

## **POLS 209-905: Introduction to Political Science Research**

*Writing-Intensive Course*

Texas A&M University

Fall 2010

M W F, 9:45 – 10:35 a.m., Allen 1015

Instructor Christopher Olds

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**Course Description from Texas A&M University Undergraduate Catalog:** Introduction to the philosophy and practice of social science and to modes of research in major subfields of political science. **Prerequisite:** Political science majors must have completed POLS 209 before they enroll in their last 18 hours of 300- and 400- level courses. This means a student may take no more than 6 hours of upper division (300- and 400- level courses) before completing POLS 209. Enrollment is restricted to political science majors.

**Specific Goals of the Course:** This course is designed to introduce students to the process of conducting academic social science research. While some of you may be entering this course with some apprehension, asking questions like, ‘why would I need to learn how to do social science research’ or ‘what is the point of learning statistics when I’m not a math major,’ your experience in this course will assist you in developing valuable skills you can apply for the rest of your lives. These skills include the following:

- the ability to explain why something in the world that interests you should matter or is relevant to others
- the ability to evaluate how others have discussed your topic of interest in the past in order to build upon this past knowledge
- the ability to establish an easily understandable proposal that you believe best explains the concept that interests you
- the ability to design an unbiased procedure in which you and others can determine whether your explanation is legitimate
- the ability to determine whether others adequately explain and provide evidence for their own claims regarding concepts

These skills are important because there are potential dangers in discussing ideas with colleagues in many lines of work (and not just in academic political research) where unfounded claims are made, limited and tangential supporting evidence of these claims is provided, and conclusions are rooted more in personal opinion than an actual observation of reality. Your experience in this course should make clear the hazards in depriving ourselves of important knowledge about the concepts we are interested in if we avoid applying these important skills.

The way in which you will attempt to cultivate the skills listed above is by becoming exposed to and conducting political science research. Political science research attempts to predict, describe, and explain political phenomena from an unbiased perspective. This course will hopefully illustrate the value of approaching politics from this perspective. You will also learn the basic tools in which you can engage in a structured and thorough approach to inquiry.

**Course Objectives:** As the instructor of this course, I expect that my students at the end of the course will:

1. Be able to discern the difficulties in trying to measure and evaluate social phenomena.
2. Be able to construct a hypothesis that attempts to describe and explain reality and can be evaluated through research.
3. Be able to distinguish the similarities and differences in multiple approaches to research design.
4. Be able to review, analyze, and connect preexisting research in a useful and coherent way.
5. Be able to design their own research plan that builds upon past knowledge and seeks out new/original information.
6. Be able to translate abstract concepts into measurable variables that can be evaluated empirically.
7. Be able to determine appropriate statistical tests for determining relationships between variables.
8. Be able to conduct statistical tests to evaluate hypothesized relationships between variables.
9. Be able to implement high-end technological tools to assist in research inquiry.
10. Be able to develop papers that are clear and focused for readers.

**Course Format:** The first half of the course will incorporate a mixture of in-class lecture and student participation to learn the major concepts related to conducting political inquiry. Student participation will come from the usage of the interactive Classroom Performance System (CPS) Electronic Clickers. The CPS clickers will be used to gauge student understanding of course materials. The usage of these clickers is discussed in more detail in the description of item two in the graded

assignments section below. In addition, students will be occasionally asked to work out a problem on the board. In the second half of the course, class sessions will occur mainly in the computer lab. The location of the computer lab will be discussed in class. There will be a reduction in lecture for these lab sessions, as students will be expected to interact hands-on with data and directly apply some of the concepts learned in the first half of the course. As the instructor, I will take on a more supervisory role and encourage students to collaboratively work through exercises using data from existing political science research. The CPS clickers will again be used in this portion of the course to monitor whether students are following how to appropriately use statistical programs to perform empirical research.

This division in class structure relates to my philosophy about the course - it is like learning how to use a toolkit. For starters, you have to figure out why you need a toolkit in the first place. Then you learn about each tool that is available in the kit. What are the characteristics of each tool and under what circumstances are they potentially useful? This means you find out about potential problems you can encounter when using the tools, how to diagnose these issues, and how to best overcome these issues. This will reveal how each tool can be applied in real situations. After all of this, you get the opportunity to actually apply the tools in a real situation. In my view, it would be somewhat reckless to let construction workers build a skyscraper with little background knowledge of how to appropriately use the necessary tools under various conditions. It would also be inappropriate for you to perform a statistical analysis with actual data when you are not fully informed about the basic intuition and process behind constructing such analyses.

It is important to note that this is a writing intensive course, which means that it will provide you with some writing instruction for the style of writing that is common in the discipline of political science. A series of assignments provides opportunities for writing practice and feedback, with the goal of improving your writing over the course of the semester. In this course we will read original research that has been written in the field of political science. In class, we will highlight the style of writing used in these works. This will help students learn the key qualities to strive for when writing a paper in the field of political science. For more details about “W” courses, go to the University Writing Center website (<http://writingcenter.tamu.edu>).

Note: Failure to earn a passing average grade on the writing requirements precludes the assignment of “W” credit, irrespective of the student’s making a passing grade for the entire course on a straight point calculation basis. In other words, a student cannot receive “W” credit for this course without earning a passing grade on the writing component.

