PS 300 Political Analysis

Oregon State University, School of Public Policy
(4 credits) / E-Campus

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Course Description

This course is designed to introduce students to the fundamental aspects and to specific methods of doing social science and public policy research. We will begin with a discussion of "methodology" (the philosophy behind research) and then move on to discussions about "methods" (techniques) of research. The primary focus of the course will be on research design, but considerable attention will be paid to elementary data analysis. This class also fulfills the Writing Intensive Course requirement for a degree in Political Science. All students are expected to use their ONID email account and Blackboard for this course.

Student Learning Outcomes

At the completion of this course students will be able to
1. Describe and compare various research techniques used in the social sciences.
2. Assess the usefulness of research methods for answering a variety of empirical questions.
3. Construct and empirically test a hypothesis.
4. Write up the results of empirical analysis in a manner that mirrors current writing in the field of political science.
5. Utilize methods and approaches appropriate for accumulating and interpreting information applicable to the discipline of political science.
6. Communicate effectively and defend in written and oral format narrative and empirical argument.

Readings / Materials

Required textbook available at the OSU Beaver Store: Babbie, Earl: *The Basics of Social Research*, 4th ed. or newer (Wadsworth Publishing). Other required and supplemental readings and materials can be found on the course Blackboard site. All lecture notes will be posted there as well.
Optional (but extremely useful): SPSS statistical software is available through the OSU RemoteApps website at https://osurds.oregonstate.edu/RDWeb/Pages/en-US/login.aspx. This will give you the opportunity to use statistical software wherever you have a good internet connection.

Textbook: NOTE: For textbook accuracy, please always check the textbook list at the OSU Bookstore website (http://osubeaverstore.com/Academics/). Sample syllabi may not have the most up-to-date information.
Assignments and Grading

Two Midterm Exams (40% total)
Two midterm exams test your understanding of the material covered in the required readings AND in the lecture notes. Each midterm will contain multiple choice, true/false, short answer and essay questions. The exams will have a time limit and be administered via Blackboard.

Tips regarding the multiple choice part: There’s always only ONE correct answer. If you have no clue, take a guess. Read carefully!

Tips regarding the essay part: Read extra carefully! Try to take every word of the question into account while writing your answer. Construct a logically coherent argument (e.g. define and describe a theoretical concept before you apply it to a case). Discuss counterarguments too. Provide examples. You are not graded on your opinions (even if asked to provide them), but on how well you use facts, theories and authors discussed in class to build your argument and form your conclusions.

Research Design (20%)
By the end of the term, each student is required to submit an 8-10 page research proposal on a political science topic, which applies the lessons learned from the textbook and lecture. More information will be found on Blackboard.

Lab Assignments (24%)
Beginning in week 3, you will be required to submit one assignment per week based on the lab part of this class, which will incorporate some simple statistical operations and data manipulation using the software SPSS. Out of the 8 assignments, your top 6 lab assignment scores will count towards your grade.

Exercises and Discussion Board Participation (16%)
There will be at least four exercises counting towards your grade, some of which will be homework assignments while others will require your contribution to the Discussion Board on Blackboard.

Due Dates TBD

Grading
The following criteria will be used for evaluating written assignments and exams:
COMMITMENT - did you cover all relevant materials/questions?
AMBITION - did you take each issue to task?
ENGAGEMENT - did you make connections between issues?
CLARITY - was the paper readable and well organized?
READINGS/COURSE MATERIALS - did you use appropriate reading and other course materials in your work? [note: cite everything appropriately]
COMPARISON - in general, how did your work compare to the rest of the class?
DIRECTIONS - a “no brainer” here. Did you follow directions?
Your minimum grade for the class will be determined by treating the total number of points in this class as percentage points in the following way:

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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94 or more points</td>
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<td>90-93 points</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89 points</td>
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<td>B-</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>59 or fewer points</td>
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If your final Blackboard score is close to a cutoff point between grades, you will be rewarded for regular contributions to class discussions with the higher grade.

Class Policies

Late Work / Make-Ups

There is no make-up and no graded late work for the exercises and lab assignments. In fact, the additional scores that will get dropped can be seen as make-up opportunities. For late submissions of the research design, 10% of the maximum possible score will be subtracted per late day and no paper will be accepted after the 4th late day. In medical or other emergency situations or time conflicts, you may petition the instructor to change the midterm exam time or date. However, you need to contact me about such issues as soon as you become aware of them and NOT after the exam.

