

[Course #]: Research Methods
Fall 2015
[class meeting times]
Professor [name]
[Professor Office Location]
Email: [address]
[Office Hours]

Course Overview and Objectives

This course will introduce you to basic concepts and methods that are essential to research in the social sciences – with a particular emphasis on research in the fields of political science, communication studies, and public-opinion research. The aim of this course is to 1) prepare students to be confident and knowledgeable consumers of research and 2) provide students with the foundation needed to embark on their own social-research projects in a rigorous manner.

We will cover both qualitative and quantitative methods, ways of conceptualizing research projects and interpreting results, and the scientific principles underlying social research. We will also, importantly, examine the limitations of these methods.

This course is also, in general, designed to 1) hone critical thinking skills and your proficiency in analyzing and summarizing course literature; 2) develop the ability to understand and apply conceptual frameworks in social science to real-world political phenomena; 3) advance writing skills and the ability to make well-supported, logical, persuasive arguments.

Learning Outcomes

Students successfully completing of this course will be able to:

- Identify circumstances in which research is necessary or valuable
- Frame research questions and generate hypotheses
- Understand the roles of qualitative and quantitative methods
- Select and apply the appropriate research methods to explore particular research questions
- Analyze, interpret, and present research results
- Critically evaluate research results reported by others, such as news reports, public opinion polls, and policy papers

Course Requirements

1. Read this syllabus very carefully.
2. Complete reading assignments before each class meets. Each reading assignment is indicated below along with the date of the class for which the reading should be completed. All readings listed are required except as noted.

3. Attend class meetings regularly and on time, and participate in class discussions. Lectures and discussions will cover material for which you will be responsible in class assignments. *Because of the short class times, it is extremely important for students to be on time. Please respect everyone's investment in the class by not disrupting it with late arrivals.*

4. Bring **two questions** related to each week's assigned readings to the first class session of the week. You may question a claim or argument in the reading, pose a further research question suggested by the reading, or simply inquire about a point that is not clear to you. Questions are submitted in writing and should be one to three sentences long. These questions will be the basis of class discussions that will take place in the second weekly class sessions.

5. Complete one **three-page essay describing a research concept** (not a technique!) such as empiricism, validity, inference, variability, significance, parsimony, etc., and explaining its importance. **Due 9/30.**

6. Complete **one three-page analysis** of an article in a major political-science, sociology, or communications-studies journal. Your paper must explain the research method used in the study and critically evaluate it. **Due 10/4.**

7. Complete **one six-page briefing paper**, the goal of which is to persuade the reader of the existence of a strong and verifiable relationship in social or political life; for example, the hypothesis that more education is associated with higher levels of political participation, or the hypothesis that higher levels of political campaign spending are associated with higher levels of voter turnout. You must use at least two (preferably more) corroborating sources for your paper, and you must explain why your sources are credible. The "nucleus" of this paper should be a literature review (see Week 4), and the paper should end with a short proposal for further research. **Due 11/18.**

There is, additionally, a midterm exam, and a final exam.

Grading policy:

- 10% - Class Participation and Attendance
- 10% - Reading Questions
- 10% - Three-Page Research-Concepts Paper (1)
- 15% - Mid-Term Exam
- 15% - Three-Page Article Analysis (1)
- 20% - Six-Page Briefing Paper (1)
- 20% - Final Exam

Written assignments submitted late will be subject to grade reduction as per course policies on pp. 9-10 of this syllabus. Assignments not completed will receive a numerical grade score of "0."

Required Texts

- Asher, Herbert. 2012. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Shively, W. Phillips. 2012. *The Craft of Political Research*. 9th edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Wheelan, Charles. 2012. *Naked Statistics: Stripping the Dread from the Data*. New York: Norton.

Additional readings indicated below are available on the [college name] Blackboard (BB) site for this course.

