Introduction to Political Science Research Methods
Fall 2008
PLS 201-001/002

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University of North Carolina at Wilmington                E-mail: seoj@uncw.edu

CLASS MEETINGS (LH 110)
M, W, F: 10:00-10:50 a.m. (Section 001)
M, W, F: 12:00-12:50 p.m. (Section 002)

OFFICE HOURS
M & W, 3:30-5:00 p.m. or By Appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Can we study politics scientifically? What do we mean by scientific inquiry of political behavior and institution? How can we as students of politics distinguish ourselves from those of journalism or history? Do you want yourself to be called a political scientist? What tools and skill-sets are available out there for a better understanding of policymaking processes? Which approach is more appropriate, qualitative or quantitative? Ultimately, can we as political scientists predict, for example, who is going to be the next president of the United States this November? If yes, how so? If not, why not?

This course will introduce you to the basic principles of research design in political science and to research tools and skills for analyzing politics rigorously. This is not a statistics class; it is a class about how political scientists conduct their research. Thus, we will explore a wide range of political science methods, including research design, qualitative approach, and basic statistical analysis. When the semester is over, I expect you to be equipped with various research approaches, both qualitative and quantitative. Using the tools of scientific inquiry, you can improve your ability to pose and answer research questions on your own. At the end of the day, I want you to tell what is “not even wrong” in study of politics.

COURSE READING

Required Reading (Textbook)

Suggested Reading


**GRADING**

1. **Short Memo on Election Prediction** (Sep 12) = 5 %
2. **First Midterm** (Sep 29) = 20 %
3. **Research Question** (1 page, Due Oct 17) = 5 %
4. **Second Midterm** (Nov 3) = 25 %
5. **Three Homework Assignments** = 15 % (5 % each)
6. **Research Design** (9-10 page, Due Dec 8) = 20 %
7. **Attendance/Participation** = 10 %

To rephrase, the class requirements are composed of

1) **Two In-Class Exams (45 %)**
2) **One Memo and Two Papers (30 %)**
3) **Three Homework Assignments (15 %)**
4) **Attendance (10%)**

- **TWO IN-CLASS EXAMS (45 %)**
  Make up exams will only be given for Excused absences and emergencies. For those with excused absences, only one make-up exam time will be available during my next available office hours.

- **SHORT MEMO ON ELECTION PREDICTION (5 %)**
  This is a maximum ONE-PAGE long and SINGLE-SPACED paper in which you identify and describe one theory, or claim, or argument from a newspaper or your grandparents that forecasts which candidate, Obama or McCain, will win the presidential election this November. Then, explain 1) Why you think his or her or their theory is either scientific or not scientific and 2) How you can improve the theory to be more scientific. Writing this short memo will provide you with an opportunity to explore and examine diverse theories and claims on how we can predict presidential electoral outcome. More details will be discussed in class.

- **RESEARCH QUESTION (5 %)**
  You are asked to address a political science research question that interests you. You can choose your own topic, but I always like you to discuss your choice with me. Specific elements in this first paper will be discussed in class. This first paper is ONE PAGE long and SINGLE-SPACED.
• **RESEARCH DESIGN** *(NOT RESEARCH PAPER) (20 %)*  
There is **NO FINAL** exam for this class. Instead, you ought to complete your **research design** addressing your previous research question. You **DO NOT** have to implement your research so that I don’t expect any research outcome from you. This is 9-10 pages long and DOUBLE-SPACED paper and obviously, you are supposed to apply the lecture and course materials to your research design.

• **THREE HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS** (15 %)  
During the **basic statistics** session of this semester, homework assignments will be distributed. They will give you a chance to practice what you are learning in the class.

• **LATE ASSIGNMENTS OR PAPERS** will be penalized and your course total points will drop 3 points.

• **ATTENDANCE** (10 %)  
Students who miss class will find themselves, and their attendance grades, quickly falling behind. I will do attendance check and apply it into your final grade. If necessary, all documentation should be submitted to me in a timely manner.

For the whole course, letter grades will be assigned according to the following point totals:

```
A=92.5 or more       A-=89.5-92.49
B+=87.5-89.49        B=82.5-87.49       B-=79.5-82.49
C+=77.5-79.49        C=69.5-77.49       D=59.5-69.49
F= less than 59.5
```

**OTHER ISSUES**  
A grade of incomplete (“I”) will be given if unforeseeable circumstances keep you from completing the course requirements within the normal semester. Under these circumstances you submit the missing assignments during the subsequent semester (not revisions of previously graded work).

According to *University of North Carolina Bulletin* and the *Student Handbook*, you are advised that: (1) Do not commit plagiarism. (2) Do not receive unauthorized assistance during the exams. (3) Violations of these rules in any assignment may be subject to a minimum penalty of failing grade for the assignment and could result in a grade of “F” for the course.