**Grades:** Grades will be based on several assignments. For the last assignment, you can select from one of two options. Students can earn one hundred points in this course. Please note that this is a course where extra credit assignments are not made available. Your grades will reflect your performance on the five assigned items only. Please note that attendance is a part of your grade given that you must be in class to participate in the interactive assessments using CPS clickers. In addition to this, missing multiple sessions will make it difficult for you to follow the material and receive a passing grade in the course.

In terms of assignments submitted late with an unexcused absence, I will deduct one letter grade for each day an assignment is late. If there is a personal conflict with any of the assignment due dates, please notify me as soon as possible.

Special Note: For those assignments that need to be submitted via e-mail, you cannot turn in the assignment late and say that the assignment did not go through to the class e-mail account. If in the very rare case that the e-mail cannot get through, submit it to my general school account, [colds1@tamu.edu](mailto:colds1@tamu.edu) or my department account, [colds1@politics.tamu.edu](mailto:colds1@politics.tamu.edu). Barring any unforeseen circumstances like a mass power outage or natural disaster, an assignment submitted just one minute late (based on the timestamp of the email) is considered a late assignment and will receive an automatic half letter grade reduction. Do not wait until the last minute to complete and submit your work.

### **Item #1--15 points: Practice Exercise Worksheets**

Over the course of the semester, three separate worksheets with a variety of exercises to complete will be distributed to students. The dates of distribution of the worksheets are listed in the class calendar below. Each worksheet will be worth five points. The primary intention of these worksheets is to assist you in pinpointing or diagnosing the numerous issues you can potentially face when conducting social science research. The grading will not be based on whether you get the correct answer in each exercise, but rather whether you exhibited a legitimate attempt to complete the exercises. Even if you are unsure of how to approach an exercise, you must attempt to finish it, as well as describe why the exercise is giving you difficulty. This way I can learn if students are having common issues with the same concepts, and attempt to rectify this by clarifying the concept in class. In order to best understand the concepts of the course, you must have some practice interacting with them before you can actually apply them. The due dates of the worksheets are 9/27 (#1), 10/13 (#2), and 12/1 (#3).

### **Item #2--15 points: Interactive Assessments**

For each class session starting Wednesday, September 8<sup>th</sup>, students will be presented with several questions that they will respond to using the Classroom Performance System (CPS) clickers made by eInstruction. Questions will be presented at various points in the class session, which potentially means students will be presented with some questions at the beginning of a session, in the middle of a session, and at the end of a session.

With each question, students will be presented with several answer options. Students will use the CPS clickers to enter the answer option they believe to be correct. The questions can be on assigned reading, materials from a previous lecture, or material being discussed in the session on that day. The number of points you earn will be based on your participation in the assessments and not on whether you get the correct answers. The less you attend class and/or the less you participate in these interactive assessments, the lower your score will be for this course item. For those instances where you have a university excused absence, you can still earn points by completing a take-home problem pertaining to the materials of the day that you missed. Refer to the statement about university excused absences about the permitted timeframe in which you can collect points for days that you missed.

The purpose of these interactive assessments is twofold. First, students can track their performance on these questions and determine which concepts they may have to study again or more in-depth as the course progresses. Second, as the instructor, the CPS clickers can help to efficiently and quickly determine whether course materials need to be explained in a different way to improve student understanding. The assessments are a low-stakes way for both you and I to gauge your comprehension of the materials presented in the course.

General information on the CPS clickers is available at <http://www.einstruction.com/products/assessment/cps/index.html> for students. More information on the CPS clickers in regards to their usage in class and how to register them online will be discussed in class. Please note that ensuring your own CPS clicker is functional for each class session is your responsibility. That means you must provide your own batteries, and that you must contact eInstruction if the clicker is not operating properly.

### **Item #3--15 points: Take-home examination**

On 10/25 in class, six essay-based questions will be distributed to students. There will be three sets of two questions each. Students will be expected to respond to one question from each set. Students will have until 10/29 to respond to the three questions they selected. The test is open-note, meaning students can refer to the required reading materials assigned in the course, as well as notes they have personally taken during lectures and while reading the assigned materials. Each of the three responses will be worth five points. Prompts will be a mix of accuracy and evaluative questions.

Accuracy questions will gauge whether students can correctly interpret whether a research analysis was conducted appropriately, and whether the student can correctly interpret the findings of a research analysis. Evaluative questions will ask students to assess the research approach of some of the course readings. Students will be expected to take a position on these evaluative prompts and provide support for their position. The student should cite course materials (when appropriate) using guidelines presented in the American Political Science Association Style Manual. Throughout the time of the examination, students cannot discuss any of the test items with other students in the course. You are allowed to e-mail me with a question or concern you might have about the exam during the examination period, but please note that I might not be able to provide certain details if it reveals potential answers to questions within a specific prompt. Be sure to contact me as soon as possible to ensure I have a chance to respond to your question in a timely way.

