

Methods of Political Inquiry

POLS 3302.01

Fall 2017

TR 10:50am – 12:05pm

Ross Hall 211

Office hours: TR 12:15pm-1:15pm and by appointment

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Course Overview

You have the ability to create knowledge. In fact, this is the goal of research; to seek to forward human existence through the development of new understanding of the way the world works. This class is partially dedicated to instructing you in the basics of research to help you develop your own ability to create knowledge.

However, beyond the creation of knowledge, it is imperative that this new knowledge you have created can be transmitted to other people. Without proper communication of research, the knowledge that has been created through the research cannot do any good. Beyond learning how to create knowledge, this class is also focused on helping you learn how to share that knowledge through academic writing. By the end of this semester, you will have a deeper understanding of how to create knowledge and how to disseminate it to people, in more than 140 characters.

Expectations

It is important to remember that you are adults, and success at the collegiate level is dependent upon approaching your studies as a responsible adult. You are expected to be in class regularly, and attendance will be taken each class period. Failure to attend will negatively impact your grade (see below). Further, as this is an upper level course that covers a large amount of unfamiliar material, attendance will serve to improve your grade beyond the formal mechanism influencing your grade. Further, you will be expected to do all of the readings (both textbook and other readings) by the below enumerated dates.

Learning Outcomes

- Formulate research questions and hypotheses.
- Identify good sources of information.
- Design empirical research projects.
- Analyze data using statistical techniques.
- Interpret bivariate and multivariate relationships.
- Effectively communicate research findings.

Required Reading

Pollock, Philip H. 2015. *The Essentials and Political Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press.

Enterline, Andrew. 2007. "A Guide to Writing to Research Projects in Graduate Political Science Courses." Available via Blackboard.

Additional articles will also be required. These readings are available via Blackboard.

Recommended: Salkind, Neil. 2015. *Excel Statistics: A Quick Guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Course Assignments

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|---|------|
| 1. Midterm Exam | 30 % |
| 2. Research Question and Literature Review | 10 % |
| 3. Theory and Hypothesis | 15% |
| 4. Methods | 15% |
| 5. Final Paper | 30% |

Grading: Grading will follow a standard scale: 89.5% or higher is an A, 79.5% to 89.49% is a B, 69.5% to 79.49% is a C, and 59.5% to 69.49% is a D.

In order to avoid myriad problems, I will NOT do any of the following:

1. Change grades unless a computational error is made
2. Reveal grades via e-mail or telephone
3. Give any extra credit opportunities other than those mentioned in the syllabus or by me in class
4. ***ACCEPT ANY LATE MATERIALS***
5. Allow any makeup exams, unless in extenuating circumstances

Exam grades will be posted on Blackboard, usually within 7 days of the exam.

If you do poorly on any of the assignments, I advise you to see me as soon as possible. It is your responsibility to seek my help if you need it.

It is important to note, I may provide a general curve on each exam. This is done in order to avoid curving the final grades which is again possible, however, unlikely.

Exams: One exam, a midterm will be given in this course. This exam will consist of 3 short answer questions, and 1 essay. You will be given a choice of two essay questions, of which, you will be required to answer one. This exam will test you regarding all course content up until the date of the exam. This exam will be worth 30% of your overall course grade.

***PLEASE NOTE: IF YOU ARRIVE TO THE EXAM
AFTER THE FIRST EXAM IS TURNED IN YOU***

***WILL NOT BE PERMITTED TO TAKE THE EXAM,
NOR WILL YOU BE ALLOWED TO TAKE A
MAKEUP.***

Makeup exams will only be given in light of a university excused absence or at the discretion of the instructor. Inform me of your absence before or within 48 hours of the examination date, either in person or by e-mail. I will need specific, written documentation to verify the nature and legitimacy of your absence. You must present this documentation to me, in person, during my office hours (or make an appointment) and before the last week of classes. At that time, I will determine whether you are eligible to take a makeup exam. You will have one (1) hour and fifteen (15) minutes to complete the makeup exam, which consists of answering *one essay question*. ***All makeup exams will take place during the last week of classes. YOU MUST CONTACT ME BEFORE THE LAST WEEK OF CLASSES TO SCHEDULE A MAKEUP EXAM. MAKE UP EXAMS WILL NOT BE GIVEN FOR THE FINAL EXAM.***

Exam Preparation: The optimal way to succeed in this class is to attend class regularly, take good notes, and keep up with the readings. Attendance in class will alert you to the material that I think is most important, however, everything in the required readings is fair game.

