Political Science 200: Research Methods in Political Science
Spring 2015

Tuesdays and Thursdays
02:25 PM - 03:15 PM

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Overview

This course will introduce you to the various ways in which political scientists study political phenomena. We will consider a variety of research methods, including historical case study research, field research, quantitative analysis, survey research, experimental techniques, and more. Whatever the research method, one of the central objectives of the course is for students to come away with a clear understanding of how to evaluate causal relationships in the political world.

In learning about these tools, we will consider a variety of real-world applications. For example, why do states give up some of their independence in order to participate in multilateral international institutions? How did Bill Clinton’s gender affect responses to the Monica Lewinsky scandal? Why did Presidents Kennedy and Johnson take different approaches to intervening in Vietnam? What is the effect of development aid on community-building after civil war? When do Latino immigrants decide to become American citizens? Do strict gun control laws reduce or increase crime? These kinds of questions are the backdrops we will use to learn about how to do political science research.

The semester will conclude with an overview of alternative approaches to political research that are less focused on establishing causation, and a unit on normative and ethical considerations in political research.
Course Information

Class Format
Unlike some lecture classes, you should complete the readings before class each day. Moreover, the lectures are a key component of the course and will contain material that is not found in the readings. The lectures will assume that you have already done the reading, and will apply the content from the reading to additional applications not found in the texts. Therefore, to succeed in this class, you will need to come to every lecture with the reading already completed.

Unlike many lecture courses, the lecture sessions will be interactive – I will ask for your opinions, and we will also frequently do class exercises that will require you to have completed the reading. If it becomes apparent that students are not sticking to the requirement that readings be completed before class, I reserve the right to administer brief quizzes, which will be counted as part of your section grade.

Grading
Your final grade is comprised of the following:

  2 in-class midterm exams (20% each, 40% total)
  Weekly discussion sections: 25%
  Final exam: 35%

The final exam will be held during the University-scheduled exam period.

There will be no make-up exams. If you have an absolutely unavoidable conflict over the exam, contact me well in advance. I also understand that emergencies happen. In a genuine emergency, I am very willing to work with you, but require documentation of emergencies - notes from doctors, emergency room personnel, etc. - in all instances.

Discussion Section
25% of your grade is based on weekly discussion sections led by the Teaching Assistant, Desiree Desierto. Your section grade will be based on attendance, participation, and various small assignments to be announced as the semester progresses.

Readings
The course has two required textbooks, which were posted to the UW system in December and should be available in the student bookstore and via various online vendors.

• Leanne Powner, 2014. Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student's Practical Guide

• Akan Malici and Elizabeth Smith, 2012. Political Science Research in Practice.
All other readings are either available on the course’s Learn@UW website (those readings are denoted with a “**”), or are available to the public on the internet (URL provided).

In addition to the required readings, I often list optional further readings for those who are interested in a specific topic (for example, in order to develop an idea for an independent project like a senior honors thesis, or to follow up on an example that we have discussed in class).

Note: the amount of reading for this course is not excessive, but it is very dense. Sometimes you will want to read a chapter twice in order to absorb all of the terms and concepts, so give yourself plenty of time.

Course Website
Our course website is available via Learn@UW. Please check the course website frequently for announcements, information about assignments, to access non-textbook readings, and for copies of lecture slides (posted after class).

Office Hours
We encourage you to see us during office hours with any questions. Please see above for weekly office hours.

Accommodation for Disabilities and Emergencies
For anyone who needs accommodations for a documented disability, please let me know immediately. I am happy to work through the McBurney Disability Resource Center, 905 University Avenue, 263-2741. Please contact them regarding this class and we can work out the nature of the accommodations that will be needed.

Note:
This is the first time this course has been taught at UW. I therefore reserve the right to modify the syllabus during the semester as we navigate this new course together. I will also check in during the semester for your informal feedback on the readings, etc.
Week 1

Jan 20 – Introduction and course overview

Jan 22 – What is social science, and why is it valuable?

Smith and Malici, “Why Do We Need a Science of Politics,” Ch. 1 in M&S

Nicholas Kristof, “Professors, We Need You!” New York Times Feb 15 2014; http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/opinion/sunday/kristof-professors-we-need-you.html?_r=0

-also click on some of the many links in that article to popular political science blogs like the Monkey Cage, etc, to see what is out there

Week 2

Jan 27 – Formulating a social scientific research question

Powner, Ch. 1 “From Research Topic to Research Question”

Jan 29 – Causal theories and hypotheses

Powner Ch. 2 “From Research Question to Theory to Hypothesis”

Hoover and Donovan, Ch. 2 “The Elements of Science”**

Recommended: Malici and Smith, “How Do We Get a Science of Politics” Ch. 2 in M&S

Week 3

Feb 3 – Causal theories and hypotheses cont.