Support for Students with Disabilities

Please discuss any special needs you may have with your instructor and/or contact the Disability Support Services Office at [phone]. This office is located at [location]

Organization of Class Sessions

This class meets twice a week. Unless noted otherwise, the first (Monday) class will primarily consist of a lecture and the second (Wednesday) class will primarily consist of discussions based on questions submitted by students, in writing, in the first weekly class meeting.

Week 1 – Introduction and Course Overview

Session 1 – Mon Aug 31

Kick-off: Why Research? The scientific method; theories and empirical data; research questions; causality; inference; prediction; measurement

Session 2 – Wed Sept 2

- Shively, *The Craft of Political Research*, chapters 1-3.

Week 2 – Basic Concepts in Scientific Research

Testable hypotheses; context-dependency; falsifiability; intersubjective evaluation; paradigms; deductive and inductive reasoning; replication and repeatability; uncertainty principle; counterfactuals; necessary and sufficient conditions

Note: Monday September 7 – Labor Day, No class

Session 1 – Wed Sept 9

- Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, ch. 3, “From Topics to Questions,” pp. 40-55. (BB)

- King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, chapter 1. (BB)

Week 3 – Types of Studies and Research Designs

Surveys; case studies; cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, meta-analyses, retrospective versus prospective studies, large-n, small-n; populations and samples; controlled experimental studies; natural experiments

Session 1 – Mon Sept 14

- Flanigan, William H. and Nancy H. Zingale. 2009. “Survey Research Methods” (Appendix), pp. 205-213, in *Political Behavior of the American Electorate*, 12th edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press, pp. 205-213. (BB)
- Niemi, Richard G, Weisberg, Herbert F., and David C. Kimball. 2011. “The Study of Voting and Elections” in *Controversies in Voting Behavior*, fifth edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press, pp. 1-22. (BB)

Session 2 – Wed Sept 16

- Discussion

Week 4 – Situating Research

Research questions; literature reviews; research applications

Session 1 – Mon Sept 21

- Knopf, Jeffrey W. and Iain McMenamin. 2008. “How to Write a Literature Review” in Stephen Yoder, ed., *Publishing Political Science: APSA Guide to Writing and Publishing*. Washington, DC: American Political Science Association.
- Thunder, David. 2004. “Back to Basics: Twelve Rules for Writing a Publishable Article.” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 37(3):493-495.

Session 2 – Wed Sept 23

- Discussion

Week 5 – Data and Variables

Quantitative and qualitative research; behavioral, demographic, geographic, and attitudinal data; types of variables (independent, dependent, intervening, confounding) operationalization; random and nonrandom errors; accuracy and precision; validity; reliability; parsimony

Session 1: Data Qualities – Mon Sept 28

- Shively, *The Craft of Political Research*, chapter 4, “Problems of Measurement: Accuracy” and chapter 5, “Problems of Measurement: Precision.”

Session 2 – Wed Sept 30

- Discussion
- “Research Concept” papers due

Week 6 – Qualitative and Mixed-Methods Research

Session 1 – Mon Oct 5

Introduction to key concepts in qualitative and mixed-methods research: case studies; interviews; process tracing; comparative method; content analysis

- Vromen, Ariadne. 2010. “Debating Methods: Rediscovering Qualitative Approaches,” pp. 249-266 in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, third edition. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Johnson, Dennis W. 2007. “Testing Public Opinion” in *No Place for Amateurs: How Political Consultants are Reshaping American Democracy*, second edition, New York: Routledge. pp. 87-114.
- Parker, Ashley and Amy Chozick. 2015. “The Best Way to Vilify Hillary Clinton? G.O.P. Spends Heavily to Test It.” *The New York Times*, July 11. Available online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/12/us/the-best-way-to-vilify-clinton-gop-spends-heavily-to-test-it.html?ref=topics&_r=0

Session 2 – Wed Oct 7

- Discussion

Week 7 – Quantitative Research Basics, Part I

Session 1 – Mon Oct 12

Introduction to key concepts in statistics: data and sampling; descriptive statistics; variability; central tendency; significance; levels of measurement; linear and nonlinear relationships

- Wheelan, *Naked Statistics*, Chapters 1-5.

