

Politics and Political Inquiry II
Spring 2008
Halfacre

Professor: Dr. Angela Halfacre

Class Time: Section one – 3:20-4:35
Section two – 5:00-6:15

Office: Room 104, 114 Wentworth

Office Hours: Mondays 1:00-3:00
Thursdays 1:15-2:45
And by other appointment.

Phone: 843 953-5825

Class Rooms: Section one--Education
Center 120
Section two – Maybank 304

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Course Description

This course is an introduction to the methods employed in the practice of political science. We will pursuing two goals: (1) to provide new analytic tools that will help in the critical evaluation of a wide variety of information and other published research used by political scientists, and (2) to improve student ability to pose *and* address research questions on their own.

Our focus here is on the *how* rather than the *what* of political science. While an important portion of the readings and lectures for this course involves quantitative and qualitative methods, this course will focus upon the interpretation of these analyses. In addition, no particular mathematics background is assumed.

Rather, this course will present a variety of different research strategies, including some you may be more familiar with than you realize: survey research (election polls), aggregate data analysis (economic indicators such as the gross national product and inflation/unemployment rates), and focus groups (used to assess presidential candidate debate performance). The idea will be to weigh the relative strengths and weaknesses of different design strategies as they relate to particular research questions and political science problems.

Readings will be both of a methodological nature as well as covering some “classic” substantive examples of different approaches. You should keep in mind that when you are reading the substantive articles the point is to examine the methods employed, not the argument at hand. Throughout the semester, we will strive to use research methods, technology, and analysis in meaningful and practical ways.

Required Readings

The following course materials are available AS A PACKAGE for purchase at the College of Charleston Bookstore.

Babbie, Earl. 2008 (fourth edition). *The Basics of Social Research*. Thomson: Wadsworth.

Wagenaar, Theodore C. 2008. *Workbook: The Basics of Social Research*. Thomson: Wadsworth.

GSS Data CD (1996 and 2006 Data Files) (prepared by Wagenaar).

You should plan on keeping the Babbie text to utilize for later coursework at the College+.

Important to note is the Babbie website: www.thomsonedu.com/sociology/babbie
OR http://www.wadsworth.com/cgi-wadsworth/course_products_wp.pl?fid=M20bI&flag=instructor&product_isbn_issn=9780495094685&disciplinenum=14

At this website, you will find chapter links and other materials that are helpful to understand better course concepts.

Course Requirements

This is primarily methods and skills seminar designed for the Political Science student desiring to effectively use research methods and gain experience in critical analysis of research approaches and results. All students are expected to read (and reread) the assigned material, work through homework problems, and be prepared to discuss for each class session.

The principal products of the course are an understanding of the different methodological tools available for political scientists, critical thinking skills, experience using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) and data analysis, and awareness of the importance of research design in assessing public problems and determining the best solutions to these problems.

Tests. Students will take three tests during the semester; each will cover material covered within that section of the course (i.e., test two will cover material only since test one). More details will be discussed in class.

Participation. You should plan on being actively engaged in this course. Come to class prepared, and offer your *informed* views during discussion. We will have several in-class activities crucial to the core of the course; you must attend to gain participation credit.

Classroom Policies and Procedures

You are responsible for all material presented in lectures, assigned reading, any supplemental material, homework assignments, class discussion, and any other class activities. For a student who desires a high grade, the best advice is to do the assigned readings ahead of time and to plan on rereading them, attend class regularly, hand in assignments on time, and participate constructively in discussions.

If you require classroom accommodations or modifications due to a documented disability or other special needs (visual, hearing, psychological, etc.), you should discuss this need with me at the beginning of the course. Please feel free to see me privately if you have concerns. **I will work with you to make your experience a positive one.**

Homeworks, Class Activities, and SPSS

Students are expected to spend time outside of class on homework problems (review questions) and activities to learn the course material (and prepare for tests). To assist with some of these activities, you will need SPSS. Academic computing has installed SPSS in many of the student computer labs on campus. We will discuss further in class.

The more time you spend carefully working and reworking the problems and assignments, the more you will gain from this course and your experience in it. If you need additional help regarding the assignments and activities, please see me during my office hours and/or discuss your questions with me in class.

