

Political Science 239: Research Methods

Dickinson College, Fall 2019
TR 10:30-11:45, Denny – 112

Professor Sarah Niebler

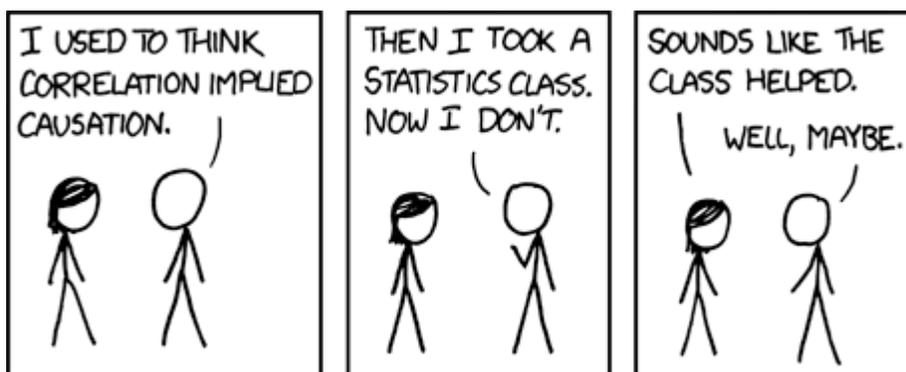
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Office Hours: Tuesday 1:30-3:00; Wednesday 1:30-3:00; and by appointment



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 designed such 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 Stata.

Methods Designated Learning Objectives

POSC 239 fulfills the political science department's research methods requirement, ensuring that all political science majors have exposure to both substantive issues in political science and the methods used in political science research. Research Methods will address all four of the political science research methods learning objectives below:

1. Identify and understand the method or methods employed by authors of key texts used in the course (among a wide range of possibilities). That is, the student will understand not only what an author is presenting as argument and evidence, but also how the method or methods used inform and structure the result.
2. Understand how one or more of the methods used in the study of politics might be put to the task of answering research questions germane to the subject matter being explored in a course.
3. Understand broad aspects of research design, including how different methodological approaches are better suited for answering particular research questions and how likely research projects logically unfold.
4. Demonstrate the ability to apply a research method (or research methods) in an assignment for the course

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. Course attendances is not optional, however, I recognize that sometimes things come up, so you may have **two** absences throughout the course of the semester without penalty. Missing more than two will result in a reduction of your attendance and participation grade.

Simply showing up for class, however, is not enough to guarantee a high participation grade. 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.¹

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:

Assignment	Percent of Overall Grade	Due Date(s)
Attendance and Participation	10%	
Research Question	5%	September 17
Literature Review	20%	October 15
Methodological Approach Papers	25% (~6% each)	October 3 October 10 October 24 November 7
Problem Sets	20% (10% each)	November 21 December 10
Final Paper	20%	December 18 @ 5:00 p.m.

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? In the final part of the course, we will use social scientific data to learn how to perform analysis of quantitative data using statistical software (Stata). The *Problem Sets* will assess your ability to do this type of analysis. Finally, your final paper will be either a revision of 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	

¹ 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.

Quantitative Reasoning Center

Dickinson College provides additional support for students taking quantitative reasoning courses through the Quantitative Reasoning (QR) Center. The QR tutors assist students with quantitative reasoning across the curriculum and, sometimes, for specific courses.

The general quantitative areas that all of the QR tutors can assist students with are:

- Organizing an Excel spreadsheet
- Making graphs in Excel
- Using a scientific calculator
- Computing statistics with or without a graphing calculator
- Analyzing data sets
- Calculating unit conversions
- Understanding the order of operations
- Reviewing for the quantitative portion of the GRE.Y

You can make an appointment with a QR tutor online by visiting WCONLINE:

<https://dickinson.mywconline.com/>. If you'd like to search for a QR tutor specific to POSC 239, use the drop-down menu under "limit to" at the top of the scheduler and select POSC 239. This will restrict the tutor list and schedule to only those tutors approved for this course. If no tutor appears for POSC 239, tutors in the following disciplines will likely be able to help: economics, psychology, international business and management, and mathematics. The QR Center is located on the Main Floor of the Waidner-Spahr Library, directly across from the Norman M. Eberly Multilingual Writing Center. For more information or if you have any questions, please visit the QR Center webpage: http://www.dickinson.edu/info/20525/quantitative_reasoning_center/2962/quantitative_reasoning_center

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)

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 values diverse types of learners and is committed to ensuring that each student is afforded equitable access to participate in all learning experiences. If you have (or think you may have) a learning difference or a disability – including a mental health, medical, or physical impairment – that would hinder your access to learning or demonstrating knowledge in this class, please contact Access and Disability Services (ADS). They will confidentially explain the accommodation request process and the type of documentation that Dean and Director Marni Jones

will need to determine your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. To learn more about available supports, go to www.dickinson.edu/access, email access@dickinson.edu, call (717) 245-1734, or go to ADS in Old West (lower level), Room 005.

