

**Scope of Political Science: Introduction to Research Methods**  
**POLS 670 – Fall 2010**

**Professor:** Jason Gainous

**Office Location:** 406 Ford Hall

**Class Meetings:** Tuesday 5:30-8:15 PM Ford Hall 305

**Office Hours:** Tuesday and Thursday 1:00 PM-3:30 PM, and by appointment

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**Goal of the course**

Why do we call our discipline "political *science*"? What kinds of research do political scientists do, and how do they communicate that knowledge to one another? How do we know what we think we know? How do we measure political phenomena? How would we know if a new public policy "worked"? Why didn't the polls in last year's national election call any of the members of this seminar? How do we analyze data, and what are good data to analyze?

During the course of the semester, we will discuss these issues and others. Our discussions, the readings, various written assignments, the final exam, and the final research paper will facilitate your becoming intelligent consumers of political science research, as well as help you become producers of your own research. The skills that you develop in the course will help you understand the literature that you read in substantive seminars, help you evaluate that research, enable you to better understand the assumptions behind each research design, help you find published research and data archives on topics that interest you, and familiarize you with some of the techniques used in individual and aggregate level analysis.

My only assumption is that participants in the seminar are intelligent and motivated students. For many students, this will be an entirely different kind of course. Many good undergraduate lecture courses and graduate seminars require you to become knowledgeable about a field, such as Political Behavior, Public Policy, or International Relations. In this course, we are not focused on a particular field, but are more interested in understanding the methods that political scientists in all fields use to understand and build knowledge. Of course, new things can be both exciting and frightening. Any trepidation that you may have is best overcome by "feeling the fear, and doing it anyway." The excitement will come with the realization that this knowledge is empowering, in that it will enable you to find, read, and understand research on your own. You will also begin to produce this kind of research, which will give you a product of your own labors.

**Requirements**

In order to meet these goals, participants in the seminar will be required to

- **Attend and participate in seminar (10%).** Every person should come to seminar prepared to comment on the assigned readings, and help others to understand the concepts presented in the readings and assignments. Research is not a spectator sport, so

you should expect me to ask for your contributions on a regular basis. Some time in class will be devoted to lecture with PowerPoint slides (available on Blackboard), but your participation in this course is expected to be that of an "active learner". Discussion questions are provided below under Course Schedule. Be prepared to discuss each in the context of the week's reading. **Any absence from seminar requires a prompt explanation.** Multiple absences seriously jeopardize the prospect for successful completion of the course.

- **Write frequent weekly assignments (45% cumulative).** To facilitate participation, as abovementioned several discussion questions associated with the topics and readings from each week are included below in the Course Schedule. I will usually require you to respond to one of the questions of your choice with 1 page of written discussion. See the Course Schedule below for weeks requiring a written assignment. Weeks requiring a written assignment will include the following beneath the header "Weekly Discussion Questions": (be prepared to discuss all, respond to one for written assignment). Weeks requiring only that you be prepared to discuss the questions will include the following beneath the header: (be prepared to discuss all). I will collect these at the beginning of class for which the discussion questions correspond.
- **Write a Literature Review (10%).** Write a literature review that covers the literature pertinent to your proposed research project. Include at least 3 citations. Clearly, your final paper should include more but this gets you started. Your review should explain whether the ideas and methods represented in the articles are cumulative, and if so, how the ideas (or methods) from later articles were developed from ideas in earlier articles. **Due in class on October 19.**
- **Observe a public meeting (5%).** This can be any meeting of a council, committee, commission, local board, or any other public agency that you have the right to attend by virtue of your citizenship. Examples of acceptable meetings would be a city council meeting (<http://www.louisvilleky.gov/MetroCouncil/default.htm>), a candidate event, or an issue-based rally. Examples of unacceptable meetings are Student Government, its committees, other student or U of L groups, or neighborhood property owners association meetings. Write a short report based on your notes from your observations (1-3 pages). **Due in class on October 26.**
- **Write a Research Design/Paper (30%).** Each participant will be required to submit a research paper/design. Papers will be judged on readability, the appropriateness of the research question, the suitability of the design for that question, and (if appropriate) the feasibility of extending the analysis in an M.A. Thesis. **You must submit your proposed topic to me on September 28.** This proposal should include the research question and a list of sources. Guidelines for the paper will be posted on Blackboard. **Final paper is due on November 30.**

