PS200: Research Methods in Political Science

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Office hours: Tuesday (10:30-11:45am)
Office location: Learn @ UW

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Office hours: Mondays, 1:15-3:15pm

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 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

• 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. 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 or before an exam.

• 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.

3 Grading

Your final grade will be composed of:

• 25% - Discussion section
• 20% - In-class midterm #1
• 20% - In-class midterm #2
• 35% - Final exam
The final exam will be held during the University-scheduled exam period: May 10, 12:25-2:25 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.

Discussion Section

25% of your grade is based on weekly discussion sections led by our Teaching Assistant, Caileigh Glenn. Your section grade will be based on attendance, participation, and occasional assignments. The main goal of sections is for you to make sure you understand the material from lectures and readings.

4 Readings Used in the Course

The course has one required textbook which should be available in the student bookstore and via various online vendors.

Books


   ⇒ Abbreviation on list of readings: DSS.

All other readings will be available via links provided on the syllabus. Sometimes the readings will be from the following textbooks (they will be scanned, so there is no need to purchase):


   ⇒ Abbreviation on list of readings: ERW.


   ⇒ Abbreviation on list of readings: PSRP.
Schedule

1. Introduction and Course Overview
   *January 17*

Hypotheses, Theories and Social Science

2. What is social science, and why is it valuable?
   *January 19*
   - DSS Chapter 1
   - DSS Chapter 2

3. Formulating a social scientific research question
   *January 24*
   - ERW Chapter 1
   - Begin ERW Chapter 2

4. Causal theories and hypotheses
   *January 26*
   - Finish ERW Chapter 2

5. Challenges to establishing causation
   *January 31*

6. Choosing a research design
   *February 2*
   - DSS Chapter 4

7. Measuring Concepts
   *February 7*
   - DSS Chapter 5
   - DSS pp. 330-337
Surveys

8. Sampling
   [February 9]
   - DSS Chapter 6

9. Survey Research
   [February 14]
   - DSS Chapter 8

Experiments

10. Experiments Overview
    [February 16]
    - DSS Chapter 7

11. Exam Review Session
    [February 21]

12. In-class Exam # 1
    [February 23]

13. Laboratory Experiments
    [February 28]
    - “Lab Experiments are a Major Source of Knowledge in the Social Sciences” (2009), Armin Falk and James Heckman, Science 326: 535-538.

14. Survey Experiments
    [March 2]
15. Field Experiments
   [March 7]

16. Normative and ethical issues
   [March 9]
   - DSS Chapter 3

QUALITATIVE APPROACHES

17. Introduction to Qualitative research/counterfactuals
   [March 14]
   - ERW pp. 109-132

18. No class on March 16: Early Spring Break!

19. Qualitative Data Management/Types of theories [March 28]

20. Process-tracing
    [March 30]
    - “Sherlock Holmes and the Adventure of Silver Blaze” (1892), Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Strand Magazine*.

21. Exam Review Session
    [April 4]

22. In-class Exam # 2
    [April 6]

23. Archival Research
    [April 11]
• SKIM “Using Archives: A Practical Guide for Researchers”
• SKIM “A Survival Guide for Archival Research”

24. “Natural Experiments” of History
   *[April 13]*

25. Interviews
   *[April 18]*
   • **PSRP** Chapter 5: Interviews: What are the Pathways to Human Rights Activism?

**Large-N/Quantitative Approaches**

26. Using Large-N Data
   *[April 20]*
   • **ERW** Chapter 7: Quantitative Data Collection and Management

27. Using Large-N Data, cont’d.
   *[April 25]*
   • **PSRP** Chapter 6: Statistical Research: To Naturalize or Not to Naturalize?

28. Using Large-N Data: an application
   *[April 27]*
29. Threats to Inference
[May 2]

- 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.

30. Final Exam Review Session
[May 5]

⇒ Final Exam (Wednesday, May 10, 12:25-2:25pm)