Research Paper: You will each be expected to write a political science research paper during the semester. This paper will be due by midnight on November 28, and should consist of a research question, a literature review, a theory presenting an answer to your research question, at least one testable hypothesis, and basic testing of the hypothesis/hypotheses using quantitative methods. This final paper will be worth 30% of your final grade in this class.

You will be required to read the research paper writing guide by Dr. Andrew Enterline. When writing your paper, please refer to this guide regularly.

You may want to ask how long this paper should be. The answer to this is that it should be as long as it needs to be to properly communicate your research question, cover the existing literature, present a theoretical understanding, provide at least one testable hypothesis, discuss the data and analytical strategy, present findings, and conclude with a discussion of implications, shortcoming, and avenues for future research. Please use 12pt Times New Roman font, double spaced, with 1 inch margins.

This paper is to be submitted through Blackboard.

Other Assignments: While the final paper is due at the end of the semester, you will be required to turn in various aspects of the paper throughout the semester as first drafts.

Research Question/Introduction and Literature Review: First, you will be asked to turn in on September 7 by midnight, a research question, and a review of the literature that relates to this question. A research question is very simple. It should provide the basic premise of your paper. Some examples that should not be used for your paper include:

Does personal wealth influence a person's political ideology?

Are neighboring countries more likely to engage in militarized disputes?

Do public policy preferences influence the policy outputs of governments?

You will be asked to settle on a research question. Further, you will also turn in a literature review with this research question. Undoubtedly, there will be existing academic research that addresses (more or less) your research question. You should identify this research and in the introductory section you should discuss this research, paying particular attention to its theory and findings. You should use this literature to set the stage for your own research question. There are multiple repositories online that will give you access to academic research. I would suggest beginning with Google Scholar, however, you may also want to look at JStor. If you have any issues finding research, you can find help by talking to a research library at the Ottenheimer Library. The librarian who is most well versed in political science research is Karen Russ, who can be reached at kmruss@ualr.edu.

The first draft of the research question/introduction, and literature review will be worth 10% of your final grade for this course. You will be graded on whether you have presented a workable question, whether you have set it up within an interesting framework, and whether you have delved into the literature focusing on the concepts laid out in the research question. As a guide, you can look at the article by myself and Dr. Martijn Schoonvelde, which is available via Blackboard.

Theory and Hypothesis: You will be required to turn in a first draft of the theoretical section of your paper with at least one testable hypothesis on September 26, by midnight. This section should explain how the concepts in your research question are related, paying particular attention to developing the causal mechanism. As an example, we can return to the above research question, “*do public policy preferences influence the policy outputs of governments?*” A theory will explain how public policy preferences influence the policy outputs of governments. You would likely draw on the existing literature regarding policy representation that suggests that when the public desires a particular policy, governments tend to give the public that policy (see Wlezien 1995; Stimson et al. 1995).

However, you would want to take it slightly further, and focus on when policy-makers respond to public preferences. You can take the existing theory, which argues that policy-makers will respond when the public demands a particular policy because they hope to win re-election, and extend it. If policy-makers respond to the public for fear of being punished by voters, it would follow that they would only respond when the public is likely to punish them for not responding. It can be theorized that the public will only be able to punish policy-makers if they are aware of what policy-makers are doing. You could then draw on the literature regarding when the public is aware, in particular when an issue is salient to the public (i.e. the public cares a great deal about an issue). This would then suggest a hypothesis that policy-makers will only respond to the public when an issue is particularly salient to the public.

Of course, the above example is quite simplified. A full working theory should be significantly more detailed than the above example.

Importantly, the first draft of the theoretical section and hypothesis/hypotheses will be worth 15% of your final grade for this course. You will be graded on whether the theory has laid out a sufficiently fleshed out and logical explanation of the relationship between the concepts in your research question, and whether it is based in existing literature. Further, you will be graded on whether the hypothesis/hypotheses presented derive(s) naturally from the theory, and is/are testable. The draft of your theory and hypothesis/hypotheses should be submitted with an updated version of your research question, introduction, and literature review. Again, you can use the article by myself and Dr. Martijn Schoonvelde available via Blackboard as a guide for this.

Methods: On November 14, by midnight, you will be asked to submit, along with the updated version of the research question, introduction, literature review, theory, and hypothesis/hypotheses, a methodological section of your final paper. This section should discuss each specific variable (i.e. dependent variable, main independent variables, control variables), how they are measured, and should include descriptive statistics. Additionally, you should discuss the data source(s) used, the methodological approach you use, and why you use this approach.