All essay responses must be typed in a word-processing computer program and follow specific formatting rules (12-pt Times New Roman font, double spaced, and one inch margins). Microsoft Word .doc files are preferred. Students will be expected to avoid frequent spelling and grammatical errors when writing their responses. **Finished exams have to be submitted to the instructor in paper form at the start of class on 10/29.**

### **Item #4--40 points: Research Project Proposal**

This proposal assignment is comprised of several papers that students will write over the course of the semester on a research topic of interest to them. As a result, the forty total points available is divided up between the paper assignments. For some of these assignments, a typed draft is due to the instructor beforehand. This way you can receive feedback on the content and structure of your writing before it is graded. *If you do not submit a draft for those papers where a draft is required, you will receive a two-point deduction on the grade for that particular paper.*

All papers must be typed in a word-processing computer program and follow specific formatting rules (12-pt Times New Roman font, double spaced, and one inch margins). Microsoft Word .doc files are preferred. Students will be expected to avoid frequent spelling and grammatical errors when writing their papers. The student should cite all resources used when

constructing these papers using guidelines presented in the American Political Science Association Style Manual. **All assignments will be due at 5 p.m. via e-mail on the specific date listed.** The email address to submit all papers is immediately below:

pols209@yahoo.com

**Paper #1 (5 points) Selecting a Potential Research Question – no draft of this paper required, finished paper due 9/20**

In this paper, students will offer a description of a research question in the field of political science that interests them. The student will be expected to provide an explanation as to why this question interests them. The student should also discuss if there have been previous attempts in the academic scholarship performing research on an area or topic directly related to the student's question. A description of the claims and findings of these past studies is not necessary for this particular paper - only a statement as to whether past research has been attempted and what types of outlets this research has been published in (e.g. which type of academic journal(s), edited volumes, and books) is required. For instance, does the research appear to be in a mixture of general political science journals and specialty journals focusing on one area, like the media & politics or international security, or is it mainly covered in the specialty journals? You have to give me a general idea as to the outlets where you would find research in your area of interest. The paper should be at least three pages long to address all requested areas in a meaningful way.

The scoring of this assignment is based on the following (out of 5 points possible)

- 2 Points: The student offers a potential research question
- 1 Point: The student offers a explanation as to why they personally find this research question interesting
- 1 Point: The student states whether previous research has been conducted on the topic and where it has been published
- 1 Point: The student's writing has an easy to follow structure (introduction-body-conclusion). The student also follows requested formatting rules and avoids frequent spelling and grammatical errors

**Paper #2 (5 points) Analyzing an Existing Research Project – no draft of this paper required, finished paper due 10/1**

In this paper, students will evaluate one academic article or book chapter related to the student's research question of interest. The purpose is for students to assess the research design of this specific project. A summary of the research question, hypothesis or hypotheses, and the research design is necessary. Students must take a position as to whether the research design is appropriate given the research question. In other words, is the way in which the study constructed an appropriate way to examine the research question? If so, an explanation for this position using course materials is necessary. If not, the student should provide some thoughts as to how the study could be modified to better address the research question (e.g. a different hypothesis, a different data collection procedure, the incorporation of an important alternative variable, etc.). The paper should be at least four pages long to address all requested areas in a meaningful way.

The scoring of this assignment is based on the following (out of 5 points possible)

- 2 Points: The student summarizes the research question, hypothesis or hypotheses, and the research design of the project
- 2 Points: The student evaluates whether the research design of the project is appropriate given the research question
- 1 Point: The student's writing has an easy to follow structure (introduction-body-conclusion). The student also follows requested formatting rules and avoids frequent spelling and grammatical errors

**Paper #3 (10 points) Literature Review on Research Question – draft of this paper required by 10/8, finished paper due 10/22**

In this paper, students will present a thorough review and analysis of the research that has previously been conducted that is related to their respective research question. The important/major works in the research area should be detailed in the literature review. This means the research that is highly cited by other scholars in the research area needs to be covered. It is the responsibility of the student to summarize these major works and evaluate how their findings have shaped how the area related to the research question is currently understood.

An assessment of the makeup of the literature is essential. This means if there is a high level of disagreement in the past scholarship in terms of theories and findings, the student must offer some thoughts as to why they believe this is the case. For those students where a relatively limited literature exists pertaining to the student's research question, they must offer some thoughts as to why they believe this is the case.

Lastly, the potential implications of past research on how the student would approach their own research project needs to be discussed. Is there an important concept in the literature that is not being addressed in the literature or is conceptualized incorrectly that the student can attempt to explore? Do the projects use an underdeveloped theory? Is a research design previously unused in the scholarship need to be applied to better examine the political phenomena of interest? These are the

sorts of questions that should be addressed here. The length of the paper will depend on how many major works related to your research question need to be discussed, but papers less than five pages will raise concerns that the student is not attempting to provide readers a thorough representation and analysis of the literature in the research area of interest.

The scoring of this assignment is based on the following (out of 10 points possible)

- 4 Points: The student presents a review and analysis of past important/major works related to their research question
- 4 Points: The student describes how the proposals and findings of past research influence their own research plan
- 2 Points: The student's writing has an easy to follow structure (introduction-body-conclusion). The student also follows requested formatting rules and avoids frequent spelling and grammatical errors

Paper #4 (15 points) Description of Research Hypotheses - draft of this paper required by 11/3, finished paper due 11/15

In this paper, students will discuss the research question they have ultimately selected to study and describe their hypothesis or hypotheses related to this question. The research question must be clearly specified and needs to be understandable to a reader that has no previous background or interest in the area of political science relevant to the research question. The hypothesis/hypotheses offered must show direct relevance to the research question presented. The concepts (variables) that are relevant to examining the research hypothesis/hypotheses need to be described in an accessible way.

