

## Political Science 239: Research Methods

Dickinson College, Fall 2016  
TF 1:30-2:45, Denny – 104

Professor Sarah Niebler

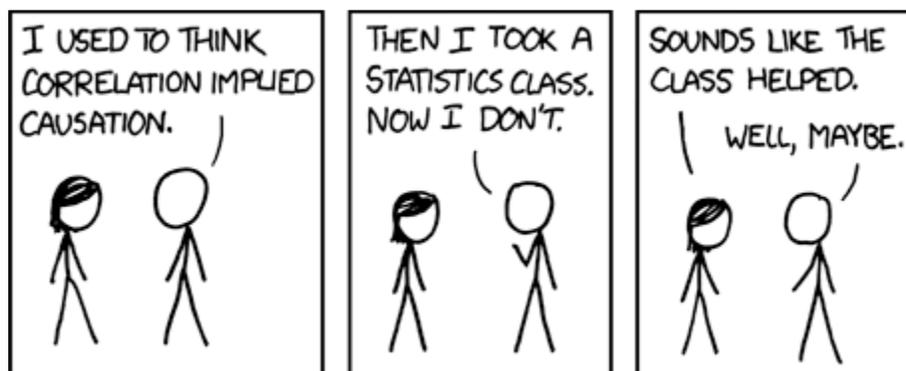
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Source: xkcd (<http://xkcd.com/552/>)

### Course Description

How do we know what we know about political, social, and economic events? How can we conduct research to expand the frontiers of our knowledge, understand the forces that drive outcomes, and contribute to theoretical understanding and public policy debates? How can we answer questions, resolve puzzles, and explain political phenomena?

This course provides an introduction to research design, research methodologies, and data analysis in political science. It will introduce an empirical approach to studying politics, the basics of causal inference, and many of the major methods and approaches used in scholarly social science research. Students will develop the tools necessary to ask interesting and important questions, generate and test theories and hypotheses, choose cases and measure concepts, collect and analyze data, and present results.

Learning to conduct research is a hands-on process, and requires active engagement. Everything we do in this course will be structured around developing students' ability to understand approaches to research. The assignments are set up so that students can apply the course material to their own research topics. My goal is for students to utilize their projects from this course as a launching point for their own independent research projects in social science disciplines.

## Learning Objectives

1. Students will use the language of empirical social science research to develop their own causal research questions and conduct literature reviews on topics of their choosing.
2. Students will consider the discuss multiple social scientific ways they might begin to answer the question they posed, thinking specifically about strengths and weaknesses of these multiple approaches.
3. Students will analyze and present quantitative information in a compelling and accessible way using computer software such as Excel and SPSS.

## Course Materials

There is one required book for the course (available at the bookstore):

Halperin, Sandra and Oliver Heath. 2012. *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Additional readings are available either on Moodle or through the library's online databases.

## Requirements and Grading

Active participation in course discussion is an essential element of the course, and will be critical to successfully learning the material. Students will learn the methods of political research by directly engaging with these methods and constantly thinking about (and discussing) the importance of different elements, the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches, and the way knowledge can be created about political topics. I expect students to answer questions that are posed, ask questions about concepts that are not clear, (respectfully) challenge viewpoints that are presented, and think critically. Attendance alone with little or no contribution or engagement will only earn you approximately a C in participation.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond participation, your grade will be based on several written assignments and three problem sets. The relative weight and due date of each component is as follows:

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Percent of Overall Grade</b>	<b>Due Date(s)</b>
Attendance and Participation	10%	
Research Question	5%	September 13
Literature Review	15%	October 14
Exit Poll Participation and Engagement	5%	November 8
Methodological Approach Papers	20% (5% each)	September 30 October 7 October 21 November 1
Problem Sets	25% (~8% each)	November 18 November 29 December 6
Final Paper	20%	December 16 @ 12:00 p.m.

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<sup>1</sup> I recognize that some students are hesitant to speak in front of class. If this is the case, please come talk with me during office hours early in the semester.

