Course Description

Advances in human understanding begin with the tools of research methodology and systematic inquiry. Doing Research in Politics will introduce you to a specific set of tools: those used in empirical research. Yet despite the focus on the dominant research methods in political science, you will find this class relevant in any of the social sciences as well as in your day-to-day life. In the broadest of terms, the purpose of this course is to teach students how to evaluate existing empirical research, formulate their own research questions, and develop analytical strategies to evaluate those questions. In other words, after this course you should be “science literate” and a better consumer of political information.

As you probably know, this class is the second in a sequence required of all political science majors at CofC. The first course in this sequence introduces political philosophy and normative political analysis. Though both courses are, at their core, about 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, however, 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 in an empirical fashion.

Overview & Objectives

I have divided the course into four sections. First, we will review the features of science, the scientific method, and core concepts in empirical research. Topics will include theory development, the formulation of 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. Section two introduces students to the components of a research design. We will cover the features of experimental and non-experimental designs and discuss 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 will focus on “doing” research. Topics include sampling, observation, content analysis, case studies, survey research, and elite interviewing. Although the discussion in this section will be limited, the goal is to provide students with a working knowledge of a range of 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. Fourth, and finally, we will cover data analysis and complete two projects—a data analysis group project and your individual research designs. So, the section-by-section outline is as follows:

Elements of Empirical Research ............1/11 to 2/5
Research Design .......................2/8 to 2/19
Doing Research .......................2/22 to 3/26
Data Analysis and Projects ..........3/29 to 5/1

Key Dates

Exam #1 -------------------------------2/19
Exam #2 -------------------------------3/26
Data Analysis Papers/Presentations .4/23
Research Designs Due ..................5/1
Course Format

I have designed this as an “active learning” course. Namely, you will see that the class requirements contain a higher quantity of graded work than most courses (from short quizzes to two research papers). Likewise, class time will be spent doing a range of exercises and having in-class discussions. Finally, my lectures make frequent use of video, charts and figures that encourage you to reflect on the day’s topic. Simply put, research methods is a topic best learned by being an active participant.

We are scheduled to meet in person—and as a whole class—this semester. According to the College, our classroom (RSS 103) can hold every student and maintain six feet of social distance. However, given the high, and rising, number of COVID-19 cases in our region, a select number of classes, around 20% of the semester, will be online and asynchronous. In other words, every week or two a class will self-paced in an online environment. During these online classes you will watch pre-recorded lecture videos, write discussion and/or reflection essays, and work on short assignments. Please take note of these dates (listed below) and check OAKS as directed.

Continuity of Learning and Interruption of Instruction

Before the drop/add deadline, students should decide whether the course plan on the syllabus matches their own circumstances. Although we are scheduled to meet (mostly) in person and as a whole class, I reserve the right to amend the syllabus and move portions of the course online. Any changes in the course format or delivery will be communicated by email. Likewise, if in-person classes are suspended, I will announce a detailed plan for a change in modality to ensure the continuity of learning. All students must have access to a computer equipped with a web camera, microphone, and internet access. Resources are available to provide students with these essential tools.

Recording of Classes

Class sessions and office hours will not be recorded. And, as noted above, online classes will be asynchronous. Students who are absent from class should do one or more of the following: obtain notes from a classmate, request lecture slides from me, review the required readings, or meet with me via Zoom to discuss what was missed.

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 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 students considering post-graduate education (M.A., Ph.D. or J.D.).

In addition to these standalone texts, there is one course textbook:


Graded Items

A plurality of your grade will be determined by two examinations, each worth 20%. Exams will be given online in OAKS during our regular class meeting time and will be a mix of multiple choice, true/false, and short answer. Exams will be open notes/readings and no proctoring service will be used. The second exam is not comprehensive. At the end of the semester, two projects will be due—a research design and a data analysis research paper. Each is worth 15% of your grade. For the research paper, you and a group member will formulate a research question, propose a hypothesis, analyze election data, and write up your findings. In addition to writing the paper, you will be asked to present your results to the class during our final exam meeting. For the research design, which will be completed individually, you will draw on the topics and methodologies 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, a series of assignments throughout the semester (quizzes, reaction papers, exercises, etc.) will be worth 10% of the course grade and in-class participation is worth the remaining 5% of your grade.

