution of the readings to understanding politics.
2. Based on the stand you take on the readings, present evidence in support of your position.
3. Extract the research design that underlies the results presented in each reading.
 - a. Evaluate if the research design adequately supports the conclusions presented.
4. Identify and assess the policy implications of the discussion presented.
5. Extract the article's theoretical approach.
 - a. Does the theory or the theoretical approach actually explain what it is supposed to explain?
6. Even if you think the reading is perfect, analysis entails trying to find the weakest points of an argument and probing to see if it is a fatal flaw or not.
7. What contribution do the readings make to our overall understanding of politics?
 - a. Is it an empirical or theoretical contribution?
 - b. Do they complement or compete with previous readings? Are we any further ahead than before?

You must use a computer and projector. Your presentation will be graded on its ability to communicate intellectually interesting and politically astute insights, not its technical artistry. Learning to present complex information in a visually compelling way is a valuable skill.

The speaking notes must be submitted as part of the assignment. Text need not be in formal essay format; it consists of presentation notes, provided that they are coherent, logical, cleaned up and properly formatted. Please create your speaking notes in the "notes" format of the pptx file. Then submit your notes in that format; it is also possible to submit notes in a separate text file.

One hour of class time is given over to your presentation. Be prepared to speak for approximately 30 minutes. You will address questions and comments from the class for the remainder of the time. The instructor chairs all presentations. Students are not responsible for presenting all the material assigned for that day, but you are expected to be familiar with the assigned readings, and to be able to address questions as to how they relate to what you present. Much of the material is quite difficult and explaining the concepts and results accurately to your classmates will take time and effort. The evaluation rubric for the class presentation is appended to this syllabus.

When the presentations are over, the class will be expected to ask **critical and thoughtful questions** about the presentations. At the end of the course, students will grade each other on their attentiveness to each other's work, using a short-version of the oral presentation rubric. This is an anonymous grade that is submitted to the instructor as an advisory grade; the instructor has task of compiling students' evaluations and assigning a final grade.

The **final take-home exam** requires you to synthesize broad course themes in an essay. To synthesize is to bring different aspects of the course material together in a coherent explanation. The question to be posed typically asks the student to address – in all its historical and theoretical complexity- a current "crisis" in the study of politics.

There are **short analytical papers**. Short means short, maximum 2000 words. These papers analyse and critique one or two of the readings assigned for a particular week. No additional research is required (or permitted) beyond the assigned readings. One paper must be submitted each month, or a late penalty.

COURSE AGENDA

Readings are listed below, in order of priority. Begin reading from the top, and make your way down as you engage in the material. Popular accounts are listed first, as an introduction to the topic. Academic journals are listed next, followed by books. Students writing analytical papers, exam papers, and making presentations on the topic are expected to engage deeply in the academic sources. Most items are posted to Brightspace. Students are NOT expected to do ALL the readings each class.

The syllabus is subject to minor changes (i.e. an addition of a supplementary reading, guest speaker, or exclusion of a previously required reading) upon notice provided by the instructor.

I. INTRODUCTION

8 January

Question: How to think about doing social science? A four-fold matrix, inspired by Martin Hollis

Watts, Duncan. 2011. "The human paradox that is common sense," *New Scientist Magazine* no. 2821.

Brooks, David. 2011. "The unexamined society" *New York Times* 7 July.

Gelman, Andrew & Thomas Basbøll. March 2014. "When do stories work? Evidence and illustration in the social sciences" *Sociological Methods Research* 43:4 547-570.

[Gelman, Andrew. 2018. "Feminism made me a better scientist" 13 August.](#)

[Tetlock, Philip. 2015. "Why an Open Mind Is Key to Making Better Predictions"](#)

Gelman, Andrew & Basbøll. 2013. "To throw away data: plagiarism as a statistical crime" *American Scientist* 101:3

The craft of visualizing social science

15 January

Question: How to construct and relate knowledge in a visually compelling story?

