
Research in Political Science
PSC 780
Fall 2009 Syllabus

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Introduction

As we know,
There are known knowns.
There are things we know we know.
We also know
There are known unknowns.
That is to say
We know there are some things
We do not know.
But there are also unknown unknowns,
The ones we don't know
We don't know.

—Donald Rumsfeld Feb. 12, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing

The purpose of this class is to provide students with a strong foundation in the research methods used to study politics. As such, we are concerned with research design, data collection, issues of measurement, and statistical analysis. While knowledge of statistics is a prerequisite for the course, **do not worry** if you cannot recall this information from your undergraduate days of yore. Considerable time will be given to bringing everybody up to speed with the statistical part of the course. A word of caution must be given: if you are having trouble with understanding an aspect or topic in the course, please come and see me immediately. This course is cumulative, which means two things: (1) if you do not understand a topic for the week, it can have serious and negative consequences for the remainder of the course; (2) if you miss coursework and lectures, you may seriously jeopardize your standing in the course. Unlike most graduate seminars, much of this course is spent in lecture. However, that does not mean we will spend no time in discussing the substantial reading you will have for the topics we will cover in the class.

Basic Course Structure:

- Class Lecture based upon reading assignments due that week
- Review homework that you have done based on your readings
- Discuss new information with examples
- In-class and group based assignments
- Discuss homework for the following week

Course Standardization

I and Dr. Fisher (your instructor for PSC 782) understand the expensive cost of textbooks; unfortunately textbooks are a necessary evil particularly in methodology courses. To help with this issue, the graduate level political methodology sequence (PSC 780 & 782) has now been standardized. This standardization has two implications (the good news and the bad news) for you. The bad news is that the startup cost for the course is a bit high. The books have a hefty price tag, but this is not unusual for methodology and stats books and packages. The good news is that in standardizing the course sequence, the instructors for PSC 780 & 782 have agreed to use the same basic textbooks (Hamilton and Johnson & Reynolds) for the course and the same software package. So, the cost that you have for this course will actually be the cost for two courses. In other words, the software and the two standard textbooks will be used in both PSC 780 and 782.

Grading:

Assignments (40%)

All homework assignments are due at the beginning of class. I do not accept late assignments. Regular homework assignments and random in-class assignments will be given during the semester. *All homework assignments must be typed.* Please bring the Johnson & Reynolds book and the five articles listed at the beginning of class with you each week.

Exams (60% total) Midterm (25 %) and Final (35%). The exams will be take home and will consist of problems and short answers. The final exam will be cumulative.

Information You Need to Know

Cheating, plagiarism and other acts of academic dishonesty will, at the least, result in a failing grade in this class, at the graduate level, cause me to seek your removal from this program at the University of Nevada, Reno. Self-plagiarism constitutes plagiarism and cheating.

Students with disabilities often have special needs. If you are a student with physical, educational or other disability-related needs, please make me aware of any accommodations you require. I am more than happy to work with you in any way necessary. All discussions of this nature will be confidential.

Please note that I have an “open door” policy with graduate students. Just let me know when you need to see me if you cannot make it during my set office hours, which are often filled with undergraduates.

Note:

**This syllabus is subject to revision
as the instructor sees fit during the semester**

Required Materials

Books:

Hamilton, Lawrence C. *Statistics with Stata*

Hoover and Donovan *The Elements of Social Scientific Thinking*

Johnson, Janet and H.T. Reynolds *Political Science Research Methods & Workbook Package*
(companion book site: <http://psrm.cqpress.com/default.asp>)

Software:

STATA software. This software package has become the standard in the discipline and you will need to familiarize yourself with its use. We have arranged for the software package to be available on Dataworks, on the Library's data system. We will spend a session or two getting you up and running on STATA, but you will need to put some time into working with the STATA book.

Primary Working Articles:

You will need to locate these articles on the library website and download them.

Gordon, Stacy B. and Gary M Segura. 1997. "Cross-National Variation in the Political Sophistication of Individuals: Capability or Choice?" *Journal of Politics* 59(1): 126-47.

Johnson, Thomas H., Robert O. Slater; Pat McGowan "Explaining African Military Coups d'Etat, 1960-1982." *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 78, No. 3. (Sep., 1984): 622-640.

Poe, Steven C. and C. Neal Tate. 1994. "Repression of Human Rights to Personal Integrity in the 1980s: a Global Analysis." *American Political Science Review* 88:853-872.

Campbell, James E. 1992. "Forecasting the Presidential Vote in the States." *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 36, No. 2. (May, 1992), pp. 386-407.

Lian, Bradley and John R. O'Neal. 1993. "Presidents, the Use of Military Force, and Public Opinion" *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 37, No. 2.: 277-300.

Other Articles

Mooney Marini, Margaret and Burton Singer. 1988. "Causality in the Social Sciences." *Sociological Methodology* (18): 347-409.