### Course Readings

- Johnson, Janet Buttolph and H. T. Reynolds with Jason D. Mycoff. 2008. *Political Science Research Methods*. Sixth Edition. CQ Press. **(JRM)**
- King Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton University Press. **(KKV)**

- You will also be required to access numerous journal articles, which are generally available electronically through access to the U of L Library website.
- Two books you will need are available on course reserve at the main desk of the Ekstrom Library. **Please do not take the book for the full two hours. Just make copies of the chapters you need.**

## Course Schedule

### Week 1 (August 24)

#### *Introduction*

- Basic Research Design
- Using the Internet (Political Science Abstracts, J-Stor, Social Science Citation Index)

### Week 2 (August 31)

*Is "Political Science" an Oxymoron?: An Introduction to Political Science Research Methods*

- JRM, Chapters 1 and 2
- KKV Chapter 1
- Bond, Jon R. 2007. "The Scientification of the Study of Politics: Some Observations on the Behavioral Evolution in Political Science." *Journal of Politics* 69 (4): 897-907.
- Lupia, Arthur. 2000. "Evaluating Political Science Research: Information for Buyers and Sellers." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 33 (1): 7-13.

### **Weekly Discussion Questions**

(be prepared to discuss all, respond to one for written assignment)

1. What specific aspects of politics interest you? Note: "international politics" or "American politics" is not a specific response. Think of questions you'd like to answer or hypotheses you'd like to test.
2. What are the characteristics of scientific inquiry?
3. In what respects are the social sciences different from the natural or physical sciences? In what respects are they similar?
4. Can any of the social sciences be described as "more scientific" than others? Which ones?
5. What obstacles do political scientists face in securing support for their research?
6. Why is knowledge uncertain?
7. What position do you take on the role of scientific inquiry in studying politics?

### Week 3 (September 7)

*Researchers as Theorists: Hypotheses, Concepts, and Variables*

- JRM, Chapter 3
- KKV, Chapter 2

- Hall, Melinda Gann. 1992. "Electoral-Politics and Strategic Voting in State Supreme Courts." *Journal of Politics* 54 (2): 427-446.
- Allison, Graham T. 1969. "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis." *American Political Science Review* 63 (3): 689-718.

### **Weekly Discussion Questions**

(be prepared to discuss all, respond to one for written assignment)

1. What is a paradigm? A theory? A model? An approach? Identify examples of each.
2. What features characterize good hypotheses?
3. What are concepts? Think of some examples of concepts. What are variables?
4. What are some of the "big questions" that confront political scientists? Try to think of a way to make a big question amenable to empirical analysis. (Many of you are going to need to do this in order to develop a manageable proposal.)
5. Identify the two models/theories in the articles. How do the models/theories differ from each other? What data are relevant to each model/theory? Single out a positive feature and a negative feature for each of the two models/theories.

### **Week 4 (September 14)**

*Researchers as Counters: Measurement*

- JRM, Chapter 4
- KKV, Chapter 5
- Gainous, Jason. 2008. "Who's Ambivalent and Who's Not? Ideology and Ambivalence about Social Welfare." *American Politics Research* 36 (2): 210-235.
- Jacoby, William G. 1999. "Levels of Measurement and Political Research: An Optimistic View." *American Journal of Political Science* 43: 271-301.
- Mainwaring, Scott, Daniel Brinks, and Anibal Perez-Linan. 2001. "Classifying Political Regimes in Latin America, 1945-1999." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 36 (1): 37-65.

### **Weekly Discussion Questions**

(be prepared to discuss all, respond to one for written assignment)

1. What is the relationship between a concept and an indicator?
2. What are good strategies for identifying the concepts relevant to your research topic?
3. What is the difference between reliability and validity?
4. What are the differences among face validity, content validity, and construct validity?
5. How can we assess the accuracy of our measurements?
6. What is measurement precision?
7. What is the advantage of having multiple indicators?
8. Mainwaring, et al. are concerned with developing a means to classify political regimes. How does Mainwaring, et al.'s definition of democracy differ from other scholars' definitions? How well do Mainwaring, et al.'s rules serve in classifying Latin American regimes? How does the performance of Mainwaring et al.'s measures compare to the performance of other scholars' measures?