While this section may seem overwhelming early in the class, it will become clearer as we cover methodology during this course. Importantly, the first draft of the methods section will be worth 15% of your final grade for this course. You will be graded on whether you adequately explain your variables, data, and methodological approach. This section should be submitted with an updated version of your research question, introduction, and literature review, theory, and hypothesis/hypotheses.

All assignments are to be submitted through Blackboard.

Extra Credit: Extra credit will not be given in this course.

Attendance: Attendance is required for this class. Attendance will be taken everyday. You are allowed 2 absences without excuses. For each absence thereafter, you will lose 2 points on your final grade in this class.

Communications: If you have any questions about the class, please see me during my office hours. If you cannot make my office hours, please schedule an appointment to see me. You are more than welcome to e-mail me as well.

Dropping Courses: Please visit the website of UALR Student Records (<http://ualr.edu/records/drop-class/>) for information concerning drops, withdrawals, and other administrative information.

Students with Disabilities: Your success in this class is important to me, and it is the policy and practice of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock to create inclusive learning environments consistent with federal and state law. If you have a documented disability (or need to have a disability documented), and need an accommodation, please contact me

privately as soon as possible, so that we can discuss with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) how to meet your specific needs and the requirements of the course. The DRC offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process among you, your instructor(s) and the DRC. Thus, if you have a disability, please contact me and/or the DRC, at 501-569-3143 (V/TTY) or 501-683-7629 (VP). For more information, please visit the DRC website at www.ualr.edu/disability.

Academic Dishonesty: Academic dishonesty, which includes, but is not limited to cheating on an exam, unauthorized collaboration on an assignment, and plagiarism, is taken very seriously in this course. Students who commit such actions will be reported to the Dean of Students and will receive an F for the course. If you have any questions about whether an action is considered to be academically dishonest, please see me or read the complete description of the UALR policy on academic dishonesty, which is available in the student handbook at www.ualr.edu/www/handbook/student_rights.html.

Course Materials and Copyright Statement: The handouts used in this course are copyrighted. “Handouts” refers to all materials generated for this class, which include but are not limited to presentation slides, syllabi, quizzes, exams, in-class materials review sheets, and additional problem sets. Because these are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy, in any manner, including through photographs, the handouts, unless I expressly grant permission.

Course Schedule (Schedule Subject to Changes)

1. Course Overview

August 17

2. Pieces of a Research Paper

Questions, an Introduction, and Literature

August 22

Read Enterline, pp. 5-10; 25-27

Read Williams and Schoonvelde, pp 1-2

Building a Theory and Deriving Hypotheses

August 24

Read Enterline, pp. 11-15

Read Pollock, pp. 48-58

Read Williams and Schoonvelde, pp. 3-6

August 29

In-class exercise

Research Design and Analysis

August 31

Read Enterline, pp. 16-24

Read Williams and Schoonvelde, pp. 6-14

Conclusions

September 5

Read Enterline, pp. 27-28

Read Williams and Schoonvelde, pp. 14-16

September 7

No Class – Use This Day to Sharpen RQ and Lit.

First Draft of Research Question and Lit Review Due on September 7 at midnight

3. Preparing for Analysis

Conceptualization

September 12 – 14

Read Pollock, pp. 1 – 18

Measuring and Describing Variables

September 19 – 21

Read Pollock, pp. 24 – 43

Uncontrolled Comparisons

September 26

Read Pollock, pp. 58 – 70

First Draft of Theory and Hypotheses Due on September 26 at midnight

Logic of Control

September 28 – October 3

Read Pollock, pp. 78 - 97

October 5

MIDTERM EXAM (IN CLASS)

5. Engaging in Inference

Controlled Comparison

October 10 – 12

Read Pollock, pp. 102-118

Sampling and Inference

October 17 – 19

Read Pollock, pp. 123 - 153

Significance and Association

October 24 – 31

Read Pollock, pp. 156 – 181

Computer Lab Day

November 2

In Stabler Hall 702B

Bivariate and Multivariate Relationships

November 7 – 14

Read Pollock, pp. 183 – 209

First Draft of Methods Due on November 14 at midnight

Computer Lab Day

November 16

In Stabler Hall 702B

November 21

No Class – Use this Day to finish analysis and Conclusion

6. Presentations

November 28 – 30

You will have 10 – 12 minutes each to present your research to the class and others.

FINAL PAPER DUE BY MIDNIGHT ON NOVEMBER 28