

PS/IS 350
Research Methods I
MWF 9-9:50

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Course Description and Objectives

This is an introduction to political science research methods. Our first goal is to examine what it means to study social questions within a “scientific method.” This includes learning the basic vocabulary and concepts used in social science, as well gaining a broad understanding of the historical origins of contemporary political science (as a discipline). Our second goal is to learn some common research methods. This will include a number of exercises that will allow you to conduct small research projects in which you will apply your knowledge of research methods