

POLI 205
Doing Research in Politics (02)
Fall 2022

Instructor:	Dr. Jordan Ragusa	Location:	Maybank Hall 307
Office:	JC Long Building	Meetings:	TR (1:40 - 2:55pm)
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Course Description

Advances in human understanding begin with the tools research methodology and systematic inquiry. Doing Research in Politics will introduce you to a specific set of tools: those used in empirical political research. Yet despite the focus on political science research methods, you will find this class relevant in any of the social sciences as well as in your day-to-day life. In simple terms, the purpose of this course is to teach students how to evaluate research, formulate their own research questions, and develop strategies to answer those questions.

As you may know, this class is the second in a sequence required of all political science majors, the first being an introduction to normative inquiry. Although both courses concern epistemology—how we acquire knowledge—the key difference is that this course focuses on empirical knowledge: the bits of information that are directly or indirectly observable. Despite their intellectual differences, however, both courses inform one another in important ways. Indeed, you will hear me say many times that empirical analysis can help answer normative questions.

Overview & Objectives

I have divided the course into three sections, each roughly a month in length. First, we will cover the features of science, the scientific method, and key concepts in empirical research. We will discuss theory development, creating hypotheses, and how political scientists measure political variables. In this first section the objective is to enhance your social scientific thinking skills while also helping you distinguish between scholarly and non-scholarly research. Second, we will spend a few weeks covering basic statistics and complete a group research project. My hope is that after this section you have a greater appreciation for how we can use data to understand political phenomena. And third, we will cover research designs. We will discuss the features of experimental and non-experimental research and review specific methodologies including content analysis, case studies, sampling, and survey research. After this section you should be able to develop research questions that are answerable with a variety of methods. So, the section-by-section outline is as follows:

Empirical Research	8/23 to 9/27
Data Analysis	9/29 to 10/20
Research Designs	10/25 to 12/1

Key Due Dates

Exam #1	9/27
Research Presentations	10/18
Exam #2	12/1
Research Designs Due	12/9

Course Format

I have designed this as an “active learning” course. What this means is that the class requirements contain a higher quantity of graded work than most (from short in class quizzes and assignments to two research projects). Likewise, class time will be spent doing a range of short exercises and discussions and my lectures make frequent use of interactive materials like videos, charts, and figures. Simply put, research methods is a topic best learned by being an active participant in the process.

Student Responsibilities

We are scheduled to meet in person this semester (except during the two data analysis weeks). Note that attendance will not be taken. If you are feeling ill, please do the socially responsible thing and stay home. I will trust your reason for missing class, treat your absence as excused, and will not request any documentation. Students who are absent from class should do one or more of the following: obtain notes from a classmate, review the required readings, or meet with me via Zoom to discuss what was missed. I will also make reasonable accommodations for make-up work. It is imperative, however, that you communicate with me in a timely manner. Accommodations will only be given with prompt communication. For example, an accommodation may not be granted if you email me about an absence a week after the fact. Lastly, even though attendance will not be taken, please know that your presence in class is absolutely crucial to earning a good grade in this course. Given the format of the class, you cannot simply review the required readings a day or two before the exam and expect to do well.

Required Readings

Each day's required reading(s) can be found below. Standalone texts such as journal articles, book chapters, and newspaper articles will be made available on OAKS. One of the main goals for these readings include a rudimentary understanding of various literatures (spanning comparative politics, American politics and international relations) and a sense of what researchers actually do. While these readings may be viewed as supplementary, I cannot stress how important they are. Indeed, they are important to your successful completion of the class and are "fair game" for any quizzes/exams. In addition to these standalone texts, there is one course textbook:

- Johnson, Janet Buttolph, Reynolds, H.T. and Jason D. Mycoff. "Political Science Research Methods 9th Edition" (2020, CQ Press).

