Interpretative Methodologies and Methods Business Meeting
Fri, September 11, 6:30 to 7:30pm MDT (8:30 to 9:30pm EDT), TBA

Open to all, including non-registrants of the APSA meeting. To receive the Zoom link and password for this meeting, RSVP at https://forms.gle/aK8Sd1Nw1AFs2oL89 by September 10.

Please join us to hear reports from the IMM program and short course chairs, learn about IMM events and other business, and congratulate the winners of the Hayward Alker Best Paper Award, the Charles Taylor Book Award, and the Grain of Sand Award.

2020 APSA Methods Café
Fri, September 11, 2:00 to 3:30pm MDT (4:00 to 5:30pm EDT), TBA
Organizers: Sarah Marie Wiebe, University of Hawai'i, Manoa; Biko Koenig, Franklin & Marshall College

Fieldwork in Political Science 1: Ethnography's Home in the Field
Fri, September 11, 8:00 to 9:30am MDT (10:00 to 11:30am EDT), TBA

Session Submission Type: Roundtable

Session Description
Given the widespread applicability of ethnography across established research programs in political science, this roundtable explores two interrelated questions, 1. How can political ethnography encourage a more reflexive, self-aware and therefore more insightful discipline? And 2. How do political ethnographers situate themselves within their respective fields, both methodologically and through fieldwork? Political ethnography has been defined as being at once an immersive methodology while also cultivating a sensibility (Schatz 2008). This roundtable brings together political ethnographers from multiple stages in their careers to discuss issues around how to conduct research using immersive, interpretive and embedded methodologies to understand political processes and movements. We seek to ascertain and cultivate new methodological insights into the growing repertoire of scholarship employing diverse ethnographic methods, including participant observations, structured and semi-structured interviews, collaborative ethnography, critical ethnography and decolonial methodologies that come to bear on the political.
Fieldwork in Political Science 3: Tracing Trends and Forging the Future
Fri, September 11, 12:00 to 1:30pm MDT (2:00 to 3:30pm EDT), TBA

Session Submission Type: Roundtable

Session Description
Field research plays an important role in political science, with scholars across subfields and epistemological approaches traveling to various sites “to acquire data, information, or insights that significantly inform one’s research” (Kapiszewski, MacLean, and Read 2015, 1). Over the last decade, political scientists have been increasingly engaged in vital discussion about the principles, practices, challenges, and benefits of engaging in fieldwork (Hsueh, 2014). This roundtable aims to energize and expand that ongoing discussion. Each participant will also address aspects of “democracy, difference and disruption” to link their fieldwork with this year’s conference theme.

The roundtable brings together a diverse set of political scientists for whom fieldwork is their primary method of data generation. Justine Davis conducts multi-method research including interviewing; participant observation; and field, survey, and lab-in-the-field experiments in sub-Saharan Africa. Roselyn Hsueh engages in comparative research, which involves conducting ethnographic interviews, collecting archival and quantitative data in authoritarian and democratic contexts including China, India and Russia. Diana Kapiszewski engages in elite interviewing and archival research in Latin America. Susan Ostermann uses mixed-methods to gain insight into institutions and institutional change in South Asia. Erica Simmons conducts research on contentious politics and market reforms that has included ethnographic fieldwork in Mexico and Bolivia. Nicholas Rush Smith conducts comparative ethnographic fieldwork to study African political violence and democracy. Robin Turner generates data on southern African politics through in-depth interviews, ethnography, and archival research. Deborah Wheeler has conducted comparative ethnographic fieldwork in the Middle East for more than 30 years. She has done interviews, surveys and participant observation to explain political change in authoritarian contexts.

Participants will address crucial issues such as the role of fieldwork in theory development and evaluation, its unifying logics and diverse approaches, research design and ethics, and researcher positionality. Roundtable attendees will enrich the conversation.

Roundtable participants jointly created the list of timely questions below. They have also developed a suggested reading list, which will be distributed to roundtable participants, in order to encourage sustained inquiry beyond the event.

The end goal is to use the roundtable as the foundation for an edited volume on fieldwork in political science. An edited volume -- like the roundtable -- represents an opportunity for diverse scholars to answer a unified set of foundational questions from multiple perspectives. Doing so will help us to see how answers vary by scholars’ epistemological commitments, the types of fieldwork in which they engage, where they conduct their inquiry, the types of human participants they involve in their work, and potentially along other dimensions, and to reflect on the implications of that heterogeneity.

Guiding questions for the roundtable participants include the following:
1. Do scholars who engage in fieldwork share a set of unifying orientations or principles despite our different epistemological commitments?
2. Why and how does fieldwork help us to craft theories and generate explanations?
3. Are there particular types of research questions, cases, or countries that encourage or require data collection/generation through fieldwork?
4. What research design strategies help maximize the value of different types of data gathered through field research?
5. What kinds of data do political scientists who conduct fieldwork gather and how do they help us answer our research questions?
6. How can fieldwork improve the quality of field, survey, and lab-in-the-field experiments?
7. How do (or should) ethical commitments shape fieldwork? What responsibilities do researchers have to research participants and to the communities where we do fieldwork? How can ethical considerations be better integrated into political science teaching and scholarship?
8. How do political scientists’ identities (e.g. race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, parental status, etc.) affect our propensity to engage in fieldwork, the ways we do fieldwork, and our experiences in the field? How can/should political scientists address positionality in our work?
9. Are more or fewer -- or different types of -- scholars engaging in fieldwork over time? What factors shape how scholars decide to produce knowledge in political science?
10. How can the discipline better support high quality fieldwork across diverse epistemologies and methodologies?