The *Research Question* assignment will ask you to develop your own empirically-testable causal research question and think about its substantive importance to political science (or a closely-related field). The *Literature Review* will ask you to examine the current status of the scholarly field with respect to the question you have raised. (What have other scholars found? How have they gone about studying their questions? How could you imagine adding to that scholarly conversation? The *Methodological Approach* papers will ask you to think through how you might use multiple methods to address your question. How would you conduct your study? What variables would you need to measure? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach as it pertains to your question? Since there is a presidential election this fall, we will be conducting an exit poll as part of the class. Your participation is required and will factor into your grade. We will use the data resulting from the exit poll to learn how to perform analysis of quantitative data using statistical software (SPSS). The *Problem Sets* will assess your ability to do this type of analysis. Finally, your final paper will be a revision of EITHER your methodological approach papers or an extension of your problem sets.

Prompts and further instructions for each of the assignments will be handed out in class at least a week before each assignment is due.

Final letter grades will be assigned in the following way:

A = 93 – 100	B- = 80 – 82	D = 60 – 69
A- = 90 – 92	C+ = 77 – 79	F = 0 – 59
B+ = 87 – 89	C = 73 – 76	
B = 83 – 86	C- = 70 – 72	

### Academic Integrity

From Dickinson College's Community Standards... "Respect for ideas — our own and others' — is a hallmark of academic integrity. We show respect by acknowledging when we have used another's words or ideas in our work. We expect others to acknowledge when they use our ideas or words in their work. Students are expected to do their own work on quizzes, papers, examinations, class assignments, etc. Normally, a paper may be submitted in fulfillment of an assignment in only one course. Exceptions require permission from the instructors. Collaboration must be noted in writing and requires the consent of all instructors."

([http://www.dickinson.edu/info/20273/dean\\_of\\_students/867/community\\_standards/2](http://www.dickinson.edu/info/20273/dean_of_students/867/community_standards/2))

With respect to the research question, literature review, and methodological approach papers, you will need to cite all of your sources. Learning how to do this is one of the goals of the course, and as such, we will discuss ways of doing this before your first assignment is due. If you have any questions about what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, please feel free to ask. We will talk more specifically about cheating as it pertains to problem sets later in the semester.

### Accommodating Students with Disabilities

Dickinson College makes reasonable academic accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students requesting accommodations must make their request and provide appropriate documentation to the Office of Disability Services (ODS) in Dana Hall, Suite 106.

Because classes change every semester, eligible students must obtain a new accommodation letter from Director Marni Jones every semester and review this letter with their professors so the accommodations can be implemented. The Director of ODS is available by appointment to answer questions and discuss any implementation issues you may have. ODS proctoring is managed by Susan Frommer (717-254-8107 or [proctoring@dickinson.edu](mailto:proctoring@dickinson.edu)). Address general inquiries to 717-245-1734 or e-mail [disabilityservices@dickinson.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@dickinson.edu). For more information, go to [www.dickinson.edu/ODS](http://www.dickinson.edu/ODS).

I am committed to including all students in this course and am happy to discuss accommodations with students, provided that this conversation happens **early** in the semester and definitely before any papers are due or exams are scheduled.

### Technology in the Classroom

For some portions of this class, we will be meeting in this room and for others, we will be meeting in a computer lab. Lab computers have specific software loaded on them that we will need in order to conduct some of our data analysis. For this class, it is up to you as to whether or not you want to use a computer to take notes or whether you want to take notes by hand. A recent study conducted by psychologists Pam Mueller and Daniel Oppenheimer shows that students who take notes on a computer do less well answering questions than do students who take notes by hand (<http://www.vox.com/2014/6/4/5776804/note-taking-by-hand-versus-laptop>).

With respect to audio recording, however, Pennsylvania is a “two-party consent” state, meaning that it is a crime to “intercept or record a telephone call or conversation **unless all parties to the conversation consent**” (<http://www.dmlp.org/legal-guide/pennsylvania/pennsylvania-recording-law>). Practically, what this means is that you should not be using any device to record class lectures or discussions. If a student with an accommodation from ODS is permitted to record class, all members of the class will be informed, but the student doing the recording will not be identified; students with ODS accommodations agree to strict guidelines with respect to how they use class recordings.