Brady, Henry. 2011. "The art of political science: Spatial diagrams as iconic and revelatory" *Perspectives on Politics*, 9:2, 311-331

[Gelman, Andrew. 2016. Lightning talk on data visualization.](#)

Adams, Michael. 2017. Fire and Ice revisited: American and Canada: Social Values in the Age of Trump and Trudeau. Environics.

[Angus Reid, Canadian Values Index](#)

[IPSOS. 2018. Age of Uncertainty: paper and videos.](#)

[David Sparks blog https://dsparks.wordpress.com/](https://dsparks.wordpress.com/)

II. ACADEMIC LINEAGE OF PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

22 January

Question: Is a democratic public clever enough to get the politicians and the policies that it wants?

[Menand, Louise. 2004. "The unpolitical animal: How political science understands voters" *New Yorker*. August 30.](#)

Edsall, Thomas. 2014. "Nothing in moderation: How ideological moderation conceals support for immoderate policies: a new perspective on the 'disconnect' in American politics." [NYT](#).

Zaller, John. 1998. "Monica Lewinsky's contribution to political science" *Political Science & Politics*. 31:2, 182-189.

Zaller, John. 2012. "What nature and origins leaves out" *Critical Review* 24: 4, 2012.

[Achen, Christopher and Larry Bartels. 2016. "Do Sanders supporters favor his policies?" *New York Times*, 23 May.](#)

Achen, Christopher and Larry Bartels. 2016. "Democracy for realists: Holding up a mirror to the electorate" *Juncture*, 22:4, 269-275.

Lenz, Gabriel. 2018. "Time for a change" *Critical Review*, 30:1-2, 87-106.

Gelman, Andrew. 2016. [No evidence that shark attacks cause elections.](#)

Cutler, Fred. 2002. "The simplest shortcut of all: Sociodemographic characteristics and electoral choice" *Journal of Politics* 64:2 466-490.

Druckman, James and Thomas Leeper. 2012. "Is public opinion stable? Resolving the micro/macro disconnect in studies of public opinion: *Daedalus*. 141: 4, 50-68

Butler, Peter. 2007. *Polling and public Opinion: A Canadian perspective*. University of Toronto Press.

III. RATIONAL AND IRRATIONAL CULTURE WARS OF NORTH AMERICA

A. Introduction

29 January

Question: Were there earlier speculative, non-scientific intimations of Trump?

Brooks, David. 2001. "One nation, slightly divisible" *Atlantic Monthly* Dec.; 288, 5.

Lasch, Christopher. 1994. "The revolt of the elites" *Harper's Magazine*, 289, 39-49.

[Perrin, Andrew. 2018. "The invention of the "white working class" Public books.](#)

Totten, Michael. 2016. "Children of the Revolution: The rise of the alt-Left" *City Journal*. Autumn.

Junn, Jane. 2016. "Hiding in plain sight: White women vote Republican" *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics Blog* *Politics of Color*, November 13.

McConnell, Scott. 2016. "The rise of the AltRight" *American Conservative* October 31.

B. (Ir)Rational culture wars of North America: Geography

5 February

Question: How do rich people and poor people sort themselves out in physical space?

Election 2016 Maps <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mejn/election/2016/>
<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/11/red-state-blue-city-how-the-urban-rural-divide-is-splitting-america/265686/>, <http://metrocosm.com/election-2016-map-3d/>

Gimpel, James & Kimberly Karnes. 2006. "The rural side of the urban-rural gap" *PS: Political Science & Politics* July.

Gelman, Andrew. 2008. *Red state, blue state, rich state, poor state: Why Americans vote the way they do*. Princeton University Press. [Slide presentation](#) [Video interview](#).

Gelman, Andrew. 2016. "19 Things we learned from the 2016 election, plus 5 more things" *Statistical Modeling, Causal Inference, and Social Science* blog.

Gelman, Andrew. 2018: "What really happened?" *Statistical Modeling, Causal Inference, and Social Science* blog. 10 November 2018, 3:57 am

Packer, George. 2018. "A new report offers insights into tribalism in the age of Trump" *New Yorker*. 12 October. [Complete Hidden Tribes Report](#). [VOX critique](#)

Wilkinson, Will. 2018. [The density divide: Urbanization, polarization, and populist backlash](#). Niskanen Center 2018.