Feb 5 – Choosing a research design

Kellstedt & Whitten, “Evaluating Causal Relationships” and “Research Design”**
Powner Ch. 4 “Choosing a Design that Fits Your Question”

Week 4

Feb 10 – Choosing a research design, cont.

Start to read Powner Ch. 5 “Case Selection and Study Design for Qualitative Research”

Feb 12 – Qualitative case studies

Finish Powner Ch. 5 “Case Selection and Study Design for Qualitative Research”

Recommended: He, “Case Study and the Comparative Method” Ch. 3 in M&S. At a minimum, make sure you understand all the bolded terms.

Week 5

Feb 17 – Qualitative case studies, cont.

Powner Ch. 6 “Qualitative Data Collection and Management”

Trachtenberg, Chapter 3 “The Critical Analysis of Historical Texts”**

Feb 19 – Case studies cont. / process-tracing

Holmes, “Silver Blaze”**

Collier, “Understanding Process Tracing”**

Week 6

Feb 24 – Catch-up and review

Feb 26 – FIRST MIDTERM EXAM
Week 7

Mar 3 – Historical case studies: an application


Recommended: Trachtenberg, Chapter 4: “Developing an Interpretation Through Textual Analysis: the 1941 Case”

Mar 5 – Archival research

“Using Archives: A Practical Guide for Researchers”
http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/04/0416_e.html

“A Survival Guide for Archival Research”

Week 8

Mar 10 – Field research

Kaup, “Field Research: Zhuang Ethnic Identity and the Chinese State,” Ch. 4 in M&S

Note: focus on the descriptions of the method of field research, not on the exact findings about the Zhuang

Mar 12 – Field research cont.

Thalhammer, “Interviews: What are the Pathways to Human Rights Activism?” Ch. 5 in M&S

Note: read critically and come to class read to talk about possible problems with the research design

Powner, pp. 148-150 (on Human Subjects Research and Elite Interviews)
Week 9

Mar 17 – Using Large-N Data

Powner, Ch. 7 “Quantitative Data Collection and Management”

Mar 19 – Some basics of quantitative analysis

Hoover and Donovan, “Measuring Variables and Relationships”**

Powner, Ch. 8 “Preparing Quantitative Data for Analysis”

Week 10

Mar 24 – Quantitative research: some applications

Pantoja and Gershon, “Statistical Research: To Naturalize or Not to Naturalize,”
Ch. 6 in M&S

Weeks, “Winners, Losers, and Survival”, pp. 54-66** (reading the rest of the chapter is recommended but not required)

Mar 26 – Some common pitfalls in quantitative research

Study Powner pp. 200-205 carefully

Revisit Kellstedt & Whitten, “Evaluating Causal Relationships”**

Mar 31-April 2: Spring break

Week 11

April 7 – Survey research

April 9 – Survey, Lab, and Field Experiments

Morton and Williams, “Experimentation in Political Science”
“http://web.iancirebon.ac.id/ebook/moon/PoliticalScience/ExpChapHand
book5April06.pdf

Smith, “Experimental Research: If Bill Clinton Were a Woman?” Ch. 10 in M&S

Recommended:
Tomz and Weeks, “Public Opinion and the Democratic Peace”**
Fearon, Humphreys, and Weinstein, “Can Development Aid Contribute to Social
Cohesion after Civil War? Evidence from a Field Experiment in Post-
Conflict Liberia”
http://cega.berkeley.edu/assets/cega_research_projects/69/Development
Aid and Social Cohesion in Liberia.pdf
Brader, “Striking a Responsive Chord: How Political Ads Motivate and Persuade
Voters by Appealing to Emotions”**

Week 12

• Survey experiment competition submissions due April 13 at noon!

April 14 – Survey, Lab, and Field Experiments / midterm review

April 16 – SECOND MIDTERM EXAM

Week 13

April 21 – Game theory

Morrow, Ch. 1 “Overview” ***
Watch online lecture and read notes and handouts for Yale Open Course on Game
theory: http://oyc.yale.edu/economics/econ-159/lecture-1

April 23 – Game theory cont.

Drezner, “The Hidden Hand of Economic Coercion”

Week 14

April 28 – Interpretivism

Geertz, “Thick Description”**
Recommended further learning: podcasts by Thaddeus Jackson

April 30 – Interpretivism cont.

Dunn, “Examining Historical Representations”**

Week 15

May 5 – Normative and ethical issues in social science research

Smith and Malici, “Normative and Ethical Considerations of Political Science Research,” Ch. 12 in M&S

May 7 – Normative and ethical issues cont.

Read this online Human Subjects Research tutorial
http://www.uwec.edu/ORSP/IRB/about/submit/upload/UWEC-Online-Human-Subject-Protection-Tutorial.pdf