Political Science 817
Empirical Methods of Political Inquiry

UW-Madison • Spring 2014 • Thursdays 1:20-3:15pm • 422 North Hall

Contact Information

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The Course

Political science, like all academic fields, advances by scholarly research. This course introduces graduate students to the issues that commonly arise in qualitative and quantitative empirical political science research designs and their execution. Because no single approach to a research question is ideal, we will learn about the trade-offs involved in selecting one design over another. As a researcher and a consumer of others’ research, you must be self-conscious about the strengths and weakness of each methodology.

Requirements

The readings are a combination of books, book chapters, and articles. Some are general sources intended to acquaint you with a set of issues; others are applications that exemplify a methodological approach. The two required books are Gerring’s Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework (2nd ed.) and King, Keohane, and Verba’s Designing Social Inquiry (KKV), both available for purchase online and at the University Book Store. Other readings will be distributed electronically on Learn@UW. Students are expected to do all of the required reading and come to class meetings ready to discuss the material. I will give advance notice when the readings are changed.

Class meetings will mostly be in a seminar format, interrupted by mini lectures. You should expect to participate in the dissection of each week’s required readings.

There will be five short homework assignments scattered throughout the semester. These exercises will allow you to develop a specific skill, evaluate competing research designs, and see how theories work in practice. Each assignment will take time, but should not run longer than 5 double-spaced pages. Please deliver these to me in hard copy.

For the final paper each student will develop an original research design. The paper should efficiently synthesize the relevant literature and outline the hypotheses, arguments, or theory to
be examined. It should propose an empirical research project, a sort of blueprint for a study that depends only on resources that are typically available to a graduate student. I hope that the research design will eventually lead to a paper in another seminar, a conference presentation, or part of a dissertation. An abstract of at least one page is due in my mailbox on **Monday, May 5 at 4pm**. Papers are due in my mailbox by **Friday, May 16 at 4pm**. Most papers will be about 20 pages long and should not be much longer unless you are actually undertaking the research in the paper. Please consult with me if this is the case. Although I will provide written feedback on the abstract, you should also have at least one face-to-face meeting with me before completing the paper.

**Grades**

Final grades are based on contributions to class participation (20%), homework assignments (30%), and the final paper (50%). Please talk with me anytime during the semester if you have questions about the material, requirements, or your performance. The grading scale is as follows: A = 93-100%, AB = 88-92.9%, B = 83-87.9%, BC = 78-82.9%, C = 70-77.9%, D = 60-69.9%, F = 0-59.9%.

**Introduction (January 23)**

**Inference: The General and the Particular (January 30)**

**Required**

Gerring [Chapters 1-3]

KKV [Chapters 1 & 2]


**Recommended**


Mahoney and Goertz. 2006. “A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research.” *Political Analysis*.

Measurement I: Concept Operationalization (February 6)

**Required**
Gerring [Chapters 5]
KKV [p. 150-68]

**Recommended**
★ Assignment 1: Measuring Educational Quality

Measurement II: Reliability and Validity (February 13)

**Required**
Gerring [p. 80-6 & Chapter 7]

**Recommended**

Theories, Hypotheses, and Inference (February 20)

**Required**
Gerring [Chapters 6 & 8]

**Recommended**

★ Assignment 2: Durkheim’s Hypotheses

**Collecting Data (February 27)**

**Required**

Gerring [p. 74-80 & 87-95]

KKV [Chapter 6]


**Recommended**


★ Assignment 3: Fact Finding

**Specification and Spuriousness (March 6)**

**Required**

KKV [p. 168-84 & 199-207]


**Causation, Necessity, and Sufficiency in Small-N Studies (March 13)**

**Required**

Gerring [Chapters 11 & 12]
KKV [Chapter 3]

Recommended

[No class on March 20 due to Spring Recess]

Lab and Field Experiments (March 27)

Required
Gerring [Chapter 9 & p. 256-73]
KKV [p. 185-99]

Recommended
★ Assignment 4: Designing an Experiment

[No class on April 3 due to MPSA Annual Meeting]
Quasi-Experiments (April 10)

**Required**

Gerring [p. 273-90]


**Recommended**


Case Selection, Case Methods, Sampling, and Generalization (April 17)

**Required**

KKV [Chapter 4 & p. 86-91]


Recommended
★  Assignment 5: Selecting a Sample

Qualitative Interviews and Participant Observation (April 24)

Required
Rivera, Sharon Werning, Polina M. Kozyreva, and Eduard G. Sarovskii. 2002. “Interviewing Political Elites: Lessons from Russia.” PS: Political Science & Politics. (Also see other articles in the symposium in the same issue.)

Recommended
Survey Research (May 1)

Required

Recommended

Communicating Research (May 8)

Required

Recommended (readings on publication bias and replication)