

POLS 200: Research Methods and Sources (Section: 001)
Fall 2017: MW 6-7:57 p.m., MOLN 124
Department of Politics, Philosophy, and Law
University of Wisconsin-Parkside

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Office Hours: MWF 11 a.m. - noon., MW 4 p.m. - 5 p.m., and by appointment

Course Description

The study of politics is more than just describing what is taking place. Political science involves investigating political phenomenon in a scientific manner, that is, using accepted research methodologies to investigate some issue of interest. Common political science questions include why people vote a certain way, what influences how legislatures, what causes war, and also interpreting and critically examining actions by relevant actors. This course will cover both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Students will learn how to develop their research interests and turn those into research questions, develop theories regarding how to explain certain observations or results (e.g. what, how, why, and under what conditions something occurs), how to develop testable hypotheses to explain theory, and developing skills to test those hypotheses and interpret results. This course will help students build a foundation in data analysis and interpretation that can be utilized in a variety of careers, or provide a solid introduction for future graduate coursework. This course provides students with the opportunity to initiate lifelong learning through the development and application of academic knowledge and skills in new or different settings.

Prerequisites: Completion of introductory political science sequence (Complete three of the five courses: POLS 100, POL 103, POL 104, POL 105, POL 202) or instructor approval.

Course Objectives

At the conclusion of this course, you will be able to:

1. Acquire and demonstrate knowledge of the scientific method and what constitutes science.
2. Critique political arguments using both supporting and opposing viewpoints, and able to determine what are appropriate sources of information.
3. Develop written and oral communication skills to communicate viewpoints to others, including writing an original research question, literature review, and hypothesis.
4. Define what is a research question, what a hypothesis is, and what is theory.
5. Develop a knowledge of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and identify which method helps answer a particular research question.
6. Develop a knowledge of various statistical techniques for analyzing data.

Required Text

Brians, Craig Leonard, Lars Willnat, Jarol B. Manheim, and Richard C. Rich. 2016. *Empirical Political Analysis*. 8th Ed. New York: Routledge. (ISBN: 978-0205791217)

The textbook is available at the University Bookstore as well as online retailers (e.g., amazon.com, barnesandnobles.com, half.com, etc.). It is also available as an e-book. I suggest buying this used on one of the sites I mentioned, as the used price is about half that of buying new.

There are also readings that will be uploaded to D2L. Those are indicated in the course schedule.

The university offers a free digital subscription to the New York Times for as long as you are a student. You have to re-register every year, but it is a great way to know what is going on in the world. Visit <http://libguides.uwp.edu/nytimes> and follow the instructions. As a student, you can also receive a discounted subscription to the Wall Street Journal. A 15-week subscription is only \$15 (\$1 per week). Visit <http://r.wsj.net/j8wrm> to sign up.

Student Responsibilities

Please come to class prepared. This means you need to read and take notes on the assigned readings beforehand. Attending class and participating is important, as there will be material discussed only in lectures that will be tested on exams and quizzes. You are also responsible for treating your fellow classmates with respect, especially during class discussions. We each come to this course with diverse backgrounds and different ideas regarding various issues and how government should work. Please respect your classmates by not talking when others have the floor.

If you have an excused absence and need to make up an exam, you must notify me as soon as possible after the absence. You are responsible for providing satisfactory evidence to the instructor the next class session after your absence. Please refer to the student handbook for more information regarding excused absences.

Technology Policy

Cell phone use in class is inappropriate and distracting to both myself and other students. If you use a laptop or tablet to take notes, please do not surf the Internet during class or use social media. If you need to call or text someone in an urgent situation, quietly leave the room. However, do not make calling and texting a habit. I reserve the right to ask students to leave if you are using your cell phone, or a laptop/tablet, if not used for note-taking purposes.

Attendance

Class attendance is important and affects your final grade as exams cannot be made up unless an absence is excused (e.g. approved university activity, funeral for immediate family, religious

observance). Absences related to your academic workload, illness, work schedule, car problems, etc. are not usually excused absences. You are allowed up to two unexcused absences during the course. After three unexcused absences, your grade for the course being lowered by one-third a grade level (e.g. A- to B+, or B to B-), and will be lowered again after three more unexcused absences. If you miss a class, you are responsible for obtaining the missed material (e.g., notes) from another student, as my notes/PowerPoint slides will not be made available. In-class assignments cannot be made up, but exams may be made-up if you have an approved excuse or an emergency. If you have an emergency that causes you to miss an exam, you must contact me as soon as possible (within 24 hours unless there is a **valid** reason why you could not contact me sooner) to arrange a make-up exam that will be given in an alternative format from the exam taken in class.

