

Political Science 239: Research Methods

Dickinson College, Fall 2020
Tuesday & Thursday 10:30-11:45

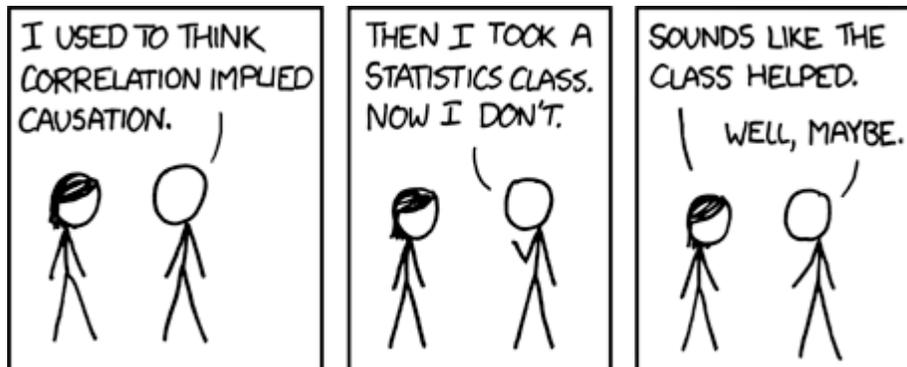
Professor Sarah Niebler

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Office Hours: Monday 10:00-11:00; Thursday 1:00-2:00; and by appointment

Zoom Link for Class and Office Hours: [REDACTED]



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 collection, management, analysis, and visualization 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 multiple social scientific methodologies they might use to begin to answer the question they posed, thinking specifically about strengths and weaknesses of these multiple approaches.

3. Students will collect, analyze, and present quantitative information in compelling and accessible ways.

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 results.
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:

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

You DO NOT need an online access code and you may purchase any edition of the book you choose. Additional readings are available on Moodle.

Requirements and Grading

Active participation in this course is essential. Students learn the methods of political research by directly engaging with these methods and 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, engage viewpoints that are presented, and think critically.

It is my hope that students will be able to participate in synchronous zoom sessions throughout the semester, although we will not meet both times per week for the entire semester. If you know you will not be able to attend synchronous sessions, please let me know and we can discuss other ways for you to participate in the class. I will provide you with questions to guide your reading, which should help you prepare for class discussion. I am hopeful students will be able to participate in class largely with their cameras on, but you are not required to have your video on during class. We will talk about participation and how best to engage in class discussion on the first day of the semester.

We will talk about all graded assignments in-depth on the first day of class and throughout the semester. Guidelines for all assignments can also be found on the course Moodle page. The relative weight and due date of each component is as follows:

Assignment	Percent of Overall Grade	Due Date(s)
Participation and Engagement	10%	
Research Question	5%	September 3
Methods Papers	4 @ 7.5% each 30% total	Due by FRIDAY at 11:59 p.m. September 18 September 25 October 9 October 22
Literature Review Check-In	5%	September 11
Literature Review	20%	October 2
Quantitative Data Papers	4 @ 7.5% each 30% total	Due by FRIDAY at 11:59 p.m. October 30 November 6 November 20 (Wednesday) December 2 @ 5:00 p.m.

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	

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

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. This semester, all QR tutoring sessions will be conducted remotely. 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)

Students must complete their own work. You may discuss your ideas with your colleagues, but the work you hand in must be your own. In everything you write in this course, you must properly cite all your sources. I prefer for you to use Chicago style with in-text citations (as opposed to footnotes). If you do not know how to do this, please consult the library's research guides and/or the library liaison for political science, Ian Boucher (boucheri@dickinson.edu). If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, please ask sooner rather than later.

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/ADS or email access@dickinson.edu.

If you've already been granted accommodations at Dickinson, please follow the guidance at www.dickinson.edu/AccessPlan for disclosing the accommodations for which you are eligible and scheduling a meeting with me as soon as possible so that we can discuss your accommodations and finalize your Access Plan.

Additionally, ADS created some resources specifically dealing with the remote learning environment, which can be found here: <https://www.dickinson.edu/SOAR>.

