# PS200: Research Methods in Political Science

## Spring 2016

**Tuesday/Thursday**  
**Van Hise 104**  
**3:30-4:20pm**

Professor Jonathan Renshon  
✉️ renshon@wisc.edu  
Office location: North Hall 406  
Office hours: Tuesday (10:30-11:45am)

Teaching Assistant:  
Dmitrii Kofanov  
✉️ kofanov@wisc.edu  
Office location: North Hall 121  
Office Hours: Tuesday (1:00-3:00pm)

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## 1 Course Description

This course will introduce you to the various ways in which political scientists study political phenomena. We will consider a variety of research methods, including historical case study research, field research, quantitative analysis, survey research, experimental techniques, and more. Whatever the research method, one of the central objectives of the course is for students to come away with a clear understanding of how to evaluate causal relationships in the political world.

In learning about these tools, we will consider a variety of real-world applications. For example, why do states give up some of their independence in order to participate in multilateral international institutions? How did Bill Clinton’s gender affect responses to the Monica Lewinsky scandal (and how can we know for sure)? Why did Presidents Kennedy and Johnson take different approaches to intervening in Vietnam? What is the effect of development aid on community-building after civil war? When do Latino immigrants decide to become American citizens? Do strict gun control laws reduce or increase crime? These kinds of questions are the backdrops we will use to learn about how to do political science research.

## 2 Guidelines

For this specific class:

- If you have a question, or want to know if a reading is available, please check Learn@UW for any announcements and download the latest copy of the syllabus before emailing.
• If you ever have any questions, or are confused about something, please do not hesitate to come to office hours and meet with me. Please also consider making an appointment just to introduce yourself and tell me how the course is going. Office hours are Tuesdays between 10:30-11:45 AM, and you can make an appointment at the following website: [https://calendar.wisc.edu/scheduling-assistant/public/profiles/jSWjsloX.html](https://calendar.wisc.edu/scheduling-assistant/public/profiles/jSWjsloX.html). If you are unavailable at that time due to a conflict with another class, you can email me to schedule an appointment.

• You are responsible for the readings listed under each class.

• If you have a disability or circumstance that could affect your performance, please contact me early in the semester so that we can consider accommodations. The McBurney Center for Disability Services can provide official documentation of disabilities.

• Obviously, academic misconduct is not tolerated. Please make sure you are familiar with the policies outlined by the Dean of Students.

• One exception: I will not respond to emails sent the night before an assignment is due.

• Do the readings in preparation for each class. If you miss one, don’t ignore it and move on, but make an effort to catch up.

• Come to class on time.

• It’s fine to use a computer to take notes, but please don’t bring your computer so you can write emails and read the news during class (it’s much more obvious than you realize).

• There are legitimate reasons to have to miss class, but if you must, please email me ahead of time to let me know. If too many students seem to be missing classes regularly, I will begin taking attendance.

• If you have any questions about anything related to the course, here are the steps you should take (and the order in which you should take them):
  1. consult the syllabus
  2. email your TA
  3. Come to my office hours to ask/email me

### 3 Grading

Your final grade will be composed of: …

• 45% - 5 written assignments (9% each)
• 10% - Weekly discussion sections
• 10% - In-class midterm
• 35% - Final exam
The final exam will be held during the University-scheduled exam period: May 9, 2:45-4:45 PM. There will be no make-up exams. If you have an absolutely unavoidable conflict with the exam, contact me well in advance. I also understand that emergencies happen, but require documentation of all emergencies that affect your course participation, exams, or assignments.

Written Assignments

Five times during the semester, I will ask you to write an approximately 3-page (double-spaced) memo applying a particular methodology to a research question of your own choosing. You do not need to carry out the research, but rather propose a “research design” that explains how you would approach a particular question. We will distribute the detailed instructions for each assignment well in advance.

Discussion Section

5% of your grade is based on weekly discussion sections led by our Teaching Assistant, Dmitrii Kofanov. Your section grade will be based on attendance, participation, and occasional very minor assignments. The main goal of sections is for you to make sure you understand the material from lectures and readings, and to get feedback on your assignments both as you are working on them, and after they have been graded.

4 Readings Used in the Course

The course has two required textbooks, which should be available in the student bookstore and via various online vendors.

Books (to purchase)

   ⇒ Abbreviation on list of readings: ERW.

   ⇒ Abbreviation on list of readings: PSRP.