Instructor Responsibilities

As part of being your instructor, I have responsibilities to you. I will help answer questions regarding the course, and help you understand the material. I will be available during office hours and also available by appointment if you cannot make office hours. I will also try to answer questions via email within 48 hours (does not include weekends). All questions regarding grades must be asked in person, either after class or during office hours.

My responsibility to you is to provide clear guidelines as to what is expected. I will be using D2L to communicate and post grades. Please check your campus email and D2L regularly to make sure you can view course announcements and review your grades as the semester progresses. I am also responsible for ensuring the classroom provides an environment for everyone to learn and to express themselves.

Grading

Two exams: 40% (Two at 20% each)
Research design paper: 30%
Literature review: 10%
Research question: 5%
Lab assignments: 15%

Final grade scale: A = 94% and above, A- = 90%-93%, B+ = 87%-89%, B = 84%-86%, B- = 80%-83%, C+ = 77%-79%, C = 74%-76%, C- = 70%-73%, D+ = 67%-69%, D = 60%-66%, F = 59% and below (Note: I do not round up final grades if you are just below the cutoff, such as having a 93.8%. I have to define the scale at some point, and some people are always going to fall on the other side of the divide).

Exams (Two at 20% each): A midterm and a final exam will be scheduled. Exams will be given in class and alternative exams are only allowed with an approved excuse. The format of the exams will be multiple choice and short answer, as well as completing some math problems. Bring a scientific calculator that can calculate square roots. Cell phones may not be used as a calculator.

Research paper (30%): Students will write a 10-12-page research paper in this course. Students will develop a research question, write a literature review, and conduct original analysis using quantitative methods that will be learned during the course, and present the paper in class. For the quantitative analysis, you may use existing datasets that you find or develop your own. You will need to meet with me during Week 8 to discuss which dataset(s) you plan on using for your paper. The presentation will be at least 5 minutes that discusses the research question and the findings. Visual aids are optional, but highly encouraged. The presentation is worth 10% of the grade for the research paper. Several class sessions will be used to help students with their projects, and students will need to meet with me later in the semester during office hours regarding their project. Notice there are several deadlines throughout the semester regarding different parts of the paper (research question, literature review, methodological approach, final paper.) The final paper is the research question, literature review, and methodical approach that is tied together with an introduction, transitions between sections, and a conclusion. The components of the research design and the final paper will be submitted D2L.

Literature review (10%): Students will write a 3-4-page literature review that discusses the relevant scholarly literature related to your research question. Literature reviews are not simply a list of sources. You will be required to synthesize the sources, which means you need to organize how you discuss them and how they fit together. More details regarding the literature review assignment will be provided in the semester.

Research question (5%): Students will write a 2-3-page discussion of their research question. A research question is more than just discussing what you will write about. It is about trying to answer what has not been previously answered, or in other words, what puzzles remain regarding your topic.

Homework assignments (15%): Homework assignments will be throughout the semester, with several that will require the use of SPSS to complete. These assignments will help familiarize on how to conduct political science research and familiarize yourself with SPSS. The SPSS homework assignments can be completed using a personal computer if you purchase an SPSS license or in computer labs across campus. The unavailability of SPSS will not be considered a valid excuse for not completing homework assignments. Due dates for assignments are below. Assignments are due at the beginning of class, and any assignments submitted after that are considered late. Late assignments submitted within 24 hours of the due date will be penalized by 50 percent and no assignments will be accepted after 24 hours of the due date, regardless of the reason. Homework must be legible and pages must be stapled together. You may work together for homework, but must submit your own sheets, and the write-up for any assignments must be in your own words.

Grading notes: Proper spelling, punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure will be part of your research paper grade. Students need to develop the ability to write clearly and in common political science style that includes a research question, literature review, methodology, and results section, as well as a conclusion. Students are expected to carefully read, edit, and proofread their written work. If English is not your native language, or even if it is and you would like further assistance, there are on-campus resources that are there to help you. The university offers assistance in various subjects through the Parkside Academic Resource Center

(PARC). Assistance is free and is available in Wylie D180. If you need help with this course, please make an appointment. Help with writing assignments is available on a walk-in basis. Visit the PARC in-person or online at <https://www.uwp.edu/learn/academicsupport/parc/> for hours and more information.