Please know that I am committed to working with all students so they can succeed in this course. I encourage you to contact me via email or come to office hours if you have any questions or concerns.

Covid-19 and the Fall Semester

These are extraordinary times in the country and the world, and this course is meeting remotely because of these circumstances. I know this is not the semester you imagined, but I hope we can work together to make the best of a challenging situation. Please know that I value your health and well-being and am happy to work with you if unexpected things arise throughout the semester. I do

ask you to communicate with me if possible. I do not expect you to disclose particular circumstances of any challenges you are facing (although I am happy to try to recommend resources as I'm able) but I cannot work with you if we are not in touch.

Outline of the Course

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

August 18 – Introductions and Course Expectations

August 20 – Objectivity, Values, and the Ethics of Social Science Research

- “Political Research” and (part of) “Objectivity and Values” (pages 53-60) from Political Research

August 25 – Research Questions

- “From Topics to Questions,” Chapter 3 from The Craft of Research
- (Part of) “Asking Questions: How to Find and Formulate Research Questions” from Political Research

August 27 – Theory and Hypotheses

- (Part of) “The Empirical Approach to Political Science” and (part of) “Hypotheses, Concepts, and Variables” from Political Science Research Methods

September 1 – Scholarly Sources and Literature Reviews

- “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)

September 3 – Literature Reviews, cont., and How to Read Scholarly Articles

- **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)

Unit II: Methods of Political Science Research

September 8 & 10 – Experimental Design

- **Literature Review Check-in Due**
- “Experimental Research” in Political Research
- Bauer, Nichole. 2017. “The Effects of Counterstereotypic Gender Strategies on Candidate Evaluations.” *Political Psychology* 38(3): 279-295

September 15 & 17 – Comparative Research and Case Studies

- **Methods Paper #1 (Experimental Design) Due**
- “Comparative Research” in Political Research
- 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

September 22 & 24 – Surveys

- **Methods Paper #2 (Comparative Research and Case Studies) Due**
- “Surveys” in Political Research
- 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

September 29 & October 1 – Interviews and Focus Groups

- **Literature Review Paper Due**
- “Interviewing and Focus Groups” in Political Research
- Walsh, Katherine Cramer. 2012. "Putting Inequality in Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective." *American Political Science Review* 106(3): 517-532

October 6 – Fall Pause, No Class

October 8 – Ethnography & Participant Observation

- **Methods Paper #3 (Survey OR Interviews and Focus Groups) Due**
- “Ethnography and Participant Observation” in Political Research
- Geertz, Clifford. 1972. “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight.”

October 13 & 15 – Content Analysis

- “Textual Analysis” in Political Research
- Bradshaw, Samantha, Philip N. Howard, Bence Kollanyi, and Lisa-Maria Neudert. 2020. “Sourcing and Automation of Political News and Information over Social Media in the United States, 2016-2018.” *Political Communication* 37(2): 173-193

Unit III: Quantitative Study of Politics

October 20 – Measurement and Data Sources

- “Measurement” from Political Science Research Methods

October 22 – Workshop Time

- **Methods Paper #4 (Ethnography OR Content Analysis) Due**

October 27 – Descriptive/Univariate Statistics and Charts

- “Quantitative Analysis” from Political Research

October 29 – Workshop Time

- **Data Paper #1 (Measurement and Data Sources) Due**

November 3 – Election Day, No Class

November 5 – Election Debrief

- Read blog posts as assigned
- **Data Paper #2 (Descriptive/Univariate Statistics and Charts) Due**

November 10 – Multivariate Statistics and Charts

- “Bivariate Analysis” from Political Research

November 12 – Workshop Time

November 17 – Workshop Time

November 19 – Critiquing Research

- **Data Paper #3 (PivotTables and Bivariate Stats and Charts about Data) Due**

November 24 – Critiquing Research, cont., and Wrap-Up

- **Data Paper #4 (Teach Yourself a New Skill) Due – may be handed in at any point before Wednesday, December 2 @ 5:00p.m.**