An explanation as to how the hypothesis/hypotheses compare to past hypotheses examined in the scholarship is necessary. The student has to mention whether they think their hypothesis/hypothesis needs to be compared with alternative hypotheses that exist. In addition, the student should explain why the examination of their hypothesis or hypotheses should be relevant to others. Students will answer the ever important 'so what' question - why would examining the hypothesis or hypotheses make a contribution to knowledge that others would appreciate? The paper should be at least six pages long to address all requested areas in a meaningful way.

The scoring of this assignment is based on the following (out of 15 points possible)

- 3 Points: The student describes their research question and hypothesis/hypotheses in a clear, understandable fashion
- 3 Points: The student describes the concepts (variables) that are relevant in examining their hypothesis/hypotheses
- 3 Points: The student contrasts their hypothesis/hypothesis to past hypotheses evaluated by scholars
- 3 Points: The student evaluates whether their research project needs to compare alternative hypotheses from their own
- 3 Points: The student's writing has an easy to follow structure (introduction-body-conclusion). The student also follows requested formatting rules and avoids frequent spelling and grammatical errors

Paper #5 (5 points) Description of Research Design/Methods - no draft of this paper required, finished paper due 11/22

In this paper, students will describe the research design they believe is most appropriate to evaluate their hypothesis/hypotheses. An explanation as to why the student believes their research design is a better option than potential alternatives is required. For example, if the student wants to construct an experimental design studying how alternative styles of news coverage on illegal immigration shapes attitudes towards Latinos, the student should justify why an experimental approach is more preferable than studying data with natural variation, such as cross-sectional survey data.

A description of how the student is collecting information to research their hypothesis is mandatory for this paper. The procedure in which you will evaluate this information is also required. If the student will perform statistical regression(s), what will the statistical model look like? If the student is studying how individual political trust impacts political participation, the student must describe where and how the student will collect data on these and any other relevant variables. Is the data used in the regression readily available, or would the student have to build their own dataset? If the data exists, what are the important characteristics of the sample? If the student will perform comparative case studies, which cases will be examined and why? How will the cases be examined? For example, a student wanting to compare the rhetoric of several presidential administrations on race and see how this helped shape media portrayals of minorities during these administrations must explain how they will evaluate presidential rhetoric and media coverage of minorities. The paper should be at least six pages long to address all requested areas in a meaningful way.

The scoring of this assignment is based on the following (out of 5 points possible)

- 2 Points: The student describes the research design they will use and why it is appropriate relative to other options
- 2 Points: The student describes how they will collect the information to research their hypothesis/hypotheses
- 1 Point: The student's writing has an easy to follow structure (introduction-body-conclusion). The student also follows requested formatting rules and avoids frequent spelling and grammatical errors.

**Item #5--15 points: Data Analysis Project (students select one of the following options)**

For this assignment, students will select from one of two options, an academic research poster or a website based research report. Regardless of which assignment the student selects, a maximum of fifteen points can be earned.

The academic research poster is a suitable option for those students who have constructed a research proposal in the paper assignments described above where it is feasible to collect and evaluate data within the time constraints of a semester-length project. The website based research report is a suitable option for those students where it is unfeasible to collect and evaluate data within the time constraints of a semester-length project. This will often be the case when the student has developed a research proposal where extensive original data collection is required such that the necessary time needed to collect it would extend beyond the timeframe of this specific course. Simply put, when it is clear that students can evaluate their own research question developed in the paper assignments described above before the semester is over, the research poster is the appropriate option. For students where it does not appear likely that they can evaluate their own research question before the semester is over, the webpage report is the appropriate option. To help come to a decision on this, the instructor will consult the student over the course of the semester regarding the feasibility of their research design.

A student must inform the instructor in a statement by e-mail as to which option they select. This statement will be due on 11/17 via email by 5 p.m. Those students who fail to notify which option they have selected by this time will receive a two-point deduction on the score for this assignment. The email address to submit these statements is immediately below:

pols209@yahoo.com

Option #1 Academic Research Poster

An academic poster is a visual representation of the most important aspects pertaining to a research project. With this option, students will construct their own academic research poster that presents findings evaluating the hypothesis/hypotheses on the research question they selected. Students are expected to have carried out their research plan mapped out in paper assignment #5 and are able to present results on what was discovered. The poster should succinctly detail the most important elements of the research project - the research question, previous theories/literature, research hypotheses, research methodology, research results, and conclusions. Each of these items (and all the information corresponding to these items) needs to be clearly identified on the poster for anyone to locate.

The posters must be no smaller than 24'' x 36'' and no larger than 36'' x 48'' in size. They can either be black and white posters or color posters. Students that prefer to do a black and white poster should be able to get one printed affordably from Copy Corner for less than \$20 if the poster is not on glossy paper or is laminated. Students that would like to have a poster printed in color ink will have to speak with me, as I will place an order through a online printing company that prints scientific posters at discounted prices.

