

MEREDITH COLLEGE
Political Science 334: Research Design and Methods
Spring 2009

Instructor: Jeffrey D. Martinson
Office: Joyner 220
Office Hours: MTWTh 2 – 3 PM
F by Appointment

Office Phone: 760- 2349
Home Phone: 327-4729 (Before 9 pm)
Email: martinso@meredith.edu

Course Description and Goals:

This course provides a broad overview of the nature of inquiry in political science and is intended to give students an understanding of how to do empirical research. Students will finish the course knowing how philosophy of science, research design and statistical and causal inference are understood in the discipline of political science.

Divided into three parts, the course first focuses on the history, controversies and resultant principles of the political science discipline's philosophy of science. The second part deals with the specific questions of research design, the use of theories and models, hypotheses and tests, measures and controls. Finally, the third part examines various methods for collecting and interpreting empirical data, including surveys, interviews, content analysis and statistical exploration.

Educational Outcomes:

By semester-end, students will

- 1) know basic theoretical frameworks within the field of political science;
- 2) explain scientific discovery and process, and the ability to explain the primary research methods of the field;
- 3) connect primary supporting research with a particular theoretical position in the field;
- 4) apply theoretically-based explanations and solutions to individual behavior or societal phenomena;
- 5) solve problems by analyzing data, thinking critically, and selecting optimal results.

The underlying motivation for the course content and these objectives is to equip students not only for further study in political science and in other fields of social science but also in order to become better students of the world more generally.

Texts

The following text is required for this course:

Research Methods in the Social Sciences.
By Chava Frankfort-Nachmias and David Nachmias
St. Martin's Press, 7th Edition (2007)
ISBN 978-0-71675519-7

Other short readings will be assigned by the instructor during the course. These will be provided in electronic or hardcopy format by the instructor.

Requirements

The course is centered on a comprehensive text which investigates the history, forms and functions of research in political science. Daily reading assignments are brief but dense, therefore requiring careful consideration. Students are expected to have finished all assigned readings prior to class in order to participate in discussion. In addition, each student will complete three exams or papers (two midterms and one final and six short exercises. Each of these requirements is elaborated in detail below.

The grading weights and the dates when requirements are due are as follows:

Participation	Daily	20%
Exercises (6)	Various	5% (each)
Exam One	2/16	10%
Exam Two	3/23	10%
Exam Three	5/5 (1PM)	30%

Detailed descriptions of each of these requirements are provided below:

Participation:

Students are expected to come to class prepared. This includes having read the material, having formulated opinions on the material and/or having generated questions regarding unclear aspects of the material. Study guides in the form of glossaries, summaries, outlines, reading questions and sample quizzes are included as a part of each chapter in the text in order to facilitate these tasks. Students are encouraged to share their thoughts during regular class discussions moderated by the instructor. Participation grades may also include grades earned on unannounced reading checks (AKA pop-quizzes.) Attendance is important and every three unexcused absences will result in a letter grade reduction. In general, however, participation is *based on intellectual engagement, not physical presence*. Students are encouraged to check with the instructor regularly in order to learn their current participation score and (if necessary) ways to improve it.

Exams:

Exams will test the student's comprehensive learning at the three points during the semester. They will include multiple choice and short essay questions. Study guides and sample questions will be circulated well in advance of exams. Each exam is cumulative in that it covers all material between exam day and the start of class (i.e., not just the material between exams.) Finally, excused absences from examinations can only be obtained in advance or for medical or other emergencies. Such emergencies must be documented to the satisfaction

of the instructor. An unexcused absence from an examination will result in a grade of zero for that examination.

Exercises

The exercises enable students to demonstrate their learning at various points throughout the semester by undertaking a brief project directly related to the most recent readings. Thus, for example, exercise 1 (which follows the 2nd week) has students describe a puzzle, a story (theory) related to it, some various possible outcomes (values of the dependent variable), some possible causal factors (independent variables), and the student's hunches for different factors relate to different outcomes (hypotheses). Other exercises will involve content analysis research designs and work with statistical packages. Exercises will not exceed 5 pages in submitted length. Email submissions will not be accepted, and late submissions will be penalized 10% per day.

Final Letter Grades

Final scores are determined using the weights mentioned above and according to the breakdowns listed below:

A: 93-100 B: 84-92 C: 70-83 D: 60-69 F: 0-59

Weather

We will follow the college policy on inclement weather.