Guetzkow, Joshua, Michèle Lamont and Grégoire Mallard. 2004. "What Is Originality in the Humanities and the Social Sciences?" *American Sociological Review* 69(2): 190-212. (Skip pp. 373-6 up to the Temporal Plausibility section)

The Agenda

Week 1: Introduction to the course; What Political Scientists do and don't do

Readings: Homework assignment 1 regarding "theories" due.

Week 2: Studying Politics: The Science in Social Science

Readings: Johnson & Reynolds Chapters Introduction, 1 & 2
Hoover and Donovan Chapters 1

Homework: 1. Hoover & Donovan Chapter 1 Discussion Questions 3, 4
2. J&R Workbook Exercises 2-2, 2-3, 2-4, 2-5, 2-6, 2-7, 2-11, 2-12

Week 3: Logic and Causal Relationships

Readings: Johnson & Reynolds pp. 122-126

Mooney Marini, Margaret and Burton Singer. 1988. "Causality in the Social Sciences." *Sociological Methodology* (18): 347-409. (Skip pp. 373-6 up to the Temporal Plausibility section).

Homework: 1. Briefly summarize each of the five primary articles in the syllabus in no more than 5 written lines.
2. Identify the topic they are interested in generally
3. Identify the specific question(s) and causal relationships that they are investigating
4. Workbook exercise 3-1

Week 4: Understanding Prior Research: The Literature Review and Topic History

Readings: Johnson & Reynolds Chapter 6

Guetzkow, Joshua, Michèle Lamont and Grégoire Mallard. 2004. "What Is Originality in the Humanities and the Social Sciences?" *American Sociological Review* 69(2): 190-212.

Homework: Using 5 appropriate scholarly articles, write a literature review of a political science topic of your choice.

Week 5: Hypotheses & Concepts

Readings: Johnson & Reynolds Chapter 3
Hoover and Donovan Chapter 3, 4

Homework: Workbook exercises 3-2, 3-3, 3-4

Using your topic and literature review from last week, identify two hypotheses that you would be interested in testing. Highlight the causal relationship and the concepts logic behind your hypotheses (i.e. why should I expect there to be a relationship between these concepts?).

Week 6: Variables & Measurement

Readings: Johnson & Reynolds Chapter 4
Hoover and Donovan Chapter 2, 5

Homework: 1. Workbook 4-2, 4-3, 4-5, 4-7

2. Hoover & Donovan, Chpt 2 discussion questions 3 & 4

3. The following list contains several concepts that might be used in political research. List one or more variables that might be used to represent each of them. Indicate how confident you are that the variables you select to represent each concept adequately capture all that you mean when you use the concept. Do you need several variables to capture the meaning of these concepts?

Economic Development
Racial discrimination

Political Repression
terrorism

political equality
liberalism

4. Using your hypotheses from last week, discuss how you would measure the concepts you indicated in your hypotheses. Think about this carefully and explain in detail.

Week 7: Measurement: Reliability and Validity

Readings: Johnson & Reynolds Chapter 7

Homework: 1. Using the five primary articles, identify at least two principle concepts from the article and document how each concept was operationalized. Now, choose one article and devise a different way to operationalize the two concepts you just identified. Finally, identify threats to the validity of the measures you have devised for these two concepts.

2. Using your topic, literature review, and concepts from prior weeks, explain what variables you would use to measure your concepts, how you would measure those variables, and what the threats to validity of those variables might be.

Week 8: Research Design

Readings: Johnson & Reynolds, pp. 127-175

Homework: 1. You need to become familiar with the STATA statistical package. Please begin skimming through the Hamilton book. Please learn how to access STATA through the Citrix system. Information on how to do this is available through the Library's Dataworks Website (<http://www.knowledgecenter.unr.edu/dataworks/citrixinfo.html>)

You may also find this page that lists several STATA tutorials useful:
<http://www.stata.com/links/resources1.html#user>

2. Workbook exercises 3-5, 3-6, 3-7

3. Using the five primary articles, discuss the nature of each research design. Your description should include the type of design, the variables used and the data used in each article.

Midterm assigned

Week 9: Research Design II

Readings: No additional readings

Homework: Midterm due at the beginning of class

Week 10: Sampling

Readings: Johnson & Reynolds Chapter 7

Homework: Workbook exercise 9-3, 9-7

Week 11: Empirical Observation and Methodology

Readings: Johnson & Reynolds Chapter 8, 9, 10

Homework: Workbook Exercise 10-1 through 10-7

Week 12: Introduction to Univariate Statistics I

Readings: Johnson & Reynolds Chapter 11

Homework: Workbook exercises 11-2, 11-4, 11-6, 11-7, 11-8

Week 13: Introduction to Univariate Statistics I

Homework: Assigned by the instructor

Week 14: Introduction to Bivariate Statistics I

Readings: Johnson & Reynolds Chapter 12 (431-476)

Homework: Workbook exercises 12-1, 12-2, 12-3, and as assigned

Week 15: Introduction to Bivariate Statistics II

Homework: Workbook exercises 12-5, 12-6 and as assigned

Final Examination given

Week 16: Introduction to Bivariate Statistics III

Homework: Homework assigned by the instructor;

Final examination due December 10, 12:00pm
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