Please note you can include **“SPSS” as a skill on your resume** after the experience you gain in this course. We will also discuss other skills you can include (after completing this course) on your resume during class.

Plagiarism and Cheating

Plagiarism and/or cheating will not be tolerated in this course. Plagiarism is defined as the presentation of someone else’s ideas or language as your own. Cheating is defined as giving or receiving unauthorized assistance on any graded assignment. If the student

does not feel that he or she has an adequate understanding of plagiarism, cheating, or the consequences thereof, it is highly recommended that the student visit me in my office and/or discuss questions about this in class.

Evaluation

Evaluation of student performance will be based on:

Test One	30%
Test Two	30%
Test Three	30%
Participation	10%

<u>Grading Scale:</u>	A	93-100	A-	90-92
	B+	88-89	B	83-87
	B-	80-82	C+	78-79
	C	73-77	C-	70-72
	D+	68-69	D	63-67
	D-	60-62	F:	Below 60

Test Policy

Absences on the test day will not be excused unless the student provides verifiable documentation of accident, illness, or college or legal obligation. Unexcused absences from the test will result in a score of zero for that test. A make-up test for *excused absences* will be by arrangement with the instructor *within one week* of the test date.

Political Science Major Goals

Through this course, you will also be working on the Department of Political Science's goals for your development as an academic and citizen. This course assists with meeting each of these goals, but those in **bold** are particularly emphasized.

Specifically:

- **Goal 1: read for comprehension, critically analyze text, and write effectively in a manner appropriate to the task (e.g., through your examination of the literature and your writing of tests)**
- Goal 2: comprehend the views of others and articulate and defend one's own position (e.g., through your participation in class and discussion of course literature)
- **Goal 3: develop the skills of applying theories and concepts to new situations (e.g., through your examination of the literature and your research)**
- Goal 4: acquire knowledge of political systems including their institutions, processes, laws and constitutions; the relations between and among nations; major political philosophies (Western and non-Western) and the context of their origins; and the bases of human political behavior in diverse political settings and roles (e.g., through your research)
- **Goal 5: develop an appreciation for the range of methodologies and approaches to the study of politics as well as the scope of the discipline (e.g., through our broad examination of political science methods)**
- **Goal 6: conduct research and analysis, including qualitative and quantitative analysis (e.g., through your research proposal development)**
- Goal 7: develop the expectation of participation in public life (e.g., through our discussion how you can contribute to society through rigorous research and the sharing of results in objective and effective manners)
- Goal 8: develop the communication, cooperation, and negotiation skills necessary to work with others in a public forum (e.g. your participation in class)
- Goal 9: develop an appreciation for the interplay of ideas in the public forum (e.g., through class participation, discussion and consideration of course articles)
- Goal 10: work comfortably in a diverse world (e.g., through your interaction with your peers, faculty, and other community individuals as you develop your research proposals and as we identify research priorities for the field)

Course Outline*

Political Science as a Discipline

Date: Wednesday, January 9, 2008

Discussion: How should we characterize Political Science as a discipline? What are the sub-fields of political science (Political Theory, Public Law, American Politics, Public Administration, Public Policy, Comparative Politics, and International Politics)? How is Political Science useful?

The Research Process

Date: Monday, January 14

Discussion: What is the research process? What experience have you had to date with research? What research interests do you presently have? What are the goals of political science research? What are procedures to conduct research in political science?

The Scientific Method

Date: Wednesday, January 16

Readings and Review Questions (always due by the start of class): Babbie, Chapter One (Please note, bring the Babbie text to class each day)

Discussion: What is the scientific method? How do political scientists use the scientific method to conduct research?

Special Guest: Ana Emelianoff, Bachelors Essay Presentation

Monday, January 21 - MLK Holiday

The Scientific Method and Theory

Date: Wednesday, January 23

Readings and Review Questions: Babbie, Chapter Two

Discussion: What is the scientific method (continued)? How do political scientists use the scientific method to conduct research (continued)? What is triangulation? What is theory? What is a research question? How are quantitative and qualitative methodologies selected to address a research question? What is symbolic interactionism?