Session 2 – Wed Oct 14

- Discussion

Week 8 – Quantitative Research Basics, Part II

Session 1 – Mon Oct 19

- Wheelan, *Naked Statistics*: chapters 6, 8, 9, and 10.
- Asher, *Polling and the Public*, chapters 4 and 6.

Session 2 – Wed Oct 21

- Discussion

Week 9 – Midterm Exam and Review

Session 1: Exam Review – Mon Oct 26

Session 2: Midterm Exam 21 – Wed Oct 28

Week 10 – Psychological Factors in Social Research

Confirmation bias; reinforcement effect; anchoring effects; social desirability, nonattitudes

Session 1 – Mon Nov 2

- Asher, *Polling and the Public*, chapter 2, “The Problem of Nonattitudes,” pp. 37-61.
- Kahneman, Daniel. 2011. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Chapter 7, “A Machine for Jumping to Conclusions.” (BB)
- Keohane, Joe. 2010. “How Facts Backfire.” *The Boston Globe*, July 11. (BB)

Session 1 – Wed Nov 4

- Discussion
- Three-page analysis due

Week 11 – Biases, Distortions, and Pitfalls in Research

Common fallacies, missing data, questionnaire effects, period effects, selection bias and nonresponse; violations of randomness; recall error

Session 1 – Mon Nov 9

Required:

- Wheelan, *Naked Statistics*, chapter 7, “The Importance of Data,” pp. 110-126.

- Asher, *Polling and the Public*, chapter 3, “Wording and Context of Questions,” pp. 63-89.
- Brehm, John. 1993. *The Phantom Respondents: Opinion Surveys and Political Representation*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, chapter 1, pp. 1-22 (BB).
- Fischer, David H. 1970. “Fallacies of Causation,” in *Historian’s Fallacies*. NY: Harper and Row, pp.164-186. (BB)

Session 1 – Wed Nov 11

- Discussion

Week 12 – Data Gathering

Instruments; data processing; statistical tools; sampling design; research ethics

Session 1 – Mon Nov 16

- Shively, *The Craft of Political Research*, chapter 7, “Selection of Observations for Study.”
- Asher, *Polling and the Public*, chapter 5, “Interviewing and Data Collection Procedures.”
- Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, “The Ethics of Research,” pp. 285-288. (BB)

Session 2 – Wed Nov 18

- Discussion
- Six-page briefing papers due

Week 13 – Interpreting Data Analyses

Session 1 – Mon Nov 23

- Asher, *Polling and the Public*, chapter 8, “Analyzing and Interpreting Polls.” pp. 205-236.

Note: Wednesday, November 25 – No class, Thanksgiving Break

Week 14 – Reporting Results and Presenting Data

Visualization; information graphics; spatial models

Session 1 – Mon Nov 30

- Tufte, Edward R. 2004. *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, Second Edition. Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press. Excerpt. (BB)
- Greasley, Pete. 2008. *Quantitative Data Analysis Using SPSS: An Introduction for Health and Social Science*, chapter 7, “Reporting the Results and Presenting the Data” pp. 103-110. (BB)
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. “Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” chapter 1 in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 3-30. (BB)

Session 2 – Wed Dec 2

- Discussion
- Three-page article analysis papers due

Week 15 – Multivariate Models and “Big Data”

Predictive modeling, controls, overlaying data and data integration; data mining; social network analysis;

Session 1 – Mon Dec 7

Required:

- Wheelan, *Naked Statistics*, chapter 11, “Regression Analysis,” and chapter 12, “Common Regression Mistakes.”
- Baker, Stephen. *The Numerati*. 2008. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, chapter 3, pp. 67-95.
- Issenberg, Sasha. 2012. “How President Obama’s Campaign Used Big Data to Rally Individual Voters.” *MIT Technology Review*.
<http://www.technologyreview.com/featuredstory/509026/how-obamas-team-usedbig-data-to-rally-voters/>