Grade Distribution

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<th>Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Exam #1</td>
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<td>Exam #2</td>
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<td>Research Design</td>
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<td>Research Paper</td>
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<td>Assignments/Quizzes</td>
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<td>Data Analysis Exercises</td>
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<td>Participation</td>
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Grade Policy

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<th>Grade</th>
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Student Responsibilities

Attendance will not be taken in this class. If you are feeling ill, even just a little, 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. I will also make reasonable accommodations for make-up work. However, it is imperative that you communicate with me in a timely manner. Reasonable accommodations will only be given with prompt communication. Nonetheless, please know that your presence in class is absolutely crucial to earning a good grade in this course. You cannot simply review the required readings a day or two before the exam and expect to do well.

Honor Code and Academic Integrity

Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when suspected, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved. Incidents where the instructor determines the student’s actions are related more to misunderstanding and confusion will be handled by the instructor. The instructor designs an intervention or assigns a grade reduction to help prevent the student from repeating the error. The response is recorded on a form and signed both by the instructor and the student. It is forwarded to the Office of the Dean of Students and placed in the student’s file. Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported directly by the instructor and/or others having knowledge of the incident to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty 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

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

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.
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). For the online classes, readings, quizzes, and assignments are usually due that evening by 11:59pm (again, unless otherwise noted). Please check the modules in OAKS as directed. Lastly, please review each day’s learning objectives before class and when preparing for the exam. If you can answer these questions, you should do well in this course.

Section I: Features of Empirical Research

Introduction (online, please check OAKS) M (1/11)
Reading(s) → None
Assignment(s) → Watch the course introduction videos (Module 1)
→ Complete the syllabus quiz (Module 1)(due Monday by 11:59pm)
Objective(s) → What are the course policies, requirements, objectives and structure?

Why the “Science” in Political Science? W, F (1/13 - 1/15)
Reading(s) → JRM Chapter 2 (all)
Assignment(s) → None
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 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 (MLK Jr. Day) M (1/18)
Reading(s) → None
Assignment(s) → None
Objectives(s) → None

Why the “Science” in Political Science? W (1/20)
Reading(s) → Groeling “Media Bias by the Numbers” (Module 2)
Assignment(s) → Complete the media bias reading response (Module 2)(due Wednesday before class)
Objective(s) → See above

Why the “Science” in Political Science? (online, please check OAKS) F (1/22)
Reading(s) → None
Assignment(s) → Complete the discussion prompt (Module 3)(due Friday by 11:59pm)
→ Complete quiz 1 (Module 3)(due Friday by 11:59pm)
Objective(s) → See above

Theories, Hypotheses and Variables M, W (1/25 - 1/27)
Theories, Hypotheses and Variables (online, please check OAKS) F (1/29)

Reading(s)
→ Kalmoe “Political Violence” (Module 4)
→ Rauchhaus “Evaluating the Nuclear Peace Hypothesis” (Module 5)

Assignment(s)
→ Complete the Kalmoe reading response prompt (Module 4)(due Friday by 11:59pm)
→ Complete quiz 2 (Module 4)(due Friday by 11:59pm)
→ Complete the Rauchhaus hypotheses assignment (Module 5)(due Monday before class)

Objective(s)
→ See above

Measuring Political Constructs M, W, F (2/1 - 2/5)

Reading(s)
→ JRM Chapter 4 (pages 86 - 100)(for Monday)
→ Allcott and Gentzkow “Fake News in the 2016 Election” (Module 6)(for Friday)

Assignment(s)
→ Complete quiz 3 (Module 6)(due next Monday before class)

Objective(s)
→ 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?
→ Is everything measurable? When is formal measurement not wise?

Section II: Research Design

Causality M, W (2/8 & 2/10)

Reading(s)
→ JRM Chapter 6 (pages 121-124 and 127-134)(for Monday)
→ Stratmann and Baur “Electoral Rules and the German Bundestag” (Module 7)(for Wednesday)

Assignment(s)
→ None

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?

