

# Political Science 239: Research Methods

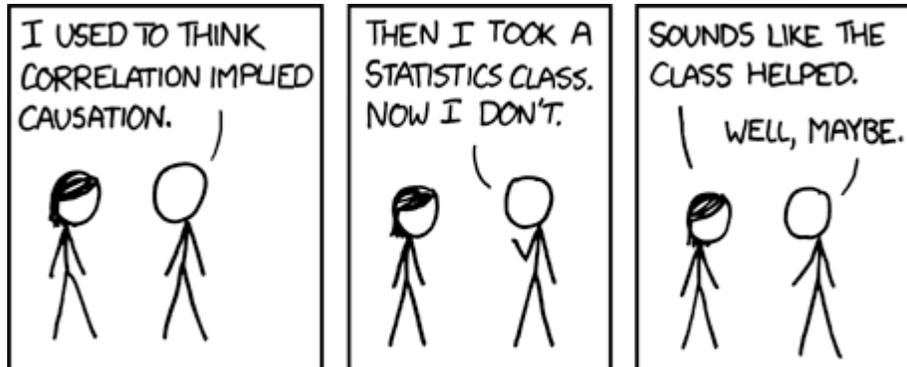
Dickinson College, Fall 2021  
Tuesday & Thursday, 10:30-11:45  
Denny 112 (computer lab)

Professor Sarah Niebler

Office: Denny Hall 302

Email: [nieblers@dickinson.edu](mailto:nieblers@dickinson.edu)

Student Office Hours: Monday 10:00-11:30; Tuesday 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 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. 2020. *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills, Third Edition*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

You DO NOT need an online access code. Page numbers correspond to the third edition, but if you have a previous edition, it should be sufficient. Talk with me if you have any questions, especially when partial chapters are assigned. 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, I will ask you to think about and discuss the importance of different elements of research, 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. While it is my hope that students will attend in-person class meetings, please know that I would prefer you NOT to do so if you are feeling sick. It is incumbent upon all of us to keep one another healthy. The best thing to do if you miss class is to talk with a classmate about what you missed and get notes from them. If you miss multiple class meetings in a row, please get in touch with me so we can figure out the best path forward and make sure you do not fall too far behind.

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 17
Methods Papers	4 @ 7.5% each 30% total	<b>Due by FRIDAY at 11:59 p.m.</b> October 1 October 8 October 22 November 5
Literature Review Check-In	5%	September 24
Literature Review	20%	October 15
Quantitative Data Papers	4 @ 7.5% each 30% total	<b>Due by FRIDAY at 11:59 p.m.</b> November 12 November 23 December 2 (Wednesday) December 15 @ 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	

*A note on due dates...*As you can see, there are a lot of individual assignments for this class, but most of them are short and based specifically on what we learned the previous week (or two). I am willing to be flexible with due dates **provided you talk with me** ahead of the due date of the assignment.

### 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. 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](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 for ideas 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." ([https://www.dickinson.edu/download/downloads/id/963/community\\_standards.pdf](https://www.dickinson.edu/download/downloads/id/963/community_standards.pdf))

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](mailto: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](http://www.dickinson.edu/ADS), email [access@dickinson.edu](mailto:access@dickinson.edu), call (717) 245-1734, or go to the ADS office in Room 005 of Old West, Lower Level (aka "the OWLL").

If you've already been granted accommodations at Dickinson, please follow the guidance at [www.dickinson.edu/AccessPlan](http://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. If test proctoring will be needed from ADS, remember that we will need to complete your Access Plan in time to give them at least one week's advance notice.

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 2021 Semester

While it is my sincere hope that we will be able to conduct this entire semester in person, we all now know how quickly things can change. First and foremost, 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 when 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 am 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 31 – Introductions and Course Expectations

September 2 – Objectivity, Values, and the Ethics of Social Science Research

- “Political Research” and (part of) “Objectivity and Values” (pages 64-73) from Political Research

September 7 – 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

September 9 – Theory and Hypotheses

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

September 14 – 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 16 – Literature Reviews, cont., and How to Read Scholarly Articles

- **Library Session**
- 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)
- **Research Question Due by Friday, September 17 at 11:59 p.m.**

### **Unit II: Methods of Political Science Research**

September 21 – Experimental Design

- “Experimental Research” in Political Research

September 23 – Experimental Design in Practice

- Bauer, Nichole. 2017. “The Effects of Counterstereotypic Gender Strategies on Candidate Evaluations.” *Political Psychology* 38(3): 279-295
- **Literature Review Check-in Due by Friday, September 24 at 11:59 p.m.**

September 28 – Comparative Research and Case Studies

- “Comparative Research” in Political Research

September 30 – Comparative Research and Case Studies in Practice

- 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
- **Methods Paper #1 (Experimental Design) Due by Friday, October 1 at 11:59 p.m.**

October 5 – Survey Research

- “Surveys” in Political Research

October 7 – Survey Research in Practice

- 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
- **Methods Paper #2 (Comparative Research and Case Studies) Due by Friday, October 8 at 11:59 p.m.**

October 12 – Interviews and Focus Groups

- “Interviewing and Focus Groups” in Political Research

October 14 – Interviews and Focus Groups in Practice

- Walsh, Katherine Cramer. 2012. "Putting Inequality in Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective." *American Political Science Review* 106(3): 517-532
- **Literature Review Paper Due by Friday, October 15 at 11:59 p.m.**

October 19 – Fall Pause, No Class

October 21 – Ethnography and Participant Observation

- “Ethnography and Participant Observation” in Political Research
- Geertz, Clifford. 1972. “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight.”
- **Methods Paper #3 (Survey OR Interviews and Focus Groups) Due by Friday, October 22 at 11:59 p.m.**

October 26 – Content Analysis

- “Textual Analysis” in Political Research

October 28 – Content Analysis in Practice

- 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 Data Analysis**

November 2 – Measurement and Data, **ELECTION DAY – Vote if you are eligible to do so!**

- “Measurement” from Political Science Research Methods

November 4 – Workshop Time

- **Methods Paper #4 (Ethnography OR Content Analysis) Due by Friday, November 5 at 11:59 p.m.**

November 9 – Descriptive/Univariate Statistics and Charts

- “Quantitative Analysis” from Political Research

November 11 – Workshop Time

- **Data Paper #1 (Measurement and Data Sources) Due by Friday, November 12 at 11:59 p.m.**

November 16 – Bivariate Statistics and Charts

- “Bivariate Analysis” from Political Research

November 18 – Workshop Time

November 23 – Workshop Time

- **Data Paper #2 (Descriptive/Univariate Statistics and Charts) Due by Tuesday November 23 at 11:59 p.m.**

November 25 – Thanksgiving Break, No Class

November 30 – Multivariate Statistics and Charts

- “Multivariate Statistics” from Political Research

December 1 – Workshop Time

- **Data Paper #3 (PivotTables and Bivariate Stats and Charts about Data) Due by Friday, December 2 at 11:59 p.m.**

December 7 – Critiquing Research

December 9 – 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 15 @ 5:00p.m.**