Johnston, R., Jones, K. and Manley, D. 2016. "The growing spatial polarization of presidential voting in the United States, 1992–2012: Myth or reality?: *PS: Political Science & Politics* 49:4, 766–770.

Abrams, Samuel & Morris Fiorina. 2012. "The Big Sort" that wasn't: A skeptical re-examination" *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 45:02, 203-210.

Fiorina, Morris, Samuel Abrams, Jeremy Pope. 2010. *Culture war? The myth of a polarized America*. Longman.

- Feller, Avi, Andrew Gelman & Boris Shor. 2012. "Red state / blue state divisions in the 2012 presidential election," *Forum* 10:4, 127–131.
- Abramowitz, Alan. 2010. *The disappearing center: Engaged citizens, polarization, and American democracy*. Yale University Press.
- Jacoby, William. 2014. "Is there a culture war? Conflicting value structures in American public opinion" *American Political Science Review* 108:4, 754-771.

B. (Ir)Rational culture wars of North America: Canadian Populism

12 February

Question: Is Canada immune from the rise of Trump-style populism?

- Loewen, Peter and Benjamin Allen Stevens. 2019. *Automation, AI and anxiety: Policy preferred, populism possible*. Public Policy Forum.
- Graves, Frank. 2019. *Northern populism: Causes and consequences of the ordered outlook*. EKOS Research.
- Adams, Michael. 2017. *Could-it-happen-here? Canada in the age of Trump and Brexit*. Environics Research.
- Flanagan, Thomas. 2016. "Could a populist wave also sweep Canada?" *Policy Options*.
- Johnston, Richard. 2014. "Canada is polarizing—and it's because of the parties" *Washington Post*. 18 February.
- Keivins, A. & Stuart Soroka. 2018. "Growing apart? Partisan sorting in Canada, 1992–2015" *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 51:1, 103-133.

READING WEEK, NO CLASS 19 February

(Ir)Rational culture wars: marriage and family

26 Feb to be re-scheduled

Question: Is populism conceived at home?

- Douthat, Ross. 2010. "The changing Culture War" *New York Times*. December 6.
- [Leonhardt, David. 2015. "Red vs. Blue America on Marriage" *Upshot New York Times*.](#)
- [Cahn, Naomi and June Carbone. 2010. *Red state families vs. blue state families: The family-values divide* OUP.](#)
- [Wilcox, Bradford and Nicholas Zill. 2015. *Red state families: better than we knew*. Institute for Family Studies.](#)
- Wilcox, Bradford and Wendy Wang. 2017. *The marriage divide*. Research Brief for Opportunity America—Brookings Working Class Group.
- Murray, Charles. 2012. "The new American divide" *Wall Street Journal*. 21 January 2012.
- Gelman, Andrew, 2013. "Charles Murray's *Coming Apart* and the measurement of social and political divisions" *Statistics, Politics, and Policy* 2013; 4:1, 70–81.
- [Cross, Philip and Peter Mitchell. 2014. *The marriage gap between rich and poor Canadians: How Canadians are split into haves and have-nots along marriage lines*. Institute of Marriage and Family Canada.](#)
- [Banks, Ralph. 2011. "The racial gap in marriage: how the institution is tied to inequality," *Atlantic Monthly*.](#)
- Malloy, Jonathan. 2009. "Bush / Harper? Canadian and American Evangelical politics compared," *American Review of Canadian Studies*. 39:4, 352–363.
- Putnam, Robert, Carl Frederick, Kaisa Snellman. 2012. "Growing class gaps in social connectedness among American youth" Boston: Harvard Kennedy School of Govt. Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America.

IV. STRUCTURAL THEORIES: MODERNIZATION & POST-MODERNIZATION

Big Question: What drives social and political change? Is it economic structures or cultural legacies? And can we identify predictable pathways?

