
PS170: Research Methods in Political Science

Fall 2019
Tuesday/Thursday
SOC SCI 5208
11:00-11:50am

Professor Jonathan Renshon

✉: renshon@wisc.edu

Office location: North Hall 409

Office hours: Tuesday (3:30-5:00pm)

Teaching Assistants:

Lotem Bassan

✉: lbassan@wisc.edu

Priyadarshi Amar

✉: pamar@wisc.edu

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.

This 3-credit class meets for three 50-minute class periods each week (2 lecture, 1 section). I expect that students will work on course learning activities (reading, assignments, studying, etc) for about 2 hours out of the classroom for every class period (e.g., 6 hours outside of class per week, on average). Some weeks will be more intensive than others, so please plan ahead. The syllabus includes additional information about meeting times and expectations for student work.

No background in political science or statistics is required for this course. The goal of the course is to introduce you to some of the most common approaches to research methodology in political science (and social sciences more broadly). Students who closely and carefully engage course readings, attend and participate in class discussion, and complete course assignments will be able to:

- Analyze relations among individuals, domestic society, political institutions, and states

- Explain important concepts in research design and methodology
- Assess political science theories
- Understand and assess the quality of empirical work in political science research
- Apply course concepts to analysis of contemporary political debates

2 Guidelines

- 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. check Canvas
 3. email your TA
 4. Come to my office hours to ask/email me
- 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 3:30-5:00 PM, and you can make an appointment at the following website: <https://calendly.com/jrenshon/office-hours-tuesday/>. 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.
- I will do my best to get back to you within 24 hours if you email me.
 - 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 miss class, but if you must, please email me ahead of time to let me know.

3 Course Information

Grading

Your final grade will be composed of:

- 20% - Discussion section
- 40% - Assignments
- 15% - In-class midterm
- 25% - Final exam

There will be opportunities for extra credit. We will use the following scale for translating any numerical grades into final letter grades:

A	93.00 and up
AB	87.00-92.99
B	83.00-86.99
BC	77.00-82.99
C	73.00-76.99

The final exam will be held during the University-scheduled exam period: May 7, 10:05am-12:05 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.

Lectures

Lectures are a key component of the course and will contain material that is not found in the readings. There will also be opportunities for extra credit in lecture (e.g., participation via Tophat).

Discussion Section

20% of your grade is based on weekly discussion sections led by our Teaching Assistants. 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.

Exams

You will have a midterm (15% of your grade) and a final exam (25% of your grade). There will be no make-up exams without a university-excused absence. If you have a university-excused reason to miss an exam, please contact me well in advance. In the case of an emergency, I require written documentation in all instances. Please share your exam schedule with your family and plan your personal travel around the exams.

Assignments

Over the course of the semester, you will have 5 applied assignments. Please turn these in electronically via Canvas. They are due by 11:00am on the due date.

- Assignment #1 (Developing a Research Question)
- Assignment #2 (Survey Research)
- Assignment #3 (Large-N Research)
- Assignment #4 (Qualitative Research)
- Assignment #5 (Experimental Research)

Each assignment is worth 8% of your total grade. Late assignments will receive a one letter-grade reduction for every 24 hours that they are late (or portion thereof).

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

1. *The Process of Social Research* (2016) Jeffrey C. Dixon, Royce A. Singleton, Jr. & Bruce C. Straits ⇒ 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):

1. *Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student's Practical Guide* (2014) Leanne C. Powner, CQ Press. ⇒ Abbreviation on list of readings: **ERW**.
2. *Political Science Research in Practice* (2012) Akan Malici and Elizabeth S. Smith, Routledge Press. ⇒ Abbreviation on list of readings: **PSRP**.

Tophat

We will use Tophat, a system that allows students to ask and answer questions, take polls, take quizzes, and give feedback during class. Participation in Tophat is *required* for the course. Students can use any web-enabled device (laptop, tablets, smartphones) to participate, or you can use text message to submit answers. The subscription is \$16 for the semester, and I have cut down the number of textbooks to accommodate this cost. Please follow the instructions at <https://kb.wisc.edu/luwmad/page.php?id=59937> to sign up. Our course join code is 784619.

Tophat will record your participation in the course and will be used when determining final letter grades, boosting people who are close to the cutoff for their particular grade.

Course Website

Our course website is available via Canvas. Please check the course website frequently for announcements, information about assignments, and to access non-textbook readings and other materials.