We will discuss in class how to develop an informative poster using PowerPoint with the help of the University Writing Center on 10/29.

A draft of PowerPoint slide of poster is due at 5 p.m. by email on 11/29, and a revised final PowerPoint slide of the poster is due at 5 p.m. by email on 12/6. Those students who fail to provide a draft of their poster slide will receive a two-point deduction on the score for this assignment. The email address to submit the poster slides is immediately below:

pols209@yahoo.com

Students will also be expected to present their academic poster during a poster session on 12/13, the day specified by the university as our final examination period. The student should be able to answer questions from poster session attendees regarding their research project at this time.

The scoring of this assignment is based on the following (out of 15 points possible)

- 3 Points: The student provides a brief review of the question, past literature, hypothesis/hypotheses, and methodology
- 3 Points: The student offers on the poster both written and visual (tables, graphs, etc.) summaries of their results
- 3 Points: The student attempts on the poster to discuss the implications of their results for their research question
- 3 Points: The student creates a clearly labeled, easy to follow poster that lacks spelling/typographical errors
- 3 Points: The student attends the poster session and answers questions about their project from attendees

## Option #2 Website Based Research Report

The website based research report will present students the opportunity to evaluate an existing dataset and present the results of this data on a personally created website. Students will be given a research question and hypothesis that can be evaluated with the dataset, and students will use this information to construct and evaluate an appropriate statistical model. The expectation is that students will provide an explanation as to why they selected the model that they did and describe the results of their hypothesis tests. It will be expected that students will provide both a written and visual (tables, graphs, etc.) summary of their regression results. A discussion about the general characteristics of the data, such as sample size and descriptive statistics, is also required. Any potential issues the student has with the data based on diagnostic tests or their interpretation of the regression results needs to be included in their research report. The student should discuss the implications of the findings as they relate to the research question and hypothesis stated in the assignment prompt. Students will have a comments section on their webpage, giving classmates the opportunity to ask questions, as well as evaluate the model used and the corresponding findings.

Students will use the WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) website editing interface of Google Sites to create their webpage. Google Sites offers multiple appropriate templates that students can select from, or students can elect to develop their own presentation style with the HTML coding features made available.

The webpage will be evaluated on the readability and accessibility of the content posted. The student should cite all resources used when constructing their webpage report using guidelines presented in the American Political Science Association Style Manual.

A link to the initial version of the webpage is due at 5 p.m. by email on 11/29, and a link to the revised final version of the webpage is due at 5 p.m. by email on 12/6. Those students who fail to provide a link to the initial version of their webpage report will receive a two-point deduction on the score for this assignment. The email address to submit the links is immediately below:

pols209@yahoo.com

Once the link to the revised report has been sent, I will send an email to students with links to all the webpage reports that have been created. Students participating in this project will be required to visit the webpage reports of their classmates and make an effort to comment on these reports in the comments section of each respective webpage. The number of webpages each student will be expected to review will be determined after finding out the number of students participating in this project. The student comments will be incorporated into the dialogue of an in-class discussion section occurring on 12/13, the day of our final examination period. During this discussion, students will compare and contrast the models and findings offered on each webpage. Every student should be able to answer questions from the instructor and classmates regarding their statistical analysis during this discussion section.

The scoring of this assignment is based on the following (out of 15 points possible)

- 3 Points: The student constructs and describes a statistical model they evaluated using the provided dataset
- 3 Points: The student provides both a written and visual (tables, graphs, etc.) summary of their regression results.
- 3 Points: The student details the implications of the regression results for the selected research question and hypothesis
- 3 Points: The student made a legitimate attempt to review and comment on the webpages created by their colleagues.  
The student also responds to questions regarding their own statistical analysis during an in-class discussion section
- 3 Points: The student's webpage is presented in a clear, easy to follow format. All content that is created is readable and accessible. The student also avoids frequent spelling and grammatical errors.

Upon completion of the five items, final class grades will be assigned with the following grading scale, out of one hundred total points possible.

A = 89.50 - 100

B = 79.50 - 89.49

C = 69.50 - 79.49

D = 59.50 - 69.49

F = 0 - 59.49

## Course Readings

There are two texts that are required. These books can be acquired separately or as a bundle, and are frequently discounted on online sites like Amazon.com. All other assigned readings, such as academic journal articles and book chapters, will be posted on course reserves online. Details will be given in class on how to acquire these readings.

Pollock, Philip H. 2009. *The Essentials of Political Analysis*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.  
ISBN: 978-0-87289-606-2

Pollock, Philip H. 2006. *A Stata Companion to Political Analysis*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.  
ISBN: 0-87289-305-7

The two assigned texts should also be available on reserve at the Policy Sciences & Economics Library (PSEL) in the Annenberg Presidential Center adjacent to the Allen Building.

## Statement about Students with Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Department of Student Life, Services for Students with Disabilities in Room B118 of Cain Hall, or call 845-1637.