I am fully committed to work with all students needing accommodations in my courses. If you've already been granted accommodations at Dickinson, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can meet to review your Accommodation Letter and complete your Blue Forms. If you will need test proctoring from ADS, remember that you will need to provide them with at least one week's notice.

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, 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?*

September 3

- Introduction to the Course, No Reading

Objectivity and Values

September 5

- Political Research, Chapters 1 and (part of) 3, pages 1-24 and 53-60 (middle)

Research Questions

September 10

- “From Topics to Questions” Chapter 3 from The Craft of Research, pages 40-55 (Available on Moodle)
- Political Research, Chapter 5, pages 101-128

Theory and Hypotheses

September 12

- “The Building Blocks of Social Scientific Research” Chapter 4 from Political Science Research Methods, pages 102-125 (Available on Moodle)

Scholarly Sources and Literature Reviews

September 17

- **Preliminary Research Question Due**
- Hoover Green, Amelia. 2013. "How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps" (Available on Moodle)
- Rosenberg, Karen. 2011. "Reading Games: Strategies for Reading Scholarly Sources." From Writing Spaces. (Available on Moodle)
- Library Session with Ian Boucher (in our classroom)

September 19

- "Literature Reviews," From Writing in Political Science, pages 60-67 (Available on Moodle)
- "Using Sources" Chapter 6 from The Craft of Research, pages 90-107 (Available on Moodle)

II: Methods of Political Science Research

Experiments

September 24

- Political Research, Chapter 8, pages 187-201

September 26

- Bauer, Nichole. 2017. "The Effects of Counterstereotypic Gender Strategies on Candidate Evaluations." *Political Psychology* 38(3): 279-295.
- 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.

Comparative Research/Case Studies

October 1

- Political Research, Chapter 9, pages 202-229

October 3

- **Methods Approach Paper #1 (Experiments) Due**
- Brady, Henry. 2010. "Data-Set Observations versus Causal-Process Observations: the 2000 U.S. Presidential Election" in Rethinking Social Inquiry eds. Henry Brady and David Collier. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. (Available on Moodle)
- McCauley, John. 2013. "Economic Development Strategies and Communal Violence in Africa: The cases of Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana." *Comparative Political Studies* 46 (2): 182-211.

Surveys

October 8

- Political Research, Chapter 10, pages 232-252
- Enten, Harry. 2017. "Fake Polls Are A Real Problem" (Available via FiveThirtyEight at: https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/fake-polls-are-a-real-problem/?ex_cid=story-twitter)

October 10

- **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 15

- Political Research, Chapter 11, pages 253-286
- **Literature Review Due**

October 17

- 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 22

- **Fall Pause, No Class**

October 24

- **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 29

- Political Research, Chapter 13, pages 309-337

October 31

- 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 Study of Politics

Descriptive Statistics

November 5

- Political Research, *Part of* Chapter 14, pages 338-355 (middle)

November 7

- **Methods Approach Paper #4 (Content Analysis) Due**
- **No Class, Professor Niebler at Conference**

Probability and Statistical Inference

November 12

- Political Research, *Part of* Chapter 14, pages 355-365

November 14

- "Probability and Statistical Inference" from The Fundamentals of Political Science Research (Available on Moodle)

November 19

- Review Readings/Notes from November 5-November 14
- Workshop Day

Bivariate Analysis

November 21

- **Problem Set #1 Due**
- Political Research, Chapter 15, pages 366-369 (middle)

November 26

- Political Research, Chapter 15, pages 382-390

November 28

- **No Class, Thanksgiving Break**

December 3

- Political Research, Chapter 15, pages 369-381

December 5

- Review Readings/Notes from November 21-December 3
- Workshop Day

Critiquing Stats in the World and Applying What We've Learned

December 10

- **Problem Set #2 Due**
- Reading to be announced

December 12

- Reading to be announced

Wednesday, December 18 at 5:00 p.m.

- **Final Paper Due (upload to Moodle)**