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 a brief introduction to approaches to political research that are less focused on establishing causation, and a unit on normative and ethical considerations in political research.
Course Information

Grading
Your final grade will consist of the following:

- 5 written assignments: 12% each = 60%
- Weekly discussion sections: 5%
- Final exam: 35%

The final exam will be held during the University-scheduled exam period: Thursday, Dec 17, 5:05-7:05pm. There will be no make-up exams. If you have an absolutely unavoidable conflict with the exam, contact me well in advance. I also understand that emergencies happen, but require documentation of all emergencies that affect your course participation, exams, or assignments.

Written Assignments
Five times during the semester, I will ask you to write an approximately 3-page (double-spaced) memo applying a particular methodology to a research question of your own choosing. You do not need to carry out the research, but rather propose a “research design” that explains how you would approach a particular question. We will distribute the detailed instructions for each assignment well in advance.

Discussion Section
5% of your grade is based on weekly discussion sections led by our Teaching Assistant, Dmitrii Kofanov. Your section grade will be based on attendance, participation, and occasional very minor assignments. The main goal of sections is for you to make sure you understand the material from lectures and readings, and to get feedback on your assignments both as you are working on them, and after they have been graded.

Readings
The course has two required textbooks, which should be available in the student bookstore and via various online vendors.


All other readings will either be 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).

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 only the second time this course has been taught at UW. I have adapted it since the first time I taught it, building in student feedback. I 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.

Course Outline

Week 1

Sept 2 – Introduction and course overview

Week 2

Sept 7 – Labor Day Holiday

Sept 9 – 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 3

Sept 14 – Formulating a social scientific research question

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

Sept 16 – 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 4

Sept 21 – Causal theories and hypotheses cont.

Sept 23 – Choosing a research design

Kellstedt & Whitten, “Evaluating Causal Relationships” and “Research Design”**

Powner Ch. 4 “Choosing a Design that Fits Your Question”

Friday, Sept 25: Assignment #1 due. Identify three different social science research questions, and for each one, develop 2-3 competing hypotheses. Detailed instructions to be posted online.

Week 5

Sept 28 – Choosing a research design, cont.

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

Sept 30 – 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 6

Oct 5 – Qualitative case studies, cont.

Powner Ch. 6 “Qualitative Data Collection and Management”

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

Oct 7 – Case studies cont. / process-tracing

Holmes, “Silver Blaze”**

Collier, “Understanding Process Tracing”**

Week 6

Oct 12 – Reading day/work on Assignment #2

Oct 14 – Historical case studies: an application; archival research


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

“A Survival Guide for Archival Research”

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

Friday, Oct 16: Assignment #2 due: Small-N qualitative historical research. Detailed instructions to be posted online.

Week 7

Oct 19 – 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
Oct 21 – Field research cont.

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

Week 8

Oct 26 – Field research cont.

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

Oct 28 – Using Large-N Data

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

Friday, Oct 30: Assignment #3 due - field research. Detailed instructions to be posted online.

Week 9

Nov 2 – Some basics of quantitative analysis

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

Powner, pp. 200-205 (rest of Ch 8 recommended but not required)

Nov 4 – Quantitative research: some applications

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

Week 10

Nov 9 – Some common pitfalls in quantitative research

Study Powner pp. 200-205 carefully

Revisit Kellstedt & Whitten, “Evaluating Causal Relationships”**
Nov 11 – Survey research


Friday, Nov 13: Assignment #4 due – large-N research. Detailed instructions to be posted online.

Week 11

Nov 16 – Survey, Lab, and Field Experiments

Morton and Williams, “Experimentation in Political Science”
“http://web.iaincirebon.ac.id/ebook/moon/PoliticalScience/ExpChapHandbook5April06.pdf

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

Recommended:
Brader, “Striking a Responsive Chord: How Political Ads Motivate and Persuade Voters by Appealing to Emotions”**

Nov 18 - Survey, Lab, and Field Experiments

Tomz and Weeks, “Public Opinion and the Democratic Peace”**

Week 12

Nov 23 – Survey, Lab, and Field Experiments, cont.

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

Nov 25 – Survey, Lab, and Field Experiments, cont.
Week 13

Nov 30 – 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

Dec 2 – Game theory cont.

Drezner, “The Hidden Hand of Economic Coercion”

Friday, Dec 4: Assignment #5 due. Propose a survey, lab, or field experiment. Detailed instructions to be posted online.

Week 14

Dec 7 – Interpretivism

Geertz, “Thick Description”**

“Poor Little Rich Women” http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/17/opinion/sunday/poor-little-rich-women.html?action=click&pgtype=Homepage&region=CColumn&module=MostEmailed&version=Full&src=me&WT.nav=MostEmailed&_r=0

Recommended further learning: podcasts by Thaddeus Jackson

Dec 9 – Normative and ethical issues in social science research

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

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

Week 15

Dec 14 – Final exam review session

FINAL EXAM: Thursday, Dec 17, 5:05-7.05pm