Course Overview

	Tuesday	Thursday
Week 1		Introduction
Week 2	What is Social Science and Why is it valuable?	Formulating a research question
Week 3	Choosing a Research design	Challenges to establishing causation
Week 4	Measuring concepts	Sampling <i>Assignment #1 due</i>
Week 5	Surveys I	Surveys II
Week 6	Large N I	Large-N II <i>Assignment #2 due</i>
Week 7	Large-N III	Review Session
Week 8	<i>In-Class Midterm</i>	Intro to Qualitative Research
Week 9	Process Tracing	Archival Research <i>Assignment #3 due</i>
Week 10	Interviews	Experiments I
Week 11	Experiments II	Experiments III
Week 12	Natural Experiments	Can We Trust Social Science? I <i>Assignment #4 due</i>
Week 13	NO CLASS	NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)
Week 14	Can We Trust Social Science? II	Normative and Ethical Issues <i>Assignment #5 due</i>
Week 15	Final Exam Review session	
<i>Final Exam: December 13, 7:25pm - 9:25pm</i>		

Schedule

1. Introduction
[September 5]
2. What is social science, and why is it valuable?
[September 10]
 - **DSS** Chapter 1
 - **DSS** Chapter 2
3. Formulating a social scientific research question
[September 12]
 - **ERW** Chapter 1
 - Begin **ERW** Chapter 2
4. Choosing a research design
[September 17]
 - Finish **ERW** Chapter 2
 - **DSS** Chapter 4
5. Challenges to establishing causation
[September 19]
 - “Evaluating Causal Relationships” (2008), Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten, *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*, pp. 45-66.
6. Measuring Concepts
[September 24]
 - **DSS** Chapter 5
7. Sampling and Case Selection
[September 26]
 - **DSS** Chapter 6
8. Survey Research 1
[October 1]
 - **DSS** Chapter 8
9. Survey Research 2
[October 3]
 - Read “executive summary” of “An Evaluation of 2016 Election Polls in the U.S.”, American Association for Public Opinion Research.

10. Large-N Data 1
[October 8]
 - **ERW** Chapter 7
11. Large-N Data 2
[October 10]
 - **DSS** Chapter 12
 - “Ten Things to Know About Reading A Regression Table.” Evidence of Governance in Politics
12. Large-N Data 3
[October 15]
 - Michael Ross. 2006. “Oil, Islam, and Women.” American Political Science Review
 - Optional further reading: Jim Frost. 2013. “How to Interpret Regression Analysis Results: P-values and Coefficients.” The Minitab Blog.
13. Review Session
[October 17]
14. In-class Midterm Exam
[October 22]
15. Introduction to Qualitative Research
[October 24]
 - **ERW** pp. 109-132
16. Process-tracing
[October 29]
 - “Sherlock Holmes and the Adventure of Silver Blaze” (1892), Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Strand Magazine*.
 - “Understanding Process Tracing” (2011), David Collier, *Political Science and Politics* 44/2: 823-830.
17. Archival Research
[October 31]
 - SKIM “Using Archives: A Practical Guide for Researchers”
 - SKIM “A Survival Guide for Archival Research”
 - SKIM “Developing an Interpretation Through Textual Analysis: The 1941 Case” (2006), Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History*, pp. 79-139.
18. Interviews
[November 5]

- Katherine Cramer. “For years, I’ve been watching anti-elite fury build in Wisconsin. Then came Trump.” 2017. Vox
 - Erhardt Graeff. “Kathy Cramer on the Politics of Resentment.” 2017. MIT Center for Civic Media.
 - **PSRP** Chapter 5: Interviews: What are the Pathways to Human Rights Activism?
19. Experiments 1
[November 7]
- **DSS** Chapter 7
 - “Experimentation in Political Science” (2009), Rebecca B. Morton and Kenneth C. Williams, *Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, pp. 339-356.
20. Experiments 2
[November 12]
- “Domestic Audience Costs in International Relations: An Experimental Approach” (2007), Michael Tomz, *International Organization* 61/4 : 821-840.
 - Henry Farrell. “Trump’s Commission Should Investigate Alien Abductions, Not Voter Fraud.” Washington Post. May 11, 2017.
21. Experiments 3
[November 14]
- John Sides. “A New Experiment Shows How Money Buys Access to Congress.” Washington Post. March 11 2014.
 - Andrew Bertoli. 2014. “World Cup Participation Increases State Aggression.” Washington Post. June 3, 2014.
22. “Natural Experiments” of History
[November 19]
- “Using Comparative Methods in Studies of Human History” (2011), Jared Diamond & James Robinson, in *Natural Experiments of History*, pp. 257-275.
 - “From Ancien Régime to Capitalism: The Spread of the French Revolution as a Natural Experiment” (2011), Daron Acemoglu, Davide Cantoni, Simon Johnson & James Robinson, in *Natural Experiments of History*, pp. 221-256.
23. Can We Trust Social Science? 1
[November 21]
- “Daryl Bem Proved ESP Is Real. Which Means Science is Broken.” Slate 2017
 - SKIM “Complexity and the Analysis of Political and Social Life” (1997), Robert Jervis, *Political Science Quarterly* 112/4: 569-593.

- 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.
 - “What is Motivated Reasoning? How Does it Work? Dan Kahan Answers.”
24. NO CLASS
[November 26]
25. NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING)
[November 28]
26. Can We Trust Social Science? 2
[December 3]
- “Scientists Who Cheat” New York Times.
 - David Broockman and Joshua Kalla. 2015. “We Discovered One of Social Science’s Biggest Frauds. Here’s What We Learned.” Vox.
27. Normative and Ethical Issues
[December 5]
- **DSS** Chapter 3
28. Final Exam Review Session
[December 10]
- ⇒ **Final Exam** (December 13, 7:25pm - 9:25pm)