Technology Use in Classroom

We will follow the History & Political Science departmental guidelines for the use of laptops, cell phones, PDAs and other technologies in the classroom. These guidelines will be provided by the instructor in a separate document.

Meredith Code of Honor

We, the Meredith Community, are committed to developing and affirming in each student a sense of personal honor and responsibility. Uncompromising honesty and forthrightness are essential elements of this commitment. The Honor System is a method by which individual honors are protected and maintained. Any dishonorable action will be regarded as a violation of this commitment, and corrective action will be taken. If I am in violation of the Honor Code, to prevent jeopardizing the Honor System or weakening our system of self-government, I have an obligation to report myself to the proper authorities. If I am aware of a violation of the Honor System by another student, I shall call this matter to the attention of that student as a violation of responsibility to the community. In choosing Meredith College, I am accepting the Honor System as a way of life. As a Meredith student, I am responsible for insuring that the Honor System is at all times carried out.

Students with Disabilities

Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with documented disabilities. In order to receive accommodations, students must go through the Counseling Center/Disability Services Office. Disability Services is located in

106 Carroll Hall and can be reached at 760-8427 or disabilityservices@meredith.edu. For additional information see the website at <http://www.meredith.edu/students/counsel/disability>.

Course Timeline

The following lists the tentative assignments for the semester. All readings are from **Research Methods**. Other short readings will be assigned and provided by the instructor.

- 1/12 – Introduction
- 1/14 & 16 – Ch 1 The Scientific Approach
what is science? • basic assumptions • aims •
roles of methodology • scientific revolution
the research process
- 1/21 & 23 – Ch 2 Conceptual Foundations of Research
concepts • definitions • theory • models • empirical research
Ch 3 Elements of Research
research problems • variables • causal relations
hypotheses • puzzles

DUE: 1/26 ** Exercise 1 Frame a Research Question **

- 1/26, 28 & 30 – Obtaining Readings: Library Science & Archival Work
Using the library • online sources • microfiche • citation

DUE 2/2 ** Exercise 2 Hands-on Library Activity (Bibliography) **

- 2/2, 4 & 6 – Ch 5 Experiments
classic examples • causal inferences • components • types
- 2/11 & 13 – Ch 6 Cross-sectional & Quasi-experimental
classic examples • causal inferences • types

DUE 2/16 ** Exam One **

- 2/16, 18 & 20 – Ch 7 Measurement
its nature • levels • transformation • error • validity
reliability
Ch 8 Sampling
aims • population • designs • sample N • errors

DUE 2/23 ** Exercise 3 Develop Measurements for a Concept **

- 2/23, 25 & 27 – Ch 9 Observers in the Process
roles • types of behaviors • recording • inference
types of observation
- 3/9, 11 & 13 – Ch 10 Survey Research
classic examples • mail • interview • mail versus interview
Ch 11 Questionnaires

classic examples • content • types • format • sequencing
avoiding bias
Ch 18 Indexes and Scales
justifications • construction • Likert • Guttman
factor analysis

3/16, 18 & 20 – Ch 12 Qualitative Research
classic examples • field work • participant observation
other types
Ch 13 Secondary Data Analysis
classic examples • pros & cons • census • archival
content analysis

DUE 3/23 ** Exam Two **

3/23, 25 & 27 – Ch 14 Data Preparation & Analysis
coding • codebooks • statistics packages (SPSS, Stata)
Ch 15 The Univariate Distribution
frequency • graphing • central tendency • dispersion
variance

DUE 3/30 ** Exercise 4 Explore a Qualitative/Quantitative Dataset (Means, St. Deviations, Terms) **

3/30, 4/1 & 3 – Ch 16 Bivariate Analysis
causality • coding of data • nominal • ordinal • interval

4/6 & 8 – Ch 17 Multivariate Analysis
control • methods • intervening • interaction • partials
regression

DUE 4/15 ** Exercise 5 Use a Statistical Package to Analyze Election Data (Correlations) **

4/15 & 17 – Ch 19 Causal Inferences
testing hypotheses • the null • samples & populations
significance

DUE 4/20 ** Exercise 6 Create a Research Design (Research Question, Bibliography, Concept Measurement, Expected Findings) **

4/20, 22 & 24 – Appendix B Presenting Research
structuring arguments • citations • slides • peer review
process

4/27 & 29 – Review

DUE 5/5 (1 PM) ** EXAM THREE **