

Seminar Style Discussion

Rationale

The major goal of education is to make students into independent learners and teachers. When you take an introductory course such as PISc 110, the instructor spends most of the class time lecturing. At some point, however, classes should change from the instructor lecturing to the students explaining. The first group of classes are “lower division” and the second group are “upper division.”

PISc 313

This is an upper division class. Therefore, in this class the students explain theories, models, hypotheses, and data to other students. The instructor’s job is to change the topic when the time is appropriate, ask questions, or clarify a particular point that is giving most students problems. It is not the instructor’s job to cram as much factual material as possible into the class time.

Class Plan

Each class begins with one or more students explaining the readings. The students who are selected give a brief summary of the chapter/article that includes the following elements:

1. A statement of the (research) question that the author is trying to answer;
2. The author’s hypotheses;
3. The data the author used to answer the question. Sometimes there are no data, only a logical argument. In this case, simply explain the “logic” of the argument.
4. The author’s conclusions.
5. Potential problems with the author’s explanation. For example, is it likely that the relationships observed are spurious? Does the author have a measurement problem? Can the author’s conclusions be generalized to other data and situations? Do the author’s conclusions fit nicely with other research and theories?

Elements 1-4 should take about 5 minutes. Element 5 should take about 15 minutes. At this point, other students in the class comment on the article and on the presentation.

We will use the Socratic method to reach an answer, or to determine that there is no answer. Obviously, it is easier for you and me if you have read the material.

Resources

If you are having difficulty with the readings, or need help in preparing to present to the class, please see me. I will be happy to set up appointments (individual, or with others, or even the whole class).

Reference: Ken Godwin’s “Interest Group Politics” syllabus.