POLS 3600: Political Science Research Methods

University of North Georgia
TR 3:30 – 4:45
Fall 2015

Professor: Glen Smith
Office: Strickland 106
Office Hours: TR (12:15 – 1:45pm) & Monday (12 – 4pm)
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Course Objectives

The primary objective of this course is to familiarize students with the standard practices of political science research. One goal of this course is to provide students with a basic understanding of the various approaches to studying political phenomenon. Understanding these approaches will allow students to critically evaluate the research conducted by other scholars. The other goal of this course is to provide each student an in-depth understanding of at least one method of empirical research. Which method(s) students use will depend on their academic interests and career goals. The purpose is of this requirement is for students to develop a practical skill that is useful in the particular career they intend to pursue. By the time students have finished this course, they should be able to:

1. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the common research methods used in political science research.
2. Critically evaluate the methods used in both qualitative and quantitative approaches.
3. Understand the common statistical approaches used to analyze both cross-sectional and longitudinal data.
4. Disseminate research findings through both oral and written communications.
5. Conduct high-quality research using at least one common approach to gather and analyze empirical data.
Course Requirements

Quizzes (200 Points)

There will be five quizzes held throughout the semester. Each quiz is worth 50 points, and will require you to answer one or two questions from the readings required for that week. The lowest quiz grade will be dropped. The quizzes will test reading comprehension prior to class, so it is important to keep up with the required readings listed in the course outline below. While reading the articles, you should focus on the methods, results and discussion sections. There will be no make-up quizzes, regardless of your reason for missing class.

Exams (400 Points)

There will be two essay exams during the semester that will cover various research methods and quantitative analysis. Essays should use information from the course readings and class discussions. Each exam is worth 200 points.

Research Paper (400 points)

Each student will come up with a research design to answer an important question regarding political science. You will meet with me to identify a research question that best fits your interests and future plans. After identifying a topic, you will write a brief literature review discussing how past research has studied the question. You will then answer the question using empirical evidence from surveys, content analysis, observation or interviews. The paper should be structured around the following sections.

Introduction (25 points)
What is the research question and why is it important? This should be no more than a couple paragraphs that clearly state the question, why it matters, and how it is relevant to political science.

Literature Review (25 points)
What did past research find on the question? How has past research attempted to answer the question? How does your research add to previous scholarship in this area? The literature reviews should have a similar format to the articles you read for class.

Theory and Expectations (25 Points)
What do you expect to find? This section requires you to develop a theory regarding what results you are likely to find. Do not simply tell me your opinion, or guess what will happen. You need to base your expectations on some theory or multiple theories of human behavior. Look to the articles we read in class for a model of what a theory section looks like.
Methods (150 Points)
What is the proposed method to study this question? What are the strengths and weaknesses to using this method, and how will they likely affect your results? Discuss the instruments that will be used and evaluate their effectiveness in answering the question. All instruments used must be presented in an appendix including: coding sheets, surveys, interview notes or direct quotes.

Results (100 Points)
Present your evidence in this section in a manner appropriate for your method. For surveys or content analysis, this section should include tables and/or graphs to present your findings. For interviews and observations, there should be quotes and analysis. This section should be a systematic and objective review of your results.

Reference Section (25 Points)
The grade for this section will depend on consistency of in-text citations, and proper citations in the reference section.

Presentation (50 Points)
Each student will present their research proposal to the class, answer questions, and revise their proposal based on audience feedback. Presentations should take no more than 15 minutes and must address each of the first four section listed above.

The length of the papers will vary depending on each student’s research question and writing style. The paper must be typed and double spaced using 12 point Times font with one-inch margins on all sides.

Grading Scale

A 900-1000
B 800-899
C 700-799
D 600-699
F Below 600

Other Information

Disruptive Behavior: Students who exhibit behaviors that are considered to obstruct or disrupt this class or its learning activities will be considered under the Board of Regents Policy on Disruptive Behavior. Behaviors which are considered to be inappropriate in this classroom include sleeping, eating, coming in late, interrupting others, talking out of turn, inappropriate behavior during group work, verbal behavior that is disrespectful of other students or the faculty.
member, or other behaviors that may be disruptive. Students who exhibit such behavior may be temporarily dismissed from the class by the instructor and may be subject to disciplinary procedures outlined in the Student Handbook.

*Academic Misconduct*: Any student caught cheating or plagiarizing will *fail the course* and be subject to further disciplinary action by the university.

*Supplemental Course Information*: Students are responsible for accessing supplemental course information common to all courses at [http://ung.edu/academic-affairs/policies-and-guidelines/supplemental-syllabus.php](http://ung.edu/academic-affairs/policies-and-guidelines/supplemental-syllabus.php)

*Accessibility Statement*: If you need this (or any other) course document in another format, please e-mail Andrew Eade at Andrew.eade@ung.edu or call 706-864-1628.

**Outline of the Course**

**Week 1 (8/18 & 8/20)**
- Introduction
- What is Empirical Research?

**Week 2 (8/25 & 8/27)**
- Qualitative v. Quantitative Research
- General Research Approaches
- Discussion Topic: How to Design a Research Project

**Week 3 (9/1 & 9/3)**
- Case Studies and Observational Analysis
- Discussion Topic: How to Select Cases for Low N Studies

**Week 4 (9/8 & 9/10)**
- Elite Interviews and Focus Groups
- Discussion Topic: Using Incentives to Recruit Subjects
Week 5 (9/15 & 9/17)
-Content Analysis
-Discussion Topic: Creating Objective Measures of Content

Week 6 (9/22 & 9/24)
-Controlled Experiments
-Discussion Topic: Generalizability v. Control

*Midterm Exam on September 29th*

Week 7 (10/1)
-Survey and Field Experiments
-Discussion Topic: Selecting a Treatment Condition

Week 8 (10/6 & 10/8)
-Public Opinion Surveys
-Discussion Topic: Can Polls Predict Primary Elections?

Week 9 (10/13 & 10/15)
-Significance Tests
-Discussion Topic: Statistical Significance and Substantive Importance

Week 10 (10/20 & 10/22)
-Ordinary Least Squares Regression
-Discussion Topic: How to Present and Discuss Regression Models
Week 11 (10/27 & 10/29)
- Dummy Variable Regression
- Interaction Variables
- Discussion Topic: How to Spot a Contingent Relationship

Week 12 (11/3 & 11/5)
- Analyzing Panel Data
- Discussion Topic: Using Time to Identify Causation

*Final Exam on Tuesday, November 10th*

Week 13 (11/12)
Student Presentations

Week 14 (11/17 – 11/19)
Student Presentations

Week 15 (12/1 – 12/3)
Student Presentations

Final Projects are due Thursday, December 10th at 3pm