Incompletes

Incompletes will only be granted in exceptional emergency situations. In all other cases the grade will be based upon the work completed by the end of the class, which may result in a failing grade. The grade “I” for Incomplete will be assigned only after the instructor and the student have completed and signed a Contract for Grade of Incomplete, which will specify deadlines for the student to finish the missing assignments.

Academic Integrity and Civility

The Oregon State University Student Conduct Code will be enforced. You can read the code at: [http://oregonstate.edu/studentconduct/](http://oregonstate.edu/studentconduct/)

Behaviors disruptive to the learning environment will not be tolerated and will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for disciplinary action. The Conduct Code is also concerned with academic dishonesty, which it defines as an act of deception such as: cheating (use or attempted use of unauthorized materials, information or study aids); fabrication (falsification or invention of any information); assisting (helping another commit an act of academic dishonesty); tampering (altering or interfering with evaluation instruments and documents); and plagiarism (representing the words or ideas of another person as one's own). If you are caught doing any of this you risk failing the class and being reported to university authorities. Whenever you are in doubt about what constitutes cheating, contact me before problems arise.

Disabilities

Students with documented disabilities will be accommodated. Please contact Disability Access Services, A200 Kerr Administration Building (737-4098 or [http://ds.oregonstate.edu/home/](http://ds.oregonstate.edu/home/)) and they will advise me as to how to meet your needs. Students with accommodations approved through DAS are responsible for contacting the faculty member in charge of the course prior to or during the first week of the term to discuss accommodations.
The #1 Class Policy
Have fun – with the assignments, the readings, and with your first steps in statistical data analysis! I will attempt to engage each student using the discussion board, and also give you the chance to respond to each other’s contributions. And yes, it is humanly possible to have fun with statistics and questions of methodology! As in other areas of life, you will get as much out of this class as you are willing to put into it.

Schedule with Relevant Textbook Chapters
(slight changes possible)

The first weeks of class (approximately) will discuss epistemology, theories, the scientific approach, social science versus natural science, philosophy, etc. I consider this the most difficult portion of the course because there are no "right" answers – just "shades of gray." The remaining weeks we will discuss and use computers, some easy statistics, and various methods of research. While many political science students are typically terrified by these latter topics, I consider them easy in the sense that there are "correct" answers. Please note, this syllabus follows the content and organization of E. Babbie The Basics of Social Research textbook.

Week 1 - Human Inquiry and Science; What Is Science?
- “PS 400” Introduction (Blackboard)
- 8 Steps (Blackboard)
- Thomas Kuhn and Scientific Revolutions (Blackboard)
- Babbie Chapter 1

Week 2 - Ethics and Politics of Research
- Babbie Chapter 3
- “Revenge of the Nerds” (Blackboard)
- Zimbardo Prison Experiment video (Blackboard)

Week 3 - Paradigms, Theory and Research
- Babbie Chapters 2 & 4
- Steel’s “Ideological Framework” (Blackboard)
- "Are Public Choice Theorists Different" (Blackboard)
- "Models of the State" (Blackboard)
- Research Idea due

Week 4 - Conceptualization and Operationalization
- Midterm Exam 1 in class
- Babbie Chapter 5

Week 5 - Indexes and Scales, Research Design; Sampling; Survey Research
- Babbie Chapters 6, 7 & 9
- "Sampling" (Blackboard)

Week 6 - Experiments and Qualitative Research
- Babbie Chapters 8 & 10
- Milgram Video (Blackboard)
Week 7 - Unobtrusive Research
- Babbie Chapter 11
- Research Design Outline with Citations due

Week 8 - Evaluation Research
- Midterm Exam 2
- Babbie Chapter 12

Week 9 - Data Analysis
- Babbie Chapters 13 & 14

Week 10 - Writing
- Babbie Chapter 15
- Research Design due

Student Evaluation of Teaching
We encourage you to engage in the course evaluation process each term – online, of course. The evaluation form will be available toward the end of each term, and you will be sent instructions through ONID. You will login to “Student Online Services” to respond to the online questionnaire. The results on the form are anonymous and are not tabulated until after grades are posted.

NOTE to prospective students: This syllabus is intended to provide students who are considering taking this course an idea of what they will be learning. A more detailed syllabus will be available on the course Blackboard site for enrolled students and may be more current than this sample syllabus.