Suggested:

- Shively, *The Craft of Political Research*, chapter 8, “Measuring Relationships for Interval Data” and chapter 9, “Further Topics on Measurement of Relationships”

Session 2 – Wed Dec 9 Last Regular Class

- Discussion and Exam Review

Week 16 – Final Exam

- Date/Time TBD

Policies Regarding Submission of Writing Assignments

Submit your written assignments on time! Late papers will be penalized one half a letter grade (five points) for each class meeting occurring after the due date at which the paper is not received. Written assignments not received by the last day of the class will receive a score of zero. No “incomplete” grades will be given on account of papers not received or missed exams.

Style: Your papers must be prepared either in APA or Chicago style. All papers must be typed/word-processed in double-spaced format, in 12-pt. Times Roman with 1” minimum margins all around. Please visit the [college] Writing Center for help with preparing your papers. The Writing Center is located at [location]

Please adhere to all style requirements and especially, *length* requirements for written assignments. *Papers not properly formatted, or of incorrect length, will not be accepted.*

Sources: Do not use sources for your papers that are published without the oversight of an editorial board or peer review. Do not use personal web sites, blogs, or non-scholarly sources such as About.com, Wikipedia, InfoPlease.com, etc. Bear in mind that the degree to which you use sources *critically* will be a factor in the grade you receive.

Quotations: papers that contain extensive quotations regardless of how well credited the source(s) where the writer could have explained the point to be made in *his or her own words* will receive a substantial grade reduction. *Paraphrase* your sources. Do not cut and paste in lieu of *writing*. Explain points you wish to make *in your own words*.

NOTE: ALL ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE SUBMITTED TO YOUR INSTRUCTOR IN PRINTED FORM. No assignments will be accepted via email. No assignment will be deemed complete without receipt of a printed copy.

Academic Integrity: Read this section carefully.

[College academic integrity code]

You are responsible for knowing what plagiarism is. If you plagiarize any portion of an assignment, you will automatically receive a numerical grade of zero and a letter grade of “F.” Your action will be reported to the [college] administration, and serious disciplinary action may result. A further warning: the resources you may be tempted to use to plagiarize are just as easily employed in the *discovery* of plagiarism. Bottom line: It’s just not worth the risk. Don’t even think about doing it. And please, pay careful attention to source documentation, paraphrasing, and the use of quotation marks in order to avoid plagiarism.

Your instructor may require that written assignments be submitted electronically via Turnitin or a similar system to check for plagiarism. Additional details on paper submission will be provided to students in these cases. [College name] regards acts

of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to its published procedures.

For further information on avoiding plagiarism, consult the [college] catalog, visit the [college] Writing Center or visit the [college] Writing Center Web site at: [address].

These Web sites also provide helpful guidance on avoiding plagiarism:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>

<http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>

Do not submit papers written for other classes. This is known as “double-dipping.” If you are discovered to have engaged in double-dipping, your assignment will receive a score of zero.

Incompletes: No “incomplete” grades will be given in this class. Incompletes are only granted, at the instructor’s discretion, upon receipt of official, fully verifiable documentation of an *extenuating circumstance* (serious medical problem, death in the immediate family, etc.) in accordance with university guidelines.

One other thing about grades: please don’t explain to your instructor that you “need” to receive a certain grade. Such requests will have no effect upon the grade you receive, regardless of your reasons for “needing” a particular grade. Such requests will simply irritate your instructor, and they are strongly discouraged. If you “need” a good grade, the way to get one is to complete all course requirements accurately and with a high degree of quality, submit assignments on time, prepare for exams thoroughly and do well on them. Do not miss classes, and stay fully engaged with the material and class discussions. Grades are not calculated arbitrarily. They are calculated according to ONE very specific standard that applies EQUALLY to all students taking the course.