A. PROMISE & PERILS OF WORLD VALUES SURVEY

4 March

Question: to what extent are American politics unique, or are they globally generic?

- Inglehart, Ronald. 2016. "Inequality and modernization" *Foreign Affairs*, 95:1, 2-10.
- Inglehart, Ronald & Pippa Norris. 2016. "Trump, Brexit, and the rise of populism: Economic have-nots and cultural backlash" Harvard Kennedy School of Government. Working paper Series, August.
- Norris, Pippa and Ronald Inglehart. 2018. *Cultural backlash Trump, Brexit, and the rise of authoritarian populism* New York: Cambridge University Press, chapter 1.
- Young, Clifford. 2016. *It's nativism: Explaining the drivers of Trump's popular support*. Ipsos Public Affairs.
- Roberto Stefan Foa & Yascha Mounk. 2016. "The danger of deconsolidation" *Journal of Democracy* 27:3, July.
- Inglehart, Ronald. 2016. "How much should we worry?" *Journal of Democracy*, 27:3.
- Berman, Sheri. 2016. "Populism is not fascism" *Foreign Affairs*.
- Inglehart, Ronald and Christian Welzel. 2010. "Changing mass priorities: The link between modernization and democracy" *Perspectives on Politics*, 8: 551-567.

B. STRUCTURAL THEORY APPLIED

11 March

Question: is a natural resource economy a curse or a blessing for Canadians?

- Adams, Julia and Ann Shola Orloff. 2005. "Defending modernity? High politics, feminist anti-modernism, and the place of gender, *Politics & Gender*, 1: 166-182.
- Ross, Michael. 2008. "Oil, Islam, women," *American Political Science Review* 102: 107-123.
- Debate: Oil, Islam, and Women, *Politics & Gender*, 5:4 (December 2009).
- Norris, Pippa, "Petroleum patriarchy? A response to Ross."
- Ross, Michael, "Does oil wealth hurt women? A reply to Norris."
- Speer, Sean. 2018. *Working-class opportunity and the threat of populism in Canada*. Macdonald-Laurier Institute.
- Speer, Sean. 2019. *Forgotten people and forgotten places: Canada's economic performance in the age of populism*. Macdonald-Laurier Institute.
- Setzler, M. & A. Yanus. 2018. "Why did women vote for Donald Trump?" *PS: Political Science & Politics* 51:3, 523-527.
- Shrivastava, Meena & Lorna Stefanick, eds. 2015. *Alberta oil and the decline of democracy in Canada* Edmonton: Athabasca University Press.
- Adkin, Laurie ed. 2016. *First world petro-politics: Political ecology and governance of Alberta* Toronto: UTP.
- Cross, Philip. 2015. *Unearthing the full economic impact of Canada's natural resources*: MacDonald Laurier Institute.
- Smith, Brock. 2015. "The resource curse exorcised" *Journal of Development Economics* 116, 57-73.
- James, Alexander. 2015. "The resource curse: a statistical mirage?" *Journal of Development Economics* 114, 55-63.

V. BIOLOGY & POLITICS

A. Evolutionary lineage of politics?

18 March

Question: Do our genes determine our fundamental orientations to politics?

Edsall, Thomas. 2013. "Are our political beliefs encoded in our DNA?" *New York Times*. 1 October.

Pinker, Steven. 2008. "[The moral instinct](#)," *New York Times*. January 13.

[Haidt, Jonathan. 2013. The Politics of Disgust](#) Animated whiteboard to accompany talk to libertarians.

[Haidt, Jonathan "The moral roots of liberals and conservatives."](#) https://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_on_the_moral_mind

Hatemi, Peter & Rose McDermott. 2012. "Policing the perimeter: disgust and purity in democratic debate" *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 45, 675-687.

McDermott, R., Tingley, D., Hatemi, P. 2014. "Assortative mating on ideology could operate through olfactory cues" *American Journal of Political Science*, 58: 997-1005.

Review Symposium: Peter K. Hatemi and Rose McDermott's *Man Is by Nature a Political Animal: Evolution Biology, and Politics*" *Perspectives on Politics* 11:3 2013.

