

Doing Research in Political Science
Political Science 205-02
Fall 2016

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114 Wentworth Street, Room 106
Office Hours: MW 1pm-4pm | TR 2pm-4pm (or by appointment)
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Course Meetings
TR (1:40 – 2:55)
Education Center 109

Course Objective—Advances in human understanding, whether in the social sciences or hard sciences, begin with the tools of research methodology and systematic inquiry. This course will introduce you to a specific set of tools: those used in empirical political analysis. But despite the focus the tools common in political science, I guarantee you will find this class relevant across the social sciences. In the broadest of terms, the purpose of this course is to teach students how to evaluate empirical research, formulate their own research questions, and develop analytical strategies to evaluate those questions.

In the first part we will review the features of science, the scientific method, and core concepts in empirical research. Topics include theory development, how to formulate hypotheses, and how political scientists measure political variables. The first section is intended to enhance your critical and social scientific thinking skills while also helping you distinguish between scholarly and non-scholarly research. The next section introduces students to the components of a research design. We will cover the features of experimental and non-experimental designs, review the fundamentals of statistical inference, and cover how to draft a literature review. This section is intended to provide you with a working knowledge of the methods used by political scientists and help you design your own research. The third part of the course will focus on "doing" research. Topics include sampling, observation, content analysis, survey research, and elite interviewing. Although the discussion in this section will be limited (entire courses are taught on each subjects), the goal is to provide students with a working knowledge of a few common tools. After this section you should be able to develop research questions that are answerable with a variety of methods and be able to explain the various components of academic research. In the final part of the course will focus on your group research project. This last section is intended to "bring it all together" and enhance both your presentation and critical thinking skills.

As you are probably aware, this class is the second in a sequence of classes required of political science majors. The first course in this sequence introduces political philosophy and normative political analysis. Although both courses concern epistemology—how we acquire knowledge—the key difference is that this course focuses on empirics—the bits of information that are directly or indirectly observable. Despite their intellectual differences, both courses inform one another in important ways. Indeed, you will hear me say many times throughout this semester than you can address normative questions using empirical tools.

Course Format—I have designed this as an "active" or "participatory" course. You will see that the class requirements contain a higher quantity of assignments than normal (and in return there are fewer papers and exams than normal). In addition, in almost every class you will work on some kind of problem-based exercise. Simply put, research methods is a topic best learned by doing (as the name of the class suggests).

Special Syllabus—Because our course coincides with an important national election, this semester's syllabus has a number of readings on elections. In a normal semester the readings would be more evenly distributed between the various subfields in political science. I see the timing of this course as a great opportunity to discuss key issues

in American politics while also demonstrating the importance of research methods. At the very end of the course you will have a unique opportunity: you and a group of students will design a survey examining some aspect of the election, administer the survey and collect the data, analyze the results, and share your findings with the class. It will be a substantial piece of original research.

Required Texts (1)— Johnson, Janet D. and H. T. Reynolds. *Political Science Research Methods*, 2012, (7th ed.).

In addition to the required textbook, students will be asked to read published research. The goals for these readings include a rudimentary understanding of various literatures (spanning comparative politics, American politics and international relations) and get a sense of what political scientists and researchers actually do. While these readings may be viewed as “supplementary,” I cannot stress how important they are. These readings will be especially critical for students working on a bachelor’s essay, those in the Honors College working on collaborative research, or those considering a post-graduate education (M.A., Ph.D. or J.D.).

Course Location— This class will meet in the Education Center room 109, a computer classroom. Although most won’t, some classes will require the use of the computers.

OAKS— This course will rely on the OAKS reserve system. The primary purpose of OAKS is to provide students access to a handful of additional readings and other course material in the most efficient manner possible. All additional readings are clearly noted on the syllabus.

Grades—The plurality of your grade will be determined by two examinations, each worth 20%. Both exams will be given in class and are closed notes. The second exam is *not* comprehensive. Exam material will come from the required readings and class lecture. There is a research design due at the very end of the semester. That paper, worth 10% percent of your grade, will draw on your knowledge of the topics covered throughout the semester. It is my hope that this paper will provide you a solid foundation for writing a bachelor’s essay or research paper (perhaps if you are in the Honors College). You will also have a group project due at the end of the semester. That project, worth 20% of your grade, is designed as a “mock academic conference” (you will present the project’s results after designing and implementing your own survey). The remainder of your grade (30% total) will be determined by a series of assignments, quizzes, and class discussion. Because research methods is a “hands on” enterprise, these assignments are designed to get your working with the topics of the week. There will be 4 unannounced pop quizzes throughout the semester, intended to test your comprehension of the required readings. There will also be 4 in class assignments and 4 homework assignments scattered throughout the semester. Finally, you will receive a grade for participating in class discussion. Each of these is worth 7.5% of your grade (for a total of 30%).