9. Think of some ways to measure concepts relevant to your research topic. If you haven't started thinking about the relevant concepts, you are losing ground. In the meanwhile, how would you measure the following concepts: "public approval of the president"; "judicial activism"; "liberal," as in how a citizen might describe herself; "conservative," as in how we might describe a member of Congress; "democratic regime."

### **Week 5 (September 21)**

#### *Researchers as manipulators: Experiments*

- JRM, Chapter 5
- Kinder, Donald R., and Thomas R. Palfrey. 1993. "On Behalf of an Experimental Political Science." In *Experimental Foundations of Political Science*. Eds. Donald R. Kinder, and Thomas R. Palfrey. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press. pp. 1-39. (available on reserve at the library)
- Rhodebeck, Laurie, and Jason Gainous. 2010. "Framing Gay Rights Issues Using Egalitarian and Traditional Values." Presented at the *Midwest Political Science Association, Annual Meeting*, Chicago, IL (2010). (available on Blackboard)
- Clawson, Rosalee A. and Eric N. Waltenburg. 2003. "Support for a Supreme Court Affirmative Action Decision: A Story in Black and White." *American Politics Research* 31(3):251-279.

### **Weekly Discussion Questions**

(be prepared to discuss all, respond to one for written assignment)

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a true experimental design? How does this type of design permit us to draw sound causal inferences?
2. What is the difference between external validity and internal validity? How can an experimenter increase internal validity? How can an experimenter increase external validity?
3. What features distinguish experimental designs from nonexperimental designs?
4. What are the principal variations on nonexperimental design? How do the different types of nonexperimental designs compare to each other in the extent to which they allow us to draw sound causal inferences?
5. In reading the articles this week think about the following: a) Does the design allow for sound causal inferences? Are there threats to internal validity? b) Are there threats to external validity? Can we generalize from the findings?
6. What are some examples of topics that might lend themselves to experimental or quasi-experimental research?

### **Week 6 (September 28)**

#### *Researchers drawing inferences: Correlations, Causality and Case Studies*

- KKV, Chapter 3 and 6
- Dion, Douglas. 1998. "Evidence and Inference in the Comparative Case Study." *Comparative Politics* 30:127-146.

- Drury, A. Cooper, Richard Stuart Olson, and Douglas A. Van Belle. 2005. "The Politics of Humanitarian Aid: US Foreign Disaster Assistance, 1964-1995." *Journal of Politics* 67 (2): 454-473.
- Stratmann, Thomas and Martin Baur. 2002. "Plurality Rule, Proportional Representation, and the German Bundestag: How Incentives to Pork-Barrel Differ across Electoral Systems." *American Journal of Political Science* 46 (3): 506-514.
- Choi, C., C. C. Turner, and C. Volden. 2002. "Means, Motive, and Opportunity - Politics, Community Needs, and Community Oriented Policing Services Grants." *American Politics Research* 30 (4): 423-455.
- **PROPOSED PAPER TOPIC DUE IN CLASS.**

### **Weekly Discussion Questions**

(be prepared to discuss all, respond to one for written assignment)

1. What are the basic strengths and weaknesses of a quasi-experimental research design and a case-study design as compared to an experimental design?
2. Are Choi et al. (2002), Stratmann and Baur (2002) and Drury et al. (2005) high in internal validity, external validity, neither, or both?
3. Under what circumstances would you want to do a case study to conduct research? What advantages does case study research offer over other research designs? What limitations affect case study research?
4. What is the role of theory in case study research?
5. What criteria can be used to evaluate case study research?
6. What characteristics distinguish different types of case study designs from each other?
7. Why are measurement and sampling especially challenging issues in case study designs?