John Hibbing. "Ten misconceptions concerning neurobiology and politics."

Kay Lehman Schlozman, "Two concerns about ten misconceptions."

Troy Duster, "Emergence vs. reductionism in the debate over the role of biology in politics"

Beckwith and Corey Morris. 2008. Twin studies of political behavior: Untenable assumptions?

Anna Jaap Jacobson, "New souls for old."

B. Political psychology

25 March

Question: How to succeed in politics by manipulating people's brains?

McDermott, Rose. 2004. "The feeling of rationality: The meaning of neuroscientific advances for political science" *Perspectives on Politics* 2:4, 691-706.

Fletcher, Joseph and Jennifer Hove. 2012. "Emotional determinants of support for the Canadian mission in Afghanistan: A view from the bridge" *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 45:1, 33-62.

Soroka, Stuart, Peter Loewen, Patrick Fournier, Daniel Rubenson. 2016. "The impact of news photos on support for military action" *Political Communication*, 1-20.

Barbara, Michael & Ashley Parker 2012. "Gosh, who talks like that now? Romney does" *New York Times*. 20 Oct.

Westen, Drew. 2007 The political brain: The role of emotion in deciding the fate of the nation. *Public Affairs*.

Pew Research Center. 2014. "Social media and the spiral of silence" *Policy Options*. Nov/Dec, 72.

Nesbitt-Larking, Paul. 2004. "Political psychology in Canada" *Political Psychology*. 25: 1, 97-114.

V. POLITICAL MARKETING

A. Putting psychology to work

1 April

Question: how does technology enable manipulation of the political brain?

- Randall, Kevin. 2015. "Neuropolitics: Where campaigns try to read your mind" *New York Times*. 3 November.
OK Cupid dating profiles are political <https://theblog.okcupid.com/tagged/politics>
- Singer, Natasha. 2013. "A data broker offers a peek behind the curtain" *New York Times*. 31 August.
- Singer, Natasha. 2012. "You for sale: Mapping and sharing the consumer genome" *New York Times*. 31 August.
- Edsall, Thomas. 2012. "Let the nanotargeting begin?" *New York Times*. 15 April.
- Federico Christopher, Howard Lavine, Christopher Johnston. 2012. "The unexpected impact of coded appeals" *New York Times*. 10 September.
- Rothfeder, Jeffrey. 2004. Terror Games *Popular Science*. <http://lustickconsulting.com/>
- Kosinski, Michael, David Stillwell, Thore Graepel. 2013. "Private traits and attributes are predictable from digital records of human behavior" *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110:15, 5802-5805.

Canadian material

- Guest. 2018. "Andrew Scheer's campaign manager says he builds creepy psychological profiles of voters too" *Press Progress*. 22 March.
- Marland, Alex. 2018. "The brand image of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in international context" *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 24:2, 139-144.
- Marland, Alex. 2016. *Brand Command: Canadian politics and democracy in the age of message control*. VCR: UBC
- Delacourt, Susan. 2013. *Shopping for votes*. Madeira Park BC: Douglas & McIntyre.
- Flanagan, Thomas. 2014. *Winning power: Canadian campaigning in the 21st century*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press, chapters 5 and 7.
- Marland, Alex and Tom Flanagan. 2013. "Political branding of the Conservative Party of Canada" *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 46:4, 951-69.

UNIVERSITY REGULATIONS

From the University Calendar: "Students are expected to complete class work by the prescribed deadlines. Only in special circumstances ... may an instructor extend such deadlines." Late papers will be assessed a late penalty at the instructor's discretion. Students who miss a deadline on account of illness are expected to hand in the assignment within one week of their return to class, with a medical certificate, per academic regulations of Dalhousie.

Papers should be submitted directly to the instructor, or the teaching assistant, or in person to the Political Science office between 8:30 am and 4:30 pm on weekdays only. The instructor cannot assume responsibility for papers otherwise submitted.