Graded Items

A plurality of your grade will be determined by two exams, each worth 20%. Exam 2 is not comprehensive and will only cover material from the third section of the course. In the middle part of the course there is a data analysis presentation due, and at the end of the semester you have a research design due. Each is worth 15% of your grade. For the data analysis project, you and a group will formulate a research question, propose a hypothesis, analyze election data, and present your results to the class. For the research design, which is a formal paper, you will draw on the topics covered throughout the semester and propose an empirical study. Another 10% of your grade will consist of a series of statistical exercises during the unit on data analysis. In essence, these assignments will be the equivalent of half of an exam. Finally, there are roughly a dozen short assignments throughout the semester (in class quizzes, essays, reaction papers, etc.) worth 10% of the course grade and class participation counts as the remaining 5% of your grade.

Grade Distribution

Exam #1	20%
Exam #2	20%
Research Design	15%
Group Project	15%
Assignments/Quizzes	15%
Data Analysis Exercises	10%
Participation	5%

Grade Policy

≥ 93	A	80 - 82.9	B-	67 - 69.9	D+
90 - 92.9	A-	77 - 79.9	C+	63 - 66.9	D
87 - 89.9	B+	73 - 76.9	C	60 - 62.9	D-
83 - 86.9	B	70 - 72.9	C-	≤ 59.9	F

Honor Code and Academic Integrity

Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of the Honor Code. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception. Incidents where I believe the student's actions reflect misunderstanding and/or confusion will be handled by me with some intervention and/or penalty. The response is recorded on a form, is signed both by the instructor and the student, and is forwarded to the Dean of Students. Cases of significant academic dishonesty will be reported directly to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible by the Honor Board will receive a XXF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This status indicator will appear on the student's transcript for two years after which the student may petition for the XX to be expunged. The F is permanent. For any questions please consult the [Student Handbook](#). When in doubt, feel free to reach out to me as well.

Center For Student Learning

At the College the Center for Student Learning, or CSL, offers a wide variety of tutoring and other academic resources in support of students. Services include walk-in tutoring, by appointment tutoring, study strategies appointments, peer academic coaching, and supplemental instruction. All services are described and all lab schedules are posted on the [CSL](#) website.

Students With Disabilities

At the College, the Center for Disability Services, better known as the [SNAP Office](#), assists students with disabilities. SNAP provides a number of services including academic advisement and exam assistance. Any student eligible for and needing accommodations because of a disability is asked to speak with me during the first two weeks of class or as soon as they have been approved for services so that reasonable accommodations can be arranged.

COURSE SCHEDULE

What follows is each day's content, readings and assignments. Required readings, quizzes and assignments should be completed prior to the first class (unless otherwise noted). Please review each day's learning objectives before class and when preparing for the exam.

Section I: Features of Empirical Research

Class Introduction

T (8/23)

Reading(s)

→ None

Assignment(s)

→ None

Objective(s)

→ What are the course policies, requirements, and objectives?

Introduction to Empirical Research

R (8/25)

Reading(s)

→ None

Assignment(s)

→ None

Objective(s)

→ Can we study politics scientifically?

About the “Science” in Political Science

T, R (8/31 & 9/1)

Reading(s)

→ JRM Chapter 2 (all)

Assignment(s)

→ Complete the discussion prompt in OAKS (Module 1)(due 8/31 before class)

Objective(s)

- 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 are the limitations of the scientific study of politics?

Theories, Hypotheses and Variables

T, R (9/6 & 9/8)

Reading(s)

→ JRM Chapter 4 (pages 73-85)

→ Kalmoe “Political Violence” (for Tuesday)

→ Rauchhaus “Evaluating the Nuclear Peace Hypothesis” (for Thursday)

Assignment(s)

→ Complete the hypotheses assignment (Module 2)(due Thursday before class)

Objective(s)

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

Measuring Political Constructs

T, R (9/13 & 9/15)

Reading(s)

→ JRM Chapter 4 (pages 86 - 100)

→ Allcott and Gentzkow “Fake News in the 2016 Election” (for Thursday)

Assignment(s)

→ None

Objective(s)

- What is reliability? What is validity? How are the two related?
- What are some common threats to reliability and validity?