### **Week 7 (October 5)**

*Researchers as Readers: Literature Review*

- JRM, Chapter 6
- Knopf, Jeffrey W. 2006. "Doing a Literature Review." *PS-Political Science & Politics* 39 (1): 127-132.
- Craig, Stephen C., Jim G. Kane, Michael D. Martinez, and Jason Gainous. 2005. "Core Values, Value Conflict, and Citizens' Ambivalence about Gay Rights." *Political Research Quarterly* 58 (1): 5-17.
- I will discuss the process I used when writing the literature review for the above article.
- We will use the Internet to begin the process using topics we come up with in class.

### **Week 8 (October 12)**

**MIDTERM BREAK-NO CLASS**

### **Week 9 (October 19)**

*Researchers as lurkers and intruders: Observation*

- JRM, Chapter 8
- KKV, Chapter 4

- Fenno, Richard F., Jr. 1977. "U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration." *American Political Science Review* 71 (3): 883-917.
- Moug, Peter. 2007. "Non-participative Observation in Political Research: The 'Poor' Relation?" *Politics* 27 (2): 108–114.
- **LITERATURE REIVEWS ARE DUE IN CLASS**

### **Weekly Discussion Questions**

(be prepared to discuss all, respond to one for written assignment)

1. Are there any advantages or disadvantages to participant observation techniques to gather data?
2. Do these strategies pose any threats to the internal validity of the research design?
3. What other problems can arise in doing observational research? Suggest some solutions.
4. What types of research questions in political science might be especially well-suited for investigation using observational techniques?
5. You have now finished KKV, what do you think about their basic argument?

### **Week 10 (October 26)**

*Researchers as Misers: Sampling*

- JRM, Chapter 7
- Reiter, Dan and Curtis Meek. 1999. "Determinants of Military Strategy, 1903-1994: A Quantitative Empirical Test." *International Studies Quarterly* 43 (2): 363-387.
- Schneider, Mark, John Scholz, Mark Lubell, Denisa Mindruta, and Matthew Edwardsen. 2003. "Building Consensual Institutions: Networks and the National Estuary Program." *American Journal of Political Science* 47: 143-158.
- Lupia, Arthur and Tasha S. Philpot. 2005. "Views from inside the Net: How Websites Affect Young Adults' Political Interest." *Journal of Politics* 67 (4, November): 1122-1142.
- Wald, Kenneth D., Dennis E. Owen, and Samuel S. Hill, Jr. 1988. "Churches as Political Communities." *American Political Science Review* 82: 531-48.
- **PUBLIC MEETING ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE IN CLASS**

### **Weekly Discussion Questions**

(be prepared to discuss all)

1. Be sure you understand the terms "case," "observation," "unit of analysis," "level of analysis," "population," "probability sample," "nonprobability sample." Make a note of what is unclear to you so we can discuss it in class.
2. What considerations do we need to keep in mind when selecting samples?
3. Why does the selection of a sample introduce error?
4. How might samples be biased?
5. Is a random sample always the best sampling option?
6. What is the difference between selecting on the dependent variable and selecting on the independent variable? Why should we avoid either of these means of selecting samples?

7. What problems might case studies present, with regard to sampling issues?

### **Week 11 (November 2)**

#### *Researchers as diggers: Content Analysis and Aggregate Data*

- JRM, Chapter 9
- Crichlow, Scott. 2002. "Legislators' Personality Traits and Congressional Support for Free Trade." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46 (5): 693-711.
- Damore, David F. 2002. "Candidate Strategy and the Decision to Go Negative." *Political Research Quarterly* 55 (3): 669-685.
- Mowle, Thomas S. 2003. "Worldviews in Foreign Policy: Realism, Liberalism, and External Conflict." *Political Psychology* 24: 561-592.

### **Weekly Discussion Questions**

(be prepared to discuss all, respond to one for written assignment)

1. What kinds of research designs are employed in this week's readings? Where did the researchers dig up their data, and are the data and measures appropriate for the questions posed in the articles?
2. Are these research stronger in internal validity or external validity, and why?
3. What is the ecological inference problem? How could we avoid it?
4. What sorts of episodic and periodic documents are available for social scientists?
5. What are the advantages of using episodic documents as a means to collect evidence?
6. What types of research questions in political science might be especially well-suited for investigation using episodic documents for empirical evidence?
7. What are the advantages of using periodic documents as a means to collect evidence?
8. What types of research questions in political science might be especially well-suited for investigation using periodic documents for empirical evidence?
9. What problems can arise in using documents of different types? Suggest some solutions.
10. Besides critically examining the articles for their use of documents, assess the suitability of their samples and the validity of their measures.