Causality (online, please check OAKS) F (2/12)

Reading(s)
→ None

Assignment(s)
→ Complete the discussion prompt (Module 8)(due Friday by 11:59pm)
→ Complete quiz 4 (Module 8)(due Friday by 11:59pm)

Objective(s)
→ See above
Experiments  
Reading(s)  
→ JRM Chapter 9 (pages 182-192)  
→ Strother et al. “College Roommates and Political Ideology” (Module 9)  
Assignment(s)  
→ None  
Objective(s)  
→ What are the main features of experimental research?  
→ What are the strengths and limitations of experiments?

Non Experiments  
Reading(s)  
→ JRM Chapter 9 (pages 169-182)  
→ Woessner and Kelly-Woessner “I Think My Professor is a Democrat” (Module 9)  
Assignment(s)  
→ None  
Objective(s)  
→ What are the main features of non experimental research?  
→ What are the strengths and limitations of non-experiments?

Exam 1 (Module 10 in OAKS during our regular class time)

Section III: Doing Research

Sources, Literature Reviews, and Research Designs  
Reading(s)  
→ JRM Chapter 3 (all)  
Assignment(s)  
Objective(s)  
→ What are the components of a research design?  
→ Why is a literature review important?  
→ Why is a literature review NOT a simple research summary?

Research Design Proposal (online, please check OAKS)  
Reading(s)  
→ None  
Assignment(s)  
→ Complete quiz 5 (Module 11)(due Monday by 11:59pm)  
→ Research design proposal (Module 12)(due Monday by 11:59pm)  
Objective(s)  
→ See above

Sampling  
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)?  
→ What is the benefit of a random sample? When would be conduct a non-random sample?
Survey Research  M, W (3/8 - 3/10)

Reading(s)
→ JRM Chapter 10 (pages 196-202)(for Monday)
→ Cohn “What Went Wrong With the Polling in 2020?” (Module 13)(for Wednesday)
→ Complete quiz 6 (Module 13)(due Friday before class)

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?

Content Analysis  F, M (3/12 - 3/15)

Reading(s)
→ JRM Chapter 8 (pages 150-153) and Chapter 10 (pages 194-196)(both for Friday)
→ Sulkin “Promises Made, Promises Kept” (Module 14)(for Monday)

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  W, F (3/17 - 3/19)

Reading(s)
→ JRM Chapter 7 (all)(for Wednesday)
→ Day “Rebel Resilience and the LRA” (Module 15)(for Friday)

Assignment(s)
→ Complete quiz 7 (Module 15)(due Monday before class)

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?

Ethnography, Field Research, and Elite Interviewing  M, W (3/22 - 3/24)

Reading(s)
→ JRM Chapter 8 (pages 156-168)

Assignment(s)
→ None

Objective(s)
→ What are the strengths and limitations of ethnographic research and field research?
→ How does survey research inform elite interviewing?

Exam 2 (Module 16 in OAKS during our regular class time)  F (3/26)

Section IV: Data Analysis and Final Projects

Descriptive Statistics and Crosstabs (all online, please check OAKS)  M, W, F (3/29 - 4/2)

Reading(s)
→ JRM Chapter 13 (pages 267-279 and 287-290)(for Monday)

Assignment(s)
→ Watch the data analysis lecture videos
→ Data analysis exercises (Module 17)(due Friday by 11:59pm)

Objective(s)
→ How can we use data to understand politics?
Regression Analysis (all online, please check OAKS) M, W, F (4/5 - 4/9)

Reading(s)
→ JRM Chapter 14 (pages 307-319)(for Monday)

Assignment(s)
→ Watch the data analysis lecture videos
→ Data analysis exercises (Module 18)(due Friday by 11:59pm)

Objective(s)
→ How can we use data to understand politics?

Data Analysis Review (in person) M (4/12)

Assignment(s)
→ None

Group Project Lab Sessions (all online, please check OAKS) W, F, M (4/14 - 4/19)

Assignment(s)
→ Scheduled mandatory 15 minute Zoom session
→ Complete your data analysis research paper and presentation (Module 19)

Group Project Due (during final exam slot) F (4/23)

Assignment(s)
→ Upload completed paper to OAKS (Module 19)
→ Give 7 minute presentation

Research Designs Due S (5/1)

Assignment(s)
→ Upload completed research design to OAKS (Module 20)(due by noon)