Students may request accommodation as a result of barriers related to disability, religious obligation, or any characteristic under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. Students who require academic accommodation for either classroom participation or the writing of tests, quizzes and exams should make their request to the Office of Student Accessibility & Accommodation prior to or at the outset of each academic term. Please see www.studentaccessibility.dal.ca for information and to obtain Form A: Request for Accommodation. A note taker may be required to assist a classmate. There is an honorarium of \$75/course/term. If you are interested, please contact OSAA at 494-2836 for more information. Please note that your classroom may contain specialized

accessible furniture and equipment. It is important that these items remain in the classroom so that students who require their usage will be able to participate in the class.

INFORMATION ON PLAGIARISM

Proper documentation is required on all writing assignments. Failure to document sources constitutes plagiarism and can result in severe academic penalty. You should keep your rough notes and be prepared to defend your work orally. Consult a writing/style manual for acceptable citation styles.

Any paper submitted by a student at Dalhousie University may be checked for originality to confirm that the student has not plagiarized from other sources. Plagiarism is considered a serious academic offence which may lead to loss of credit, suspension or expulsion from the University, or even to the revocation of a degree. It is essential that there be correct attribution of authorities from which facts and opinions have been derived.

At Dalhousie there are University Regulations which deal with plagiarism and, prior to submitting any paper in a course; students should read the Policy on Intellectual Honesty contained in the Calendar or on the Online Dalhousie website. As a student in this class, you are to keep an electronic copy of any paper you submit, and the course instructor may require you to submit that electronic copy on demand.

Additional Information for Graduate Students

As this is a cross-listed class, the requirements for graduate students are somewhat different from those for undergraduates. The number of and types of assignments are the same, but the expectations for these assignments are considerably higher:

1. In all assignments, graduate students are expected to evince a deeper analytical ability when evaluating readings; to show familiarity with a wider variety of sources; and to articulate a greater complexity of thought, in both verbal and written forms.
2. The writing style for graduate students should illustrate greater sophistication, both in the construction of the argument and in the clarity and lucidity of the writing.
3. Graduate students are expected to be prepared for each seminar; and to read beyond the minimal expectations set out for undergraduates (*i.e.*, more than one primary reading, secondary text, one online article, one student paper). Attendance is crucial. Graduate students should be willing to participate actively in the discussions, rather than waiting to be called upon to speak.
4. At the graduate level, students should show an understanding of the nuances of criticism, ie, how to accomplish an intellectually incisive criticism in a respectful and constructive manner.
5. Research papers for graduate students are generally longer. They should show evidence of good research skills; of the capacity for revision; and of the analytical capability noted in (1) above. Graduate students may choose to tailor their research papers to their thesis work; but please discuss this with me in advance.
6. Graduate students should enjoy their work more thoroughly.

Tips to Article-Writers

Ezra W. Zuckerman, MIT Sloan School of Management February 6, 2008

Over the past several years, I often find that I am giving similar advice or reactions to colleagues and students (or as referee to authors) on how to improve their papers, usually with an eye to improving the paper's likelihood of contributing to the social scientific literature. Since I give this advice often, I thought it might be of some use to compile the advice and post it on my website. Please note that this is by no means a recipe for writing great papers. God knows that if I had such a recipe, I would have an easier time writing great papers myself! And please note that the converse is also true: there are many published articles that violate one or more of these tips. Of course, many published papers are awful. And very good papers sometimes do not get accepted for publication. Consequently, all I can say is that I think these tips generally make for better papers. And what keeps me in this business is the faith that our journals generally publish the better papers and reject the weaker ones, though that faith is often tested. A final note: I plan on updating these from time to time, as I continue to play the mentor / commentator / critic / discussant / referee roles and think of something else that might be useful. Comments (via email) are also welcome.

1. Motivate the paper. The first question you must answer for the reader is why they should read your paper. There is A LOT out there to read and it is very easy to find an excuse not to read a paper. Most people don't even read all the articles published in their field's flagship journals. So if you want your paper to be read, you need to sell the reader on why your paper is so great. The introduction of your paper has to be exciting. It must motivate the reader to keep on reading. They must have the sense that if they keep on reading, there is at least a fair chance that they will learn something new.