All exercises, research proposals, etc. must have the following information displayed at the header: student's first and last name; course number (e.g. POLS 200); and assignment name (e.g. Homework 1).

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

Use of the intellectual property of others without attributing it to them is considered a serious academic offense. An academic misconduct can lead to a disciplinary hearing where sanctions can include a failed grade, or suspension or expulsion from the university. The University of Wisconsin-Parkside's policy on academic misconduct can be found at <https://www.uwp.edu/live/offices/studentaffairs/upload/14.pdf>.

Student Accessibility

Students with disabilities will be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact me the beginning of the semester with a copy of your accommodation letter so I can make the needed accommodations. Please note, you must first verify your eligibility and receive an accommodation letter from Disability Services. Please visit <https://www.uwp.edu/live/offices/disabilityservices/> for more information.

Registration Requirement

The official registration deadline to add this course with a permission number is Tuesday, September 12. The deadline to add the course with a permission number is Tuesday, September 19. Course drops must be completed by Tuesday, October 3 to not receive a Grade "W", and the last day to withdraw with a Grade "W" is Tuesday, October 24. Please refer to the university's policies regarding pro-rated tuition refund dates. University policy requires all students to be officially registered in each class they are attending. Students who are not officially registered for a course by published deadlines should not be attending classes and will not receive credit or a grade for the course. Please confirm enrollment in Solar. Registration errors must be corrected prior to the posted deadlines.

Class Schedule

Readings will come from the *Empirical Political Analysis* textbook and readings I will upload on D2L. You should be prepared to discuss the assigned reading on the day listed below. I retain the right to make changes to the schedule as needed.

Week 1 – Introduction, What is research? (Sept. 6)

Topics: Syllabus discussion, introduction to political science research

Readings:

- Brians et al., chapters 22-23
- Lacy, Dean, and Barry C. Burden. 1999. "The Vote-Stealing and Turnout Effects of Ross Perot in the 1992 U.S Presidential Election," *American Journal of Political Science* 43 (1): 233-55.
- Wright, John R. 1990. "Contributions, Lobbying, and Committee Voting in the U.S. House of Representatives." *American Political Science Review* 84 (2): 417-38.

Lab:

- Intro to SPSS.

Homework:

- Homework assignment #1-Data collection

Week 2 – Ethics (Sept. 11, 13)

Topics: Ethics in research, famous examples of ethics issues

Readings:

- Bhattacharjee, Yudhijit, 2013. "The Mind of a Con Man." *New York Times Magazine* (April 26). (Posted D2L)
- Campos, Paul. 2015. "Alice Goffman's Implausible Ethnography." *Chronicle of Higher Education*. (August 2015). (Posted on D2L)
- Mazzei, Julie, and Erin E. O'Brien. 2009. "You Got It, So When Do You Flaunt It?" *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 38 (3):358-283. (Posted on D2L)
- Milgram, Stanley. 1965. "Some Conditions of Obedience and Disobedience to Authority." *Human Relations* 18 (1): 57-76. (Posted on D2L)
- Singal, Jesse. 2015. "Michael LaCour Probably Fabricated a Document About Research Integrity." *New York Magazine Science of Us blog*. (June 1). (Posted on D2L).

Important dates:

- Homework #1 due (Sept. 13)

Week 3 – Measurement (Sept. 18, 20)

Topics: Independent and Dependent variables, Hypothesis formation

Readings:

- Brians et al., chapters 2, 5-7

Week 4 – Qualitative research (Sept. 25, 27, 29)

Topics: Participant observation, ethnography, interviews, content analysis, coding

Readings:

- Brians et al. chapters 10, 14, 19-21
- Coy, Patrick G. 2002. "Negotiating Identity and Danger Under the Gun: Consensus Decision Making on Peace Brigades International Teams." In *Consensus Decision Making, Northern Ireland and Indigenous Movements, Volume 24*. Oxford, England: Emerald Publishing, 85-122. (Posted on D2L).
- Geertz, Clifford. 2005. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." *Daedalus (Fall)* 56-86. (Posted on D2L).
- Gerring, John. 2004. "What is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?" *American Political Science Review* (May), 341-354. (Posted on D2L).
- Walsh, Katherine Cramer. 2009. "Scholars as Citizens: Studying Public Opinion through

Ethnography.” In Ed Schatz (ed.), *Political Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 165-182. (Posted on D2L).