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Disability Services; and (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class. The contact number is 910-962-7555.
CLASS SCHEDULE

Aug 20 (W)  Course Introductions and Expectations
              Studying Politics Scientifically I

Aug 22 (F)  Studying Politics Scientifically II
              Prediction and Falsifiability
              Johnson and Reynolds (J&R), Chapter 1 & 2

Aug 25 (M)  Studying Politics Scientifically III
              Logic and Rigor in Political Science Research
              J&R, Chapter 1 & 2

Aug 27 (W)  Studying Politics Scientifically IV
              Collective Action Problems & Prisoners’ Dilemma Game
              J&R, Chapter 2

Aug 29 (F)  Experimental Research Design
              J&R, Chapter 3

Sep 1 (M)  Labor Day Holiday

Sep 3 (W)  Spurious Correlations and Non-experimental Research Design
              J&R, Chapter 3

Sep 5 (F)  Time-series, Cross-sectional, and Panel Studies
              J&R, Chapter 3

Sep 8 (M)  Literature Review
              J&R, Chapter 5

Sep 10 (W)  Document Analysis
              J&R, Chapter 8
Sep 12 (F)  Content Analysis
            J&R, Chapter 8
            Short Memo Due in Class!!!

Sep 15 (M)  Guest Lecture Part I (the Randall Library Research): same classroom

Sep 17 (W)  Guest Lecture Part II (the Randall Library Research): same classroom

Sep 19 (F)  Elite Interviewing and Survey Research
            J&R, Chapter 10

Sep 22 (M)  Hypotheses, Concepts, and Variables
            J&R, Chapter 4

Sep 24 (W)  Dependent and Independent Variables
            J&R, Chapter 4

Sep 26 (F)  Constructing Hypotheses
            J&R, Chapter 4

*** Sep 29 (M) First Midterm Exam (Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10) ***

Oct 1 (W)   Measurement I
            J&R, Chapter 6

Oct 3 (F)   Measurement II
            J&R, Chapter 6

Oct 6 (M)   Fall Break

Oct 8 (W), 10 (F)  Poli-sci Day Week (No Class, but Attend a Poli-sci Event!)
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Chapter/Section</th>
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<td>Oct 13 (M)</td>
<td><strong>Sampling I</strong>&lt;br&gt;Population parameter vs. Sample statistic&lt;br&gt;Probability Sample</td>
<td>J&amp;R, Chapter 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 15 (W)</td>
<td><strong>Sampling II</strong>&lt;br&gt;Statistical Inference</td>
<td>J&amp;R, Chapter 9</td>
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<td>Oct 17 (F)</td>
<td><strong>Making Empirical Observations</strong></td>
<td>J&amp;R, Chapter 7</td>
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<td><strong>Research Question Paper Due in Class!!!</strong></td>
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<td>Oct 20 (M)</td>
<td><strong>Univariate Data Analysis and Descriptive Statistics</strong></td>
<td>J&amp;R, Chapter 11</td>
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<td>Oct 22 (W)</td>
<td><strong>Central Tendency</strong></td>
<td>J&amp;R, Chapter 11</td>
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<td>Oct 24 (F)</td>
<td><strong>Sample Standard Deviation and Normal Distribution</strong></td>
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<td>Oct 27 (M)</td>
<td><strong>Standard Normal Distribution</strong></td>
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<td>Oct 29 (W)</td>
<td><strong>Z-Score I</strong></td>
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<td>Oct 31 (F)</td>
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<td><strong>Nov 3 (M)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Second Midterm Exam (Chapters 6, 7, 9, 11)</strong></td>
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<td>Nov 5 (W)</td>
<td><strong>Measuring Relationships and Testing Hypothesis</strong></td>
<td>J&amp;R, Chapter 12</td>
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Nov 7 (F)  Crosstabulation Analysis & Statistical Independence  
*J&R, Chapter 12*

Nov 10 (M)  Testing the Hypothesis: Chi-square Test I  
*J&R, Chapter 12*

Nov 12 (W)  Chi-square Test II  
*J&R, Chapter 12*

Nov 14 (F)  Chi-square Test: Practice

Nov 17 (M)  Testing the Hypothesis: Population Mean Test I

Nov 19 (W)  Population Mean Test II  
**Homework #1 Due in Class**

Nov 21 (F)  Population Mean Test: Practice

Nov 24 (M)  Testing the Hypothesis Difference-of-means Test (t-test) I  
*J&R, Chapter 12*

Nov 26 (W), 28 (F)  Thanksgiving Holidays

Dec 1 (M)  Difference-of-means Test (t-test) II  
*J&R, Chapter 12*

Dec 3 (W)  Last Class Day  
Difference-of-means Test (t-test), **HW #2 & #3 Due in Class!!!**

Dec 8 (M)  Section 001 (10 am class)  
Research Design Paper Due by 5 p.m.

Dec 12 (F)  Section 002 (12 pm class)  
Research Design Paper Due by 5 p.m.