## Statement about Course Materials/Copyright and Plagiarism

The materials used in this course are copyrighted. By "materials," I mean anything generated for this class, which include but are not limited to syllabi, presentations, web pages, quizzes, exams, lab problems, in-class materials review sheets, and additional problem sets. Because these are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy the handouts, unless I expressly grant permission. As commonly defined, plagiarism consists of passing off as one's own the ideas, words, writings, etc., which belong to another. In accordance with the definition, you are committing plagiarism if you copy the work of another person and turn it in as your own, even if you should have the permission of the person. Plagiarism is a serious offense and students can face severe consequences if they have been found to plagiarize the work of others. If you have any questions regarding plagiarism, please consult the Texas A&M University web site (<http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu>).

## Classroom Protocol

This course requires students to work through at times complicated concepts that they sometimes will struggle with. Students should maintain a positive attitude in interacting with other students and the instructor. It is important that when appropriate, students exhibit a willingness to help and/or encourage peers that need assistance as opposed to mocking them. The best learning environment is a positive one. If any student does not follow these guidelines, I reserve the right to excuse them from the classroom.

## Statement about University Excused Absences

The following reasons are deemed by Texas A&M University as acceptable reasons for being absent to a class (from Section 7.1 from student rules <http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07>)

1. Participation in an activity appearing on the university authorized activity list. Notify me prior to your participation in this activity.
2. Death or major illness in a student's immediate family.
3. Illness of a dependent family member.
4. Participation in legal proceedings or administrative procedures that require a student's presence.
5. Religious holy day.
6. Illness that is too severe or contagious for the student to attend class (to be determined by Health Center or off-campus physician).
7. Required participation in military duties.
8. Mandatory admission interviews for professional or graduate school that cannot be rescheduled.

Students who are unable to complete graded work by the due date as a result of an excused absence have a very limited amount of time to notify the instructor that the absence is an acceptable excused absence given university policy and need to provide documentation.

From Section 7.3 on the timeframe for excused absences (<http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07>): Students may be excused from attending class on the day of a graded activity or when attendance contributes to a student's grade, for the reasons stated in Section 7.1, or other reason deemed appropriate by the student's instructor. Except in the case of the observance of a religious holiday, to be excused the student must notify his or her instructor in writing (acknowledged e-mail message is acceptable) prior to the date of absence if such notification is feasible. In cases where advance notification is not feasible (e.g. accident, or emergency) the student must provide notification by the end of the second working day after the absence. This notification should include an explanation of why notice could not be sent prior to the class. Accommodations sought for absences due to the observance of a religious holiday can be sought either prior or after the absence, but not later than two working days after the absence. If needed, the student must provide additional documentation substantiating the reason for the absence, that is satisfactory to the instructor, within one week of the last date of the absence. If the absence is excused, the instructor must either provide the student an opportunity to make up any quiz, exam or other graded activities or provide a satisfactory alternative to be completed within 30 calendar days from the last day of the absence.

**Course Outline** Note: *If any changes are necessary during the term, I will announce them in class*

### **Week 1**

\*Monday, August 30<sup>th</sup>

#### **Introduction and Expectations of Course**

**No Required Reading for Today**

\*Wednesday, September 1<sup>st</sup>

#### **How do we distinguish social/political science research from other forms of inquiry?**

##### **Required Reading:**

Hoover, Kenneth and Todd Donovan. 2008. "Chapter 1 - Thinking Scientifically" and "Chapter 2 - The Elements of Science." In *The Elements of Social Scientific Thinking*. Boston, MA: Thomson Wadsworth.

\*Friday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>

TAMU Career Center Visit on post-college opportunities

##### **Required Reading:**

O'Brien, Rory. 1999. "Normative Versus Empirical Theory and Method." In *Methods for Political Inquiry: The Discipline, Philosophy, and Analysis of Politics*, eds. Stella Z. Theodoulou and Rory O'Brien. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 77-90.

Ethridge, Marcus E. 1999. "Scientific Principles in Political Study: Some Enduring Situations." In *Methods for Political Inquiry: The Discipline, Philosophy, and Analysis of Politics*, eds. Stella Z. Theodoulou and Rory O'Brien. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 130-141.

Theodoulou, Stella Z. 1999. "Starting from Scratch: The Research Process." In *Methods for Political Inquiry: The Discipline, Philosophy, and Analysis of Politics*, eds. Stella Z. Theodoulou and Rory O'Brien. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 142-151.

### **Week 2**

\*Monday, September 6<sup>th</sup>

##### **Required Reading:**

Gladwell, Malcolm. 2005. "Chapter 1 - The Theory of Thin Slices: How a Little Bit of Knowledge Goes a Long Way," "Chapter 2 - The Locked Door: The Secret Life of Snap Decisions," and "Chapter 3 - The Warren Harding Error." In *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*. New York: Back Bay Books.

\*Wednesday, September 8<sup>th</sup>

#### **How do we appropriately define and measure the concepts we are studying?**

##### **Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2009. "Chapter 1 - The Definition and Measurement of Concepts." In *The Essentials of Political Analysis*.

\*Friday, September 10<sup>th</sup>

**Required Reading:**

Continue with “Chapter 1 - The Definition and Measurement of Concepts.”

**Week 3**

\*Monday, September 13<sup>th</sup>

**What are the various ways in which we can describe specific characteristics/qualities of our variables?**

**Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2009. “Chapter 2 – Measuring and Describing Variables.” In *The Essentials of Political Analysis*.

