

POLI 205 (01)
Doing Research in Politics
Spring 2022

Instructor:	Dr. Jordan Ragusa	Location:	Maybank Hall 115
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Course Description

Advances in human understanding begin with the tools of research methodology and systematic inquiry. POLI 205 will introduce you to a specific set of tools: those used in empirical political 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 research, formulate their own research questions, and develop analytical strategies to evaluate those questions. My hope is that after this course you are “science literate” and a better consumer of political information.

As you may know, this is the second in a sequence required of all political science majors, the first being an introduction to normative political analysis. Although both courses are 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 that empirical analysis can help answer normative questions, and vice versa.

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. We will cover 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. In the third part of the course will focus on “doing” research. Topics include sampling, observation, content analysis, case studies, survey research, and elite interviewing. Although the discussion will be limited, the goal is to provide students with a working knowledge of these common tools. After this section you should be able to develop research questions that are answerable with a variety of methods. Fourth, and finally, we will cover statistics and complete two projects—a data analysis group project and your individual research designs. So, the section-by-section outline is as follows:

Features of Empirical Research	.....	1/10 to 2/9
Research Designs	.....	2/14 to 3/2
Doing Research	.....	3/14 to 4/4
Data Analysis and Projects	.....	4/6 to 5/1

Key Due Dates

Exam #1	.....	3/2
Exam #2	.....	4/4
Data Analysis Projects	.....	4/29
Research Designs Due	.....	5/1

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 courses (from short in class quizzes and assignments 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 in the process.

Continuity of Learning

We are scheduled to meet in person this semester (except during the two data analysis weeks). If a student is absent for an extended period due to COVID-19, I reserve the right to conduct the class exclusively online via OAKS (or choose an alternate accommodation). Note that the specific accommodation will vary depending on the number of students affected, the expected duration of their absence, and the needs of the class. I reserve the same rights in the event that I or a member of my immediate family is ill. Any changes in the course format will be communicated by email. 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. Lastly, when we meet in person, class sessions will not be recorded or live streamed. 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.

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. 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 or more 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. 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. 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 (MA, PhD or JD). 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. At the end of the semester, two projects are due—a research design paper and a data analysis presentation. 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. 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, a series of assignments throughout the semester (in class quizzes, assignments, reaction papers, etc.) will be worth 10% of the course grade and class participation is worth 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 the instructor determines the student's actions reflect misunderstanding and/or 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, 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

Syllabus Review

M (1/10)

Reading(s)

→ None

Assignment(s)

→ None

Objective(s)

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

Introduction to Empirical Research

W (1/12)

Reading(s)

→ None

Assignment(s)

→ None

Objective(s)

→ Can we study politics scientifically?

No Class (MLK Jr. Day)

M (1/17)

All About the “Science” in Political Science

W, M, W (1/19 - 1/26)

Reading(s)

→ JRM Chapter 2 (all)

→ Groeling “Media Bias by the Numbers” (for 1/26)

Assignment(s)

→ Complete the discussion prompt in OAKS (Module 1)(due 1/19 before class)

→ Complete the media bias reading response (Module 2)(due 1/26 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 is the philosophy of science? What are the basic assumptions of any science?

→ What are the limitations of the scientific study of politics?

Theories, Hypotheses and Variables

M, W (1/31 - 2/2)

Reading(s)

→ JRM Chapter 4 (pages 73-85)

→ Kalmoe “Political Violence” (for Monday)

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

Assignment(s)

→ Complete the hypotheses assignment (Module 3)(due Wednesday 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 are the characteristics of good hypotheses?

→ 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

M, W (2/7 - 2/9)

Reading(s)

→ JRM Chapter 4 (pages 86 - 100)

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

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?

→ Is everything measurable? When is formal measurement not wise?

Section II: Research Design

Causality

M, W (2/14 & 2/16)

Reading(s)

- JRM Chapter 6 (pages 121-124 and 127-134)
- Stratmann and Baur “Electoral Rules and the German Bundestag” (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?

Experiments

M, W (2/21 & 2/23)

Reading(s)

- JRM Chapter 9 (pages 182-192)
- Strother et al. “College Roommates and Political Ideology” (for Wednesday)

Assignment(s)

- Complete the discussion prompt (Module 4)(due Monday before class)

Objective(s)

- What are the main features of experimental research?
- What are the strengths and limitations of experiments?

Non Experiments

M (2/28)

Reading(s)

- JRM Chapter 9 (pages 169-182)
- Woessner and Kelly-Woessner “I Think My Professor is a Democrat”

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

W (3/2)

No Class (Spring Break)

M (3/7 - 3/11)

Section III: Doing Research

Sources, Literature Reviews, and Research Designs

M, W (3/14 - 3/16)

Reading(s)

- JRM Chapter 3 (all)

Assignment(s)

- None

Objective(s)

- What are the components of a research design?
- Why is a literature review important? How do you write an effective literature review?

Sampling

M (3/21)

Reading(s)

- JRM Chapter 5 (all)

Assignment(s)

- Research design proposal due (Module 5)(due Monday before class)

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	W, M (3/23 & 3/28)
Reading(s)	
→ JRM Chapter 10 (pages 196-202)	
→ Cohn “What Went Wrong With the Polling in 2020?” (for Wednesday)	
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 and Case Studies	W (3/30)
Reading(s)	
→ JRM Chapter 7 (all)	
→ JRM Chapter 8 (pages 150-153) and Chapter 10 (pages 194-196)	
→ Sulkin “Promises Made, Promises Kept” (for Wednesday)	
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?	
Exam 2	M (4/4)
<u>Section IV: Data Analysis and Final Projects</u>	
Descriptive Statistics and Crosstabs (online, check OAKS)	W, M (4/6 - 4/11)
Reading(s)	
→ JRM Chapter 13 (pages 267-279 and 287-290)	
Assignment(s)	
→ Watch the data analysis lecture videos (Module 6)	
→ Data analysis exercises (Module 6)(due Monday by 11:59pm)	
Objective(s)	
→ How can we use data to understand politics?	
Regression Analysis (online, check OAKS)	W, M (4/13 - 4/18)
Reading(s)	
→ JRM Chapter 14 (pages 307-319)	
Assignment(s)	
→ Watch the data analysis lecture videos (Module 7)	
→ Data analysis exercises (Module 7)(due Monday by 11:59pm)	
Objective(s)	
→ How can we use data to understand politics?	
Data Analysis Review (back in person)	W (4/20)
Assignment(s)	
→ Research design draft (Module 8)	
Group Project Lab Session	M (4/25)
Assignment(s)	
→ Complete your data analysis presentation (Module 9)	

Presentations (during final exam slot)

Assignment(s)

→ Upload completed presentation (Module 9)

F (4/29)

3:30 - 5:30

Research Designs Due

Assignment(s)

→ Upload completed research design to OAKS (Module 10)

Sunday (5/1)

11:59pm