So, in summary, your grade is determined by: Exam 1: 20%, Exam 2: 20%, Group Presentation: 20%, Research Design: 10%, Quizzes: 7.5%, Class Assignments: 7.5%, Homework Assignments: 7.5%, Discussion 7.5%.

I abide by the following grading scale: A = 93+, A- = 90-92.9, B+ = 87.5-89.9, B = 83-87.4, B- = 80-82.9, C+ = 77.5-79.9, C = 73-77.4, C- = 70-72.9, D+ = 67.5-69.9, D = 63-67.4, D- = 60-62.9

Student Responsibilities—You will notice that there will be no “de jure” attendance taken. However, your presence in class is absolutely crucial to earning a good grade in this course. On the one hand, you cannot simply review the required readings a day or two before the exam and expect to earn a good grade. On the other hand, if you miss an in class assignment or quiz your grade will quickly drop. Thus, the quizzes and assignments will count as “de facto” attendance grades. There will be one, and only one, “bonus quiz” given during the semester (also unannounced). That quiz will take the place of your lowest quiz or assignment grade.

Due Dates—Assignment and exam dates are firm. If you are unable to turn an assignment in during class, I reserve the right to deduct 2% from your grade for every hour that it’s late. If an illness or other circumstance forces you

to be absent, your first responsibility is to your own health or condition. However, you are still required to fill out an [absence memo](#) with Student Affairs (that is if you missed an assignment or exam). Moreover, you should contact me immediately. Special circumstances will only be given if there is a documented and compelling reason for your absence and you alert me promptly.

Academic Honesty— As with any course at the College of Charleston, you are required to do your own work and abide by the academic honesty guidelines. Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when identified, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved. For any questions please consult the [Student Honor Code](#).

Center for Student Learning—The CSL, located on the first floor of the library, offers a wide variety of tutoring and other academic resources that support many courses offered at the College. Services include walk-in tutoring, by appointment tutoring, study strategies appointments, peer academic coaching (PAC), and supplemental instruction (SI). All services are described and all lab schedules are posted on the [CSL website](#).

Students with Disabilities— The [Center for Disability Services](#) assists students with disabilities. They provide a number of services including academic advisement and exam assistance. Please feel free to discuss any concerns with me.

Course Overview

→ denotes the required reading(s) which are to be read prior to the start of the day or week (though see any notes). I will assume you have read, and understood, the material to be discussed each day. Note that these readings will be the subject of the unannounced, in class quizzes. I advise you to review the “objectives” listed before, during and after class. If you can answer these questions or topics you should do well on the exams (and more importantly, understand something about research methodology).

Part I. Core Concepts in Research Methods

Dates/Location

Introduction and Course Overview

T
8/23

Why is our discipline called political “science”?

- Johnson and Reynolds Ch. 2
- Nate Silver, 2016 Presidential Election Forecast (see link below)
<http://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/2016-election-forecast/>
- Morales, Majority in U.S. Continues to Distrust the Media

R, T
8/25 & 8/30

Notes: For Thursday’s class, please read the Johnson and Reynolds chapter and spend some time exploring the presidential election forecast link. We will discuss why political science is a science in the context of forecasting election outcomes. Read the Morales article about media bias for Tuesday.

Objectives

- What is “empirical” research and how does it differ from other kinds of research?
- What is the scientific method and what are the characteristics of scientific research?
- What is the “philosophy” of science? What are the basic assumptions of any science?
- What are the limitations of the scientific study of politics?

No Class (APSA Conference)

R
9/1

Theories, Hypotheses, Concepts and Variables

T,R
9/6 & 9/8

- Johnson and Reynolds Ch. 4
- Sigelman and Wahlbeck, The “Veepstakes”
- Kopko and Devine, Why VPs Matter Less Than You Think

Notes: Read the Johnson and Reynolds chapter for Tuesday and the two articles for Thursday.

HWK #1 DUE next Tuesday (9/13). Hypotheses exercise. Read ONE of the following articles (pick whichever seems most interesting to you). Instructions are available on my website; see the document “Assignment #1.”

- Bakker and Vreese, Good News for the Future? Young People, Internet Use, and Political Participation
- Reiter and Tillman, Public, Legislative and Executive Constraints on Democratic Initiation of Conflict
- Rauchhaus, Evaluating the Nuclear Peace Hypothesis

Objectives

- What is a relationship? How might we know if two things are related?
- What distinguishes a hypothesis from a theory?
- What are the characteristics of good hypotheses?
- What differentiates a dependent from an independent variable?
- What is meant by “statistical control” and why is this concept important?

Measuring Political Constructs

T,R
9/13 & 9/15

- Johnson and Reynolds Ch. 5
- Taub, The Rise of American Authoritarianism

Notes: Read Johnson and Reynolds for Tuesday and the other reading for Thursday.