\*Wednesday, September 15<sup>th</sup>

**Required Reading:**

Continue with “Chapter 2 – Measuring and Describing Variables.”

\*Friday, September 17<sup>th</sup>

**What is a research hypothesis and what is meant by independent and dependent variables of a hypothesis?**

**Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2009. “Chapter 3 - Proposing Explanations, Framing Hypotheses, and Making Comparisons.” In *The Essentials of Political Analysis*.

**Week 4**

\*Monday, September 20<sup>th</sup>

**(Paper #1 – Selecting a Potential Research Question Due Today)**

Practice Exercise Worksheet #1 Passed Out in Class

**Required Reading:**

Continue with “Chapter 3 - Proposing Explanations, Framing Hypotheses, and Making Comparisons.”

\*Wednesday, September 22<sup>nd</sup>

**What are some viable research designs in political science (e.g. experiments, case studies, and formal models)?**

**Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2009. “Chapter 4 – Research Design and the Logic of Control.” In *The Essentials of Political Analysis*.

\*Friday, September 24<sup>th</sup>

**Required Reading:**

Nelson, Thomas E, Rosalee E. Clawson, and Zoe M. Oxley. 1997. “Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and its Effect on Tolerance.” *American Political Science Review*. 91(3): 567-583.

Gerber, Alan S. and Donald P. Green. 2000. “The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment.” *American Political Science Review*. 94(3): 653-663.

Moynihan, Donald P. 2005. “What Do We Talk About When We Talk about Performance? Dialogue Theory and Performance Budgeting.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*. 16(2): 151-168.

**Week 5**

\*Monday, September 27<sup>th</sup>

**(Practice Exercise Worksheet #1 Due Today in Class)**

**Required Reading:**

Gerring, John. 2004. “What is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?” *American Political Science Review*. 98(2): 341-354.

George, Alexander L. and Andrew Bennett. 2005. “Chapter 1 – Case Studies and Theory Development.” In *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

\*Wednesday, September 29<sup>th</sup>

**Required Reading:**

George, Alexander L. and Andrew Bennett. 2005. "Chapter 4 – Phase One: Designing Case Study Research," "Chapter 5 – Phase Two: Carrying Out the Case Studies," and "Chapter 6 – Phase Three: Drawing the Implications of Case Findings for Theory." In *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

\*Friday, October 1<sup>st</sup>

**(Paper #2 – Analyzing an Existing Research Project Due Today)**

**Required Reading:**

Shepsle, Kenneth and Mark S. Bonchek. 1997. "Chapter 2 – Rationality: The Model of Choice," and "Chapter 3 Getting Started with Group Choice Analysis." In *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior, and Institutions*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

**Week 6**

\*Monday, October 4<sup>th</sup>

Practice Exercise Worksheet #2 Passed Out in Class

**Required Reading:**

Shepsle, Kenneth and Mark S. Bonchek. 1997. "Chapter 4 – Group Choice and Majority Rule," and "Chapter 5 - Spatial Models of Majority Rule." In *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior, and Institutions*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

\*Wednesday, October 6<sup>th</sup>

**How can we initially determine if relationships between variables that appear probable are potentially legitimate?**

**Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2009. "Chapter 5 – Making Controlled Comparisons." In *The Essentials of Political Analysis*.

\*Friday, October 8<sup>th</sup>

**(Draft of Paper #3 – Literature Review on Research Question Due)**

**How can statistical inference help us relate our data sample to the population at large?**

**Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2009. "Chapter 6 – Foundations of Statistical Inference." In *The Essentials of Political Analysis*.

**Week 7**

\*Monday, October 11<sup>th</sup>

**Required Reading:**

Continue with "Chapter 6 – Foundations of Statistical Inference." In *The Essentials of Political Analysis*.

\*Wednesday, October 13<sup>th</sup>

**(Practice Exercise Worksheet #2 Due Today in Class)**

**How do we conduct tests of significance to find whether statistical associations can be attributed to mere chance?**

**Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2009. "Chapter 7 – Tests of Statistical Inference and Measures of Association." In *The Essentials of Political Analysis*.

\*Friday, October 15<sup>th</sup>

**Required Reading:**

Continue with "Chapter 7 – Tests of Statistical Inference and Measures of Association." In *The Essentials of Political Analysis*.

**Week 8**

\*Monday, October 18<sup>th</sup>

**How can we estimate the size of the effect an independent variable has on the dependent variable?**

**Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2009. "Chapter 8 – Correlation and Linear Regression." In *The Essentials of Political Analysis*.

\*Wednesday, October 20<sup>th</sup>

**Required Reading:**

Continue with “Chapter 8 – Correlation and Linear Regression.” In *The Essentials of Political Analysis*.

\*Friday, October 22<sup>nd</sup>

**(Final Version of Paper #3 – Literature Review on Research Question Due)**

**How can we evaluate dependent variables with limited outcomes?**

**Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2009. “Chapter 9 – Logistic Regression.” In *The Essentials of Political Analysis*.