Lab:

- Coding qualitative data

Homework:

- Homework #2-Qualitative research exercise

Week 5 – Bibliographic research, literature reviews, forming hypotheses (Oct. 2, 4)

Topics: How to formulate a hypothesis, developing a research question, writing a literature review

Readings:

- Brians et al., chapters 3-4

Important dates:

- Homework #2 due (Oct. 4)

Lab:

- Searching for scholarly literature using the library’s system.

Week 6 – Central tendency, sampling (Oct. 9, 11)

Topics: Measures of central tendency, frequency distributions, data dispersion, sampling

Readings:

- Brians et al., chapters 7, 16

Important dates:

- Research question due (Oct. 11)

Lab:

- Working with data in SPSS

Week 7 – Sampling, midterm review and exam (Oct. 16, 18)

Topics: Sampling

Readings:

- Brians et al., chapter 7

Important dates:

- Midterm review (Oct. 16)
- Midterm exam (Oct. 18)
- Homework #3 due

Week 8 – Surveys, visualizing data, descriptive statistics (Oct. 23, 25)

Topics: Types of surveys, how to conduct surveys, presenting data, interpreting cross-tabs

Readings:

- Brians et al., chapters 8, 15

Lab:

- Visualizing data, interpretation

Homework:

- Homework #4-Central tendency, visualizing data, interpretation

Week 9 – Relationships between variables (Oct. 30, Nov. 1)

Topics: Measuring relationships for different types of variables, statistical significance

Readings:

- Brians et al., chapter 17

Important dates:

- Homework #4 due (Nov. 1)

Lab:

- Chi-square, t-tests, gamma in SPSS

Homework:

- Homework #5-T-tests

Week 10 – Univariate regression (Nov. 6, 8)

Topics: Univariate regression, interpreting data

Readings:

- Brians et al, chapter 19

Lab:

- Regression in SPSS

Homework:

- Homework assignment #6-Chi square

Important dates:

- Literature review due (Nov. 6)
- Homework #5 due (Nov. 15)

Week 11 – Multivariate regression (Nov. 13, 15)

Topics: Multivariate regression, interpreting data

Readings:

- Brians et al, chapter 19

Lab:

- Regression in SPSS

Homework:

- Homework assignment #7-Univariate regression

Important dates:

- Homework #6 due (Nov. 15)

Week 11 – Multivariate regression (Nov. 20)

Topics: Multivariate regression, interpreting data

Readings:

- Brians et al, chapter 19

Lab:

- Regression in SPSS

Homework:

- Homework assignment #8-Multivariate regression

Important dates:

- Homework #7 due (Nov. 20)
- No class Nov. 22 (Thanksgiving break)

Week 13 – Research paper (Nov. 27, 29)

Topics: Lab work on research paper

Lab:

- Work on research papers

Important dates:

- Homework #8 due (Nov. 29)

Week 14 – Research paper presentations (Dec. 4, 6)

Topics: Research paper presentations

Week 15 – Final review and exam (Dec. 11, 13)

Topics: Final review and exam

Important dates:

- Final review (Dec. 11)
- Research paper due (Dec. 11)
- Final exam (5:45 p.m. – 7:45 p.m., Dec. 13)

Grading Standards for Written Assignments

A – OUTSTANDING. An "A" essay or test is clearly written and contains no grammatical errors. It demonstrates mastery of the relevant material and offers significant insight into the topic at hand.

B – GOOD. A "B" essay or test is clearly written but may contain a very few grammatical errors. It clearly relates the facts, gives sound analysis, and provides some interesting insight.

C – MEDIOCRE. A "C" essay or test is clearly written but may contain some grammatical mistakes. It adequately relates the facts and offers some analysis, although it probably does not offer much insight.

D – POOR. A "D" essay or test is intelligible but probably contains some serious grammatical errors. It often relates the facts poorly, offers little analysis, and provides no real insight.

F – UNACCEPTABLE. An "F" essay or test is poorly written and makes no coherent argument. It struggles to relate the facts and offers little or no analysis. It often creates confusion instead of providing insight.