HWK #1 DUE on Tuesday the 13th.

Objectives

- What is reliability? What is validity? How are the two related?
- Are reliability and validity concerning to qualitative researchers as well? If so, how?
- What are some common threats to reliability and validity?

Part II. Research Design and Statistics

Experimental and Non-Experimental Research Designs

T, R
9/20 & 9/22

- Johnson and Reynolds Ch. 6
- Mutz and Reeves, The New Videomalaise
- Stratman and Baur, Plurality Rule, Proportional Representation, and the German Bundestag

Notes: Read Johnson and Reynolds for Tuesday and the other two readings for Thursday.

Objectives

What are the tradeoffs of conducting an experimental versus a nonexperimental study?

What types of questions are best answered via experiment and non-experiment?

What is a case study and how does one differ from a quantitative cross-sectional study?

Exam 1

T
9/27

Finding and Interpreting Political Data

→ Johnson and Reynolds Ch. 11

→ Johnson and Reynolds Ch. 12

→ Johnson and Reynolds Ch. 13

R, T
9/29 & 10/4

Notes: for this week I am not expecting you to read all three chapters in Johnson and Reynolds. In fact, I will provide you with all notes and lecture material. The corresponding Johnson and Reynolds chapters are noted for your own reference (if a topic is unclear, you miss a class, or you need additional information in the future).

Objectives

What is “secondary data” and where can we find it?

What are the various methods for observing and interpreting data?

Introduction to SPSS and Secondary Data Analysis

→ Matthews: Justin Trudeau Isn’t Magic

→ Brownstein: Hillary Clinton’s Millennial Challenge

R, T
10/6 & 10/11

Notes: read the Matthews article for Thursday and the Brownstein for Tuesday.

HWK #2 DUE next Tuesday (10/18). Data analysis exercise. Instructions are available on my website; see the document “Assignment #2.”

Objectives

To be able to analyze and interpret data in SPSS.

Finding Sources, Conducting a Literature Review, and Writing a Research Design

→ Johnson and Reynolds Ch. 3

→ Knopf, Doing a Literature Review

R, T
10/13 & 10/18

Notes: read both articles for Thursday.

HWK #2 DUE on Tuesday the 18th

HWK #3 DUE next Tuesday (10/25). Review a study of interest to you.

Instructions are available on my website; see the document “Assignment #3.”

Objectives

What are the five components of a research design?

Why is a literature review important?

What do I mean by “imposing intellectual order” on a literature?

How is a literature review NOT a research summary?

Part III. Conducting Original Research

Case Selection and Sampling

- Johnson and Reynolds Ch. 7
- Heaney and Rojas 2007, Partisans, Nonpartisans, and the Antiwar Movement.
- Shepard, Are the Polls Skewed Against Trump?

R, T
10/20 & 10/25

Notes: read Johnson and Reynolds Ch. 7 for Thursday and the two other readings for Tuesday.

HWK #3 DUE on Tuesday the 25th

Objectives

- Why do we sample? What benefit do we receive by sampling?
- What is the benefit of a random sample? When would we conduct a *non*-random sample?
- In what situation is an observational research design best?
- What are the strengths and limitations of an observational research design?

Content and Discourse Analysis

Observation and Ethnography

- Johnson and Reynolds Ch. 9
- Novenario, Differentiating Al Qaeda and the Islamic State Through Strategies Publicized in Jihadist Magazines

R
10/27

Objectives

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of content analysis?
- In what ways can we use the written or spoken record?
- Why is reliability so important in content analysis?
- What are some of the tradeoffs in observational research?

Survey Research and Elite Interviewing

- Johnson and Reynolds Ch. 10
- Woessner and Kelly-Woessner, I Think My Professor is a Democrat

HWK #4 due on Tuesday 11/15

T, R
11/1 & 11/3

Notes: read Johnson and Reynolds for Tuesday and the article for Thursday.

Objectives

- What are the various survey modes? What are their tradeoffs vis-à-vis one another?
- How can we ask “good” survey questions? What are common question wording problems?
- How does survey research inform elite interviewing?
- How can we improve the validity of interview responses?

Election Day (Go Vote)

T
11/8

Exam 2

11/10
R

Part IV. Bringing It All Together: National Election Survey and Analysis

Designing Your Survey (Required Class) HWK #4 DUE on Tuesday the 15 th .	T 11/15
Conducting Your Survey (Required Class)	R 11/17
Importing, Cleaning, and Analyzing Your Data (Required Class)	T 11/22
No Class (Thanksgiving)	R 11/24
Group Research Project Lab Session (Required Classes)	T, R 11/29 & 12/1
Research Presentations (Final Exam Time)	12/8 12:00pm-3:00pm
Research Designs Due Monday December 12th at Noon Notes: A hard copy is due to me in my office. I will be there from 8:30am until 2:00pm.	Monday 12/12