### Outline of the Course

#### **I: The Scientific Study of Politics and *What is Research?***

August 30 – Course Overview and Syllabus; No Reading

September 2 – Political Research, Chapters 1 and 3, pages 1-24 and 53-77

September 6 – Political Research, Chapter 5, pages 101-128

September 9 – “Beginning the Research Process” from Political Science Research Methods (Available on Moodle); “Making Sense of Scholarly Answers to your Research Question: Writing the Literature Review” from Writing a Research Paper in Political Science (Available on Moodle)

September 13 – **Research Question Due**; Library Session with Anna Kozłowska, ICC2

September 16 – “The Building Blocks of Social Scientific Research” from Political Science Research Methods (Available on Moodle)

## II: Methods of Political Research

### Experimental Research

September 20 – Political Research, Chapter 8, pages 187-201

September 23 –

- Bhavnani, Rikhil R. 2009. "Do Electoral Quotas Work After They Are Withdrawn: Evidence from a Natural Experiment in India." *American Political Science Review* 103(1): 23-35.
- Broockman, David E. and Donald P. Green. 2014. "Do Online Advertisements Increase Political Candidates' Name Recognition or Favorability? Evidence from Randomized Field Experiments." *Political Behavior* 36: 263-289.

### Comparative Research/Case Studies

September 27 – Political Research, Chapter 9, pages 202-229

September 30 – **Methods Approach Paper #1 (Experiments) Due;**

- Gerring, John, Peter Kingstone, Matthew Lange, and Aseema Sinha. 2011. "Democracy, History, and Economic Performance: A Case-Study Approach." *World Development* 39(10): 1735-1748.
- Posner, Daniel N. 2004. "The Political Salience of Cultural Differences: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi". *American Political Science Review* 98(4): 529-545.

### Surveys

October 4 – Political Research, Chapter 10, pages 232-252

October 7 – **Methods Approach Paper #2 (Comparative) Due;**

- Harrison, Brian F. and Melissa R. Michelson. 2015. "God and Marriage: The Impact of Religious Identity Priming on Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Marriage." *Social Science Quarterly* 96(5): 1411-1423.
- Prior, Markus. 2005. "News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science* 49(3): 557-592.

### Interviews and Focus Groups

October 11 – Political Research, Chapter 11, pages 253-286

October 14 – **Literature Review Due;**

- Kingdon, John W. "Introduction" and "Appendix B" from Congressmen's Voting Decisions, 3rd edition. pages 3-25 and 307-310 (Available on Moodle).
- Walsh, Katherine Cramer. 2012. "Putting Inequality in Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective." *American Political Science Review* 106(3): 517-532.

### Ethnography and Participant Observation

October 18 – FALL PAUSE

October 21 – **Methods Approach Paper #3 (Surveys OR Interviews/Focus Groups) Due;**  
Political Research, Chapter 12, pages 287-308

- Geertz, Clifford. 1972. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" (Available on Moodle).

## Content Analysis

October 25 – Political Research, Chapter 13, pages 309-337

October 28 –

- Edy, Jill A. and Patrick C. Meirick. 2007. “Wanted, Dead or Alive: Media Frames, Frame Adoption, and Support for the War in Afghanistan.” *Journal of Communication* 57: 119-141.
- Pomper, Gerald. 1967. “‘If Elected, I Promise’: American Party Platforms.” *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 11(3): 318-352.

### **III: Quantitative Statistical Analysis**

November 1 – **Methods Approach Paper #4 (Ethnography/Participant Observation OR Content Analysis) Due;** "Probability and Statistical Inference" from The Fundamentals of Political Science Research (Available on Moodle) and "Sampling" from Political Science Research Methods (Available on Moodle)

November 4 – Final Preparation for Election Day Exit Poll; Reading TBA

November 8 – ELECTION DAY; Work Exit Poll Shifts; No Class Meeting

November 11 – Political Research, Chapter 14, pages 338-365

November 15 – Workshop Day; No Reading

November 18 – **Problem Set #1 Due;** Political Research, Chapter 15, pages 366-390

November 22 – Introduction to Geographic Information Systems (GIS); “Geographic Information Systems and the Spatial Dimensions of American Politics” (Available on Moodle)

November 25 – THANKSGIVING BREAK

November 29 – **Problem Set #2 Due;** Political Research, Chapter 16, pages 391-419

December 2 – Workshop Day; No Reading

December 6 – **Problem Set #3 Due**

December 9 – Critiquing Research in the Real World; “Science isn’t Broken”

(<http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/science-isnt-broken/>)

Friday, December 16 at 5:00 p.m. – **Final Papers Due**