All other readings will be available via the link provided on the syllabus.
Schedule

1. Introduction and Course Overview
   [January 19]

HYPOTHESES, THEORIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

2. What is social science, and why is it valuable?
   [January 21]
   - PSRP Chapter 1: Why Do We Need a Science of Politics?
   - “Professors, We Need You!” (2014), Nicholas Kristof, New York Times.
   - “Dear Nicholas Kristof: We Are Right Here,” Erik Voeten, Washington Post.

3. Formulating a social scientific research question
   [January 26]
   - ERW Chapter 1: From Research Topic to Research Question
   - Begin ERW Chapter 2: From Research Question to Theory to Hypothesis

4. Causal theories and hypotheses
   [January 28]
   - Finish ERW Chapter 2: From Research Question to Theory to Hypothesis
   - PSRP Chapter 2: How Do We Get a Science of Politics?

5. Choosing a research design
   [February 2]
   - Selections from The Fundamentals of Political Science Research (2008), Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten:
     - Chapter 4: Research Design, pp. 67-85.
   - ERW Chapter 4: Choosing a Design that Fits Your Question

QUALITATIVE APPROACHES

6. Case Selection
   [February 4]
• **ERW** Chapter 5: Case Selection and Study Design for Qualitative Research
  
  • “How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics” (1990), Barbara Geddes, *Political Analysis* 2/1: 131-150

⇒ **Assignment # 1 due Friday, February 5**

7. Interpretivism
   [February 9]
   
   • “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture” (1973), Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 3-32.
   

8. Case studies I
   [February 11]
   
   • **PSRP** Chapter 3: Case Study and the Comparative Method
   

9. Case studies II
   [February 16]
   
   • **ERW** Chapter 6: Qualitative Data Collection and Management
   

10. Process-tracing
    [February 18]
    
    • “Sherlock Holmes and the Adventure of Silver Blaze” (1892), Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Strand Magazine*.
    

11. Natural Experiments
    [February 23]
    
12. Archival research

[February 25]

- SKIM "Using Archives: A Practical Guide for Researchers"
- SKIM "A Survival Guide for Archival Research"

⇒ Assignment #2 due Friday, February 26

FIELDWORK

13. Field research I

[March 1]

- **PSRP** Chapter 4: Field Research: Zhuang Ethnic Identity and the Chinese State

14. Field research II: Interviews

[March 3]

- **PSRP** Chapter 5: Interviews: What are the Pathways to Human Rights Activism?
- **ERW** pp. 148-150 on Human Subjects Research and Elite Interviews

⇒ Assignment #3 due Friday, March 4

LARGE-N/QUANTITATIVE APPROACHES

15. Using Large-N Data

[March 8]

- **ERW** Chapter 7: Quantitative Data Collection and Management

16. Some basics of quantitative analysis

[March 10]
- PSRP Chapter 6: Statistical Research: To Naturalize or Not to Naturalize?

17. No class on March 15: Study day!

18. In-Class Midterm
   [March 17]

19. An application
   [March 29]

SURVEY AND EXPERIMENTAL APPROACHES

20. Survey research
    [March 31]

⇒ Assignment # 4 due Friday, April 1

21. Experiments Overview
    [April 5]
    - PSRP Chapter 10: If Bill Clinton Were a Woman?

22. No class on April 7
23. Survey Experiments

[April 12]


24. Field Experiments

[April 14]


25. Laboratory Experiments

[April 19]

- “Lab Experiments are a Major Source of Knowledge in the Social Sciences” (2009), Armin Falk and James Heckman, *Science* 326: 535-538

### Formal (and Informal) Theory

26. Game theory I

[April 21]

- Watch online lecture and read notes and handouts for Yale Open Course on Game theory: [LINK](http://example.com)

⇒ Assignment # 5 due Friday, April 22

27. Game theory II

[April 26]

28. Threats to Inference

[April 28]

- Selections from *How We Know What Isn’t So: The Fallibility of Human Reasoning in Everyday Life* (1993) by Thomas Gilovich:
  - “Seeing What We Expect to See: The Biased Evaluation of Ambiguous and Inconsistent Data,” pp. 49-72.
  - “Seeing What We Want to See: Motivational Determinants of Belief,” pp. 75-87.

29. Normative and ethical issues in social science research

[May 3]

- **PSRP** Chapter 12: Normative and Ethical Considerations of Political Science Research
- Online Human Subjects Research tutorial

30. Final Exam Review Session

[May 5]

⇒ Final Exam (May 9, 2:45-4:45 PM)