Research Design, Topics and Ethics

Dates: Monday, January 28 ; Wednesday, January 30; and Monday, February 4

Readings and Review Questions: Babbie, Chapter Three and Babbie, Chapter Four

Discussion: What are the basic steps of political science research design? What is the difference between causal inference and controlled experiment approaches? What is a literature review? How do you conduct literature reviews to frame your research problems? What are the ethical considerations necessary for research? What is the purpose of an Institutional Review Board (IRB)?

Special Guest: Tom Gilson, Reference Head

Faculty Research Panel

Date: Wednesday, February 6

Special Guests: Professors Long, Parson, Moore, Hurley, France, Velluzzi, and Veninga

Political Science Research Design and Literature Reviews

Dates: Monday, February 11

Readings and Review Questions: Review Babbie, Chapter Four

Discussion: How can you best connect previous research to your academic focus? Why and how are literature reviews useful? How can *you* further our understanding of social science?

TEST ONE

Date: Wednesday, February 13

Developing Research Questions, Hypotheses, Concepts, and Variables

Dates: Monday, February 18 and Wednesday, February 20

Readings: Babbie, Chapter Five

Discussion: How do you develop a research question? What are doable research questions? How can you use your research question to focus your examinations and analysis? What is a concept? How do you define a concept? What is a variable? How do you operationalize a variable? What is a hypothesis? How do you test hypotheses?

Basic Statistics and SPSS Workshop

MEET IN EDUCATION CENTER ROOM 109

Dates: Monday, February 25 and Wednesday, February 27

Readings and Review Questions: Babbie, Chapter 14

Bring your text, workbook and CDs to class. More details discussed in class.

Monday, March 3 and Wednesday, March 5 -- Spring Break

Measurement and Sampling

Dates: Monday, March 10; Wednesday, March 12; and Monday, March 17

Readings and Review Questions: Babbie, Chapter Six and Babbie, Chapter Seven

Discussion: What are the best ways to identify appropriate measures of your concepts/variables? How can measurement be reliable and valid? What are indexes, scales, and factor analysis? What are important sampling techniques and considerations? How do you obtain a representative sample?

March 10 Field Experience. Discussed in class.

TEST TWO

Date: Wednesday, March 19

Data Collection and Organization – Experiments and Surveys

Dates: Monday, March 24 , Wednesday, March 26, and Monday, March 31

Readings and Review Questions: Babbie, Chapter Eight and Babbie, Chapter Nine

Discussion: What is the range of experimental designs? What is the range of nonexperimental designs? How often are experimental and nonexperimental designs used in political science research? What are the best ways to collect and organize data for analysis?

Special Guest on March 26: Erin Blevins, Political Science Department Coordinator

Data Collection and Organization – Field Research

Date: Wednesday, April 2

Readings and Review Questions: Babbie, Chapter 10 and Babbie, Chapter 11

Basic Statistical Concepts and SPSS Workshop II

MEET IN EDUCATION CENTER ROOM 109

Dates: Monday, April 7 and Wednesday, April 9

Readings: Review Babbie, Chapter 14

Please bring books (text and workbook) and CDs to class

Discussion: How can we use SPSS to assist our use of statistical analysis? How often do political scientists (and nonprofit, government, and private agencies) utilize this software? What is the role of this type of analysis in each of the political science sub-fields?

Methodological Techniques: Qualitative Perspectives

Date: Monday, April 14

Readings and Review Questions: Babbie, Chapter 13

Discussion: How are qualitative perspectives in our understanding of political science problems? What is content analysis? How do you conduct quantitative and qualitative content analysis? What are the advantages and disadvantages of these techniques?

TEST THREE

Date: Wednesday, April 16

Reporting and Dissemination of Results

REQUIRED ATTENDANCE to complete course

Dates: Monday, April 21 and Wednesday, April 23

Readings: Babbie, Chapter 15

Discussion: How can you best share your research results? What is the standard format for a research paper in political science? What are the best ways to present your research in a paper format? How are these papers presented? What is the standard format for a political science poster? What are some helpful hints on producing a research poster? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this mode of presentation? WHO CARES ABOUT STYLE AND GRAMMAR?

- The instructor reserves the right to revise the course outline when necessary.