### **Week 12 (November 9)**

#### *Researchers as interrogators: Survey Analysis and Interviewing*

- JRM, Chapter 10
- Javeline, Debra. 1999. "Response Effects in Polite Cultures: A Test of Acquiescence in Kazakhstan." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 63: 1-28.
- Duff, Brain, Michael J. Hanmer, Won-ho Park, and Ismael K. White. 2007. "Good Excuses: Understanding Who Votes with an Improved Turnout Question." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 71 (1): 67-90.
- Craig, Stephen C., James G. Kane, and Jason Gainous. 2005. "Issue-Related Learning in a Gubernatorial Campaign: A Panel Study." *Political Communication* 22 (4): 483-504.
- Berry, Jeffrey M. 2002. "Validity and Reliability Issues in Elite Interviewing." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 35 (4): 679-682.

- “Symposium: Interview Methods in Political Science.” 2002. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35:663-688.

### **Weekly Discussion Questions**

(be prepared to discuss all, respond to one for written assignment)

1. What problems can arise in the construction of questionnaires? Think about this in terms of the questions asked and the order in which they are presented, and keep in mind that question wording is a measurement issue.
2. What are the positive and negative features associated with different types of surveys (e.g. face-to-face, telephone, mail, Internet)?
3. What are the advantages of using structured interviews as a means to collect evidence?
4. What problems can arise in the process of interviewing? Think about this from the perspective of the respondent and from the perspective of the interviewer. What are some ways to deal with these problems?
5. What problems are likely to occur in conducting unstructured and semi-structured interviews? What do researchers need to do to assure they obtain high quality responses during these interviews?

### **Week 13 (November 16)**

*Researchers as Number Crunchers*

- JRM, Chapters 11, 12, 13, and 14
- We will discuss all these chapters and I will use SPSS, a statistical software package, to show you some basics in data analysis.

### **Week 14 (November 23)**

*Individual Paper Discussions*

- I will meet individually with each of you to discuss the progress of your papers. Please bring all written materials you have at this point including the short literature review you wrote earlier in the semester (or updated one if you have it), notes, and outline.

### **Week 15 (November 30)**

*Researchers as Demons?: Ethics in Social Scientific Research*

- Human Subjects Protection Program Office, Institutional Review Board, University of Louisville <http://louisville.edu/research/humansubjects>
- Milgram, Stanley. 1965. "Some Conditions of Obedience and Disobedience to Authority." *Human Relations* 18 (1): 57-76.
- Baumrind, Diana. 1964. "Some Thoughts on Ethics of Research: After Reading Milgram's 'Behavioral Study of Obedience'." *American Psychologist* 19:421-423; and Milgram's response, "A Reply to Baumrind." *American Psychologist* 19:848-852.
- Greenberg, David and Mark Shroder. 2004. *The Digest of Social Experiments*. Washington: The Urban Institute Press. "Introduction - Are Experiments Ethical?" (p. 8). (available on reserve at the library)

- King, Desmond. 1998. "The Politics of Social Research: Institutionalizing Public Funding Regimes in the United States and Britain." *British Journal of Political Science* 28(3):415-444.

### **Weekly Discussion Questions**

(be prepared to discuss all, respond to one for written assignment)

1. Did Milgram violate contemporary standards of ethics in their research? If so, which ones? If not, should our standards be revised to prohibit that kind of research?
2. Milgram seems to claim that acquiring knowledge about human behavior that could be used for constructive purposes outweighs the possible ethical problems with his research. Some critics of the human subjects review process claim that being overly protective of human subjects interferes with the advancement of knowledge. What is the proper balance between the advancement of knowledge and the protection of subjects?
3. What are the different ways in which political scientists should consider ethics?
4. How does funding shape social research?
5. Looking back over the various articles you read in this class, find examples in which the authors faced ethical issues. What were the issues, (how) did the authors deal with them, and do you think any issues should have been dealt with more appropriately?
6. How have your views about political science changed over the course of the semester?