



Faculty Profile

Till Weber is Associate Professor of Political Science at Baruch College and is teaching Applied Quantitative Research at the Graduate Center this semester.

By Harry Blain

Harry Blain: *Talk a bit about your academic background and how you became interested in your current areas of research.*

Till Weber: My academic training was in Europe – I went to grad school in Florence and did my undergraduate degree in Berlin. And now I’m in the United States – which makes sense, I think, if you have a broad interest intellectually and want to work internationally. This background helped me become a “natural” comparativist, interested in the empirical study of democracy. This involves a lot of things – voters, parties, legislators, media, cabinets, presidents – and for me, American politics is one case in a broader comparative context. I’ve never been particularly satisfied with the explanations I have been given as a student or citizen about why politics works the way it does. If you look at one country at a time, you tend to end up with ad hoc explanations and I always wanted something more systematic: how does democracy really operate? If you take this step back, you can then also more easily identify particular questions for your research.



Dr. Till Weber, Baruch College, CUNY

HB: *What classes are you teaching at the Graduate Center? Do you have an idea of classes you might teach in the future?*

TW: Right now I am teaching the class on Applied Quantitative Research, which I also taught last fall. It is quantitative, yes – which is the word that most people will see initially. But it’s not a pure statistics class; above all it’s applied, in the sense that we are interested in statistics as tools for our own research. Everybody comes to class with some kind of research interest and most likely it’s very different from my own (so I get to learn a lot) and, with this in mind, the overall aim of the class is to help people do what they are doing anyway, but with a more powerful and versatile toolkit. In terms of the future, I have proposed a course blending comparative and American politics. I’m not a big fan of sub-field differences, so I asked Keena Lipsitz, who is an Americanist, if we could co-teach a course on representation, campaigns and elections which brings our sub-fields together. Let’s see if it happens!

HB: *As a specialist in methodology, what kind of advice would you give to students at the Graduate Center who are thinking about research design and methods?*

TW: I have two answers to this, and they are exact opposites. The first one is: go play; find things; dig around; and see what is out there. It’s easy to believe that whatever you’ve done in the past should be repeated in the future. I was a qualitative person at first, but then changed when I found something that was better for me. You know the Ani DiFranco quote: “how are you going to know what you like till you been around the block on that bike?” So that’s the first answer. The other answer is: at some point you’ve got to choose. Most obviously, you have to choose a thesis topic, but after the thesis you will be on the job market, then (hopefully) you will be running research projects, and so on. Each step involves important questions: What kind of research can you do? What intellectual experience do you have? Where in the world will you live? All this is strongly affected by method – method choices are fundamentally life choices. Keep this in mind; play around as much as possible, but at some time you’ve got to commit.