2. Know your audience. Since different people get excited about different things, you cannot get them motivated unless you know their taste. And different academic communities/journals have very different tastes for what constitutes an interesting question and what constitutes a compelling approach to a question. (My friend and colleague Roberto Fernandez has an excellent framework for thinking about audiences, known widely at Sloan as "Rows and Columns." I will not go into it here, but the basic idea is that social scientific communities are arrayed by two dimensions, where the "rows" are "phenomena" [e.g., area studies; topics such as entrepreneurship or racial inequality] and the "columns" are disciplines or theories. One key lesson is that one typically needs to choose whether one is aiming for a "row" audience / journal or a "column" audience / journal, and motivate / frame one's paper accordingly. Trying to motivate both row and column simultaneously usually does not work).

3. Use substantive motivations, not aesthetic ones. By an aesthetic motivation, I mean that the author is appealing to the reader's sense that a certain kind of theory or approach should be preferred regardless of its explanatory power (e.g., we should be avoiding "economistic" or "functionalist" or "reductionist" explanations). Sometimes aesthetic motivations work (for getting a paper accepted), but the contribution tends to be hollow because the end of research (figuring out how the world works) is sacrificed for the means (telling each other how much we like certain ideas). Another way of putting this is that we should not like a paper simply because it proudly displays the colors of our tribe.

4. Always frame around the dependent variable. The dependent variable is a question and the independent variables are answers to a question. So it makes no sense to start with an answer. Rather, start with a question/puzzle! (Note that I don't mean the literal dependent variable in the analysis in the paper, but the larger process/pattern that it is supposed to represent).

5. Frame around a puzzle in the world, not a literature. The only reason anyone cares about a literature is because it is helpful in clarifying puzzles in the world. So start with the puzzle. A related point is that just because a literature has not examined some phenomenon, that does not mean that you should. The only reason a phenomenon is interesting is if it poses a puzzle for existing ways of viewing the world. (Too often, I read papers that try to get motivation from the fact that a literature “has not looked at” x, y, or z. So what? There will always be a great deal of unstudied [by academics] phenomena. The question is why that matters.)

6. One hypothesis (or a few tightly related hypotheses) is enough. If people remember a paper at all, they will remember it for one idea. So no use trying to stuff a zillion ideas in a paper. A related problem with numerous hypotheses is that it's never clear what implications the invalidation of any one hypothesis has for the theory. (Note: the organizations community apparently does not agree with me on this one)

7. Build up the null hypothesis to be as compelling as possible. A paper will not be interesting unless there is a really compelling null hypothesis. If there is no interesting alternative to the author's argument, why would anyone care about it? Flogging straw men is both unfair and uninteresting.

8. Save the null. Since the null is compelling, it must be right under certain conditions. The author's job is to explain to the reader that s/he was right to believe x about the world, but that since x doesn't hold under certain conditions, s/he should shift to belief x'. This helps the reader feel comfortable about shifting to a new idea. Moreover, a very subtle shift in thinking can go a long way.

9. Orient the reader. The reader needs to know at all times how any sentence fits into the narrative arc of the paper. All too often, I read papers where I get lost in the trees and have no sense of the forest. The narrative arc should start with the first paragraph or two where a question/puzzle is framed and lead to the main finding of the paper. Everything else in the paper should be in service of that arc, either by clarifying the question or setting up the answer (including painstakingly dealing with objections). A related tip is:

10. Never write literature reviews. No one likes to read literature reviews. They are boring. So don't write them. But that doesn't mean you should ignore “the relevant literature.” To the contrary. You have raised a puzzle about the real world (see tips 3-5). One reason why it is a puzzle is because existing answers are compelling (see point 7), but flawed. So you review the literature not as an end in itself but because you show what is compelling but flawed about existing answers. Any research that does not pertain to that objective can remain unmentioned. (Ok, ok. Some reviewers will demand to see their names or that of their favorite scholars even when their work is essentially irrelevant. And it is usually good to anticipate that. But try to do as little as possible.)