**Week 9**

\*Monday, October 25<sup>th</sup>

**Take-home examination distributed in class**

\*Wednesday, October 27<sup>th</sup>

**No class today**

Work on take-home examination

\*Friday, October 29<sup>th</sup>

**Finished take-home examinations due today in class**

Discussion on how to develop a research poster

**Week 10**

\*Monday, November 1<sup>st</sup>

Computer Laboratory Session 1

**Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2006. “Chapter 1 - Introduction to Stata.” In *A Stata Companion to Political Analysis*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

\*Wednesday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>

**(Draft of Paper #4 – Description of Research Hypothesis Due)**

Computer Laboratory Session 2

**Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2006. “Chapter 2 – Descriptive Statistics.” In *A Stata Companion to Political Analysis*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

\*Friday, November 5<sup>th</sup>

Computer Laboratory Session 3

**Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2006. “Chapter 3 – Transforming Variables.” In *A Stata Companion to Political Analysis*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

**Week 11**

\*Monday, November 8<sup>th</sup>

Computer Laboratory Session 4

**Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2006. “Chapter 4 – Making Comparisons.” In *A Stata Companion to Political Analysis*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

\*Wednesday, November 10<sup>th</sup>

Computer Laboratory Session 5

**Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2006. “Chapter 5 – Making Controlled Comparisons.” In *A Stata Companion to Political Analysis*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

*\*Friday, November 12<sup>th</sup>*

Computer Laboratory Session 6

**Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2006. "Chapter 6 – Making Inferences about Sample Means." In *A Stata Companion to Political Analysis*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

**Week 12**

*\*Monday, November 15<sup>th</sup>*

***(Final Version of Paper #4 – Description of Research Hypothesis Due)***

Computer Laboratory Session 7

**Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2006. "Chapter 7 – Chi-square and Measures of Association." In *A Stata Companion to Political Analysis*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

*\*Wednesday, November 17<sup>th</sup>*

***(Statement About Data Analysis Project Preference Due by E-mail)***

Computer Laboratory Session 8

**Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2006. "Chapter 8 – Correlation and Linear Regression." In *A Stata Companion to Political Analysis*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

*\*Friday, November 19<sup>th</sup>*

Computer Laboratory Session 9

**Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2006. "Chapter 9 – Dummy Variables and Interaction Effects." In *A Stata Companion to Political Analysis*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

**Week 13**

*\*Monday, November 22<sup>nd</sup>*

***(Paper #5 – Description of Research Design/Methods Due)***

Computer Laboratory Session 10

Practice Exercise Worksheet #3 Passed Out in Class

**Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2006. "Chapter 10 – Logistic Regression." In *A Stata Companion to Political Analysis*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

*\*Wednesday, November 24<sup>th</sup>*

Computer Laboratory Session 11

**Required Reading:**

Pollock, Philip H. 2006. "Chapter 11 – Doing Your Own Political Analysis." In *A Stata Companion to Political Analysis*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

*\*Friday, November 26<sup>th</sup>*

***No class today – Happy Thanksgiving***

**Week 14**

*\*Monday, November 29<sup>th</sup>*

***(Draft of PowerPoint Slide or Webpage Based Report of Data Analysis Project Due Today)***

Computer Laboratory Session 12

**No Required Reading Today**

*\*Wednesday, December 1<sup>st</sup>*

***(Practice Exercise Worksheet #3 Due Today in Class)***

Computer Laboratory Session 13

**No Required Reading Today**

*\*Friday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>*

Computer Laboratory Session 14

**No Required Reading Today**

**Week 15**

*\*Monday, December 6<sup>th</sup>*

**(Final Version of PowerPoint Slide or Webpage Based Report of Data Analysis Project Due Today)**

Overview of What We Have Learned

**No Required Reading Today**

*\*Wednesday, December 8<sup>th</sup> and Friday, December 10<sup>th</sup>*

**No classes these days. Reading day on Wednesday and finals begin on Friday**

*\*Monday, December 13<sup>th</sup>*

**Final examination period from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m.**

The first half of the examination period will be devoted to the poster presentations, and the second half of the examination period will be devoted to the discussion of the webpage reports. All students, regardless of project, must be present for the entire two-hour period.

Summary of Important Class Dates

1. Paper #1 – Selecting a Potential Research Question **Due 9/20**
2. Practice Exercise Worksheet #1 **Due 9/27**
3. Paper #2 – Analyzing an Existing Research Project **Due 10/1**
4. Draft of Paper #3 – Literature Review on Research Question **Due 10/8**
5. Practice Exercise Worksheet #2 **Due 10/13**
6. Final Version of Paper #3 – Literature Review on Research Question **Due 10/22**
7. Take-home Examination **Passed Out 10/25**
8. Finished Take-home Examination **Due 10/29**
9. Draft of Paper #4 – Description of Research Hypothesis **Due 11/3**
10. Final Version of Paper #4 – Description of Research Hypothesis **Due 11/15**
11. Statement About Data Analysis Project Preference **Due 11/17**
12. Paper #5 – Description of Research Design/Methods **Due 11/22**
13. Draft of PowerPoint Slide or Webpage Based Report of Data Analysis **Due 11/29**
14. Practice Exercise Worksheet #3 **Due 12/1**
15. Final Version of PowerPoint Slide or Webpage Based Report of Data Analysis **Due 12/6**
16. Poster Presentation and Panel Discussion of Webpage Reports **Held On 12/13**