Causality

T, R (9/20 & 9/22)

Reading(s)

→ JRM Chapter 6 (pages 121-124 and 127-134)

→ Stratmann and Baur “Electoral Rules and the German Bundestag” (for Thursday)

Assignment(s)

→ Complete the discussion prompt (Module 3)(due Tuesday before class)

Objective(s)

- What is needed to establish causality?
- What do researchers mean when they say “correlation is not causation?”
- What are the tradeoffs of conducting an experimental versus a non-experimental study?

Exam 1

T (9/27)

Section II: Data Analysis and Group Presentations

Descriptive Statistics and Crosstabs (online, check OAKS)

R, T (9/29 & 10/4)

Reading(s)

→ JRM Chapter 13 (pages 267-279 and 287-290)

Assignment(s)

→ Watch the data analysis lecture videos (Module 4)

→ Data analysis exercises (Module 4)(due Tuesday by 11:59pm)

Objective(s)

→ How can we use data to understand politics?

- Regression Analysis (online, check OAKS)** **R, T (10/6 & 10/11)**
 Reading(s)
 → JRM Chapter 14 (pages 307-319)
 Assignment(s)
 → Watch the data analysis lecture videos (Module 5)
 → Data analysis exercises (Module 5)(due Tuesday by 11:59pm)
 Objective(s)
 → How can we use data to understand politics?
- Data Analysis Review (back in person)** **R (10/13)**
 Assignment(s)
 → None
- Group Presentations** **T, R (10/18 & 10/20)**
 Assignment(s)
 → Upload slides before your presentation date (Module 6)
- Section III: Research Designs**
- Experiments and Non Experiments** **T, R (10/25 & 10/27)**
 Reading(s)
 → JRM Chapter 9
 → Strother et al. “College Roommates and Political Ideology” (for Tuesday)
 → Woessner and Kelly-Woessner “I Think My Professor is a Democrat” (for Thursday)
 Assignment(s)
 → None
 Objective(s)
 → What are the main features of experimental research designs?
 → What are the main features of non experimental research designs?
 → What are the tradeoffs between experimental and non experimental designs?
- Content Analysis** **T (11/1)**
 Reading(s)
 → JRM Chapter 8 (pages 150-153) and Chapter 10 (pages 194-196)
 → Sulkin “Promises Made, Promises Kept”
 Assignment(s)
 → None
 Objective(s)
 → 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?
- Case Studies** **R (11/3)**
 Reading(s)
 → JRM Chapter 7 (all)
 Assignment(s)
 → None
 Objective(s)
 → How does a case study differ from a quantitative design? What are their similarities?
 → What are some of the main case study methodologies?
- No Class (fall break)** **T (11/8)**

Sampling	R (11/10)
Reading(s)	
→ JRM Chapter 5 (all)	
Assignment(s)	
→ None	
Objective(s)	
→ Why do we sample? What benefit do we receive by sampling?	
→ What are the various types of samples (both probability and non-probability)?	
 Survey Research	 T, R (11/15 & 11/17)
Reading(s)	
→ JRM Chapter 10 (pages 196-202)	
→ Cohn “What Went Wrong With the Polling in 2020?” (for Thursday)	
Assignment(s)	
→ None	
Objective(s)	
→ What are the various survey modes? What are their tradeoffs vis-a-vis one another?	
→ How can we ask “good” survey questions? What are common question wording problems?	
 Writing a Research Design	 T (11/22)
Reading(s)	
→ JRM Chapter 3 (all)	
Assignment(s)	
→ None	
Objective(s)	
→ What are the components of a research design?	
 No Class (Thanksgiving break)	 R (11/24)
 Writing a Literature Review	 T (11/29)
Reading(s)	
→ None	
Assignment(s)	
→ Research proposal due (Module 7)(due Tuesday by 11:59pm)	
Objective(s)	
→ Why is a literature review important? How do you write an effective literature review?	
 Exam 2	 R (12/1)
 Research Designs Due	 F (12/9)
Assignment(s)	11:59pm
→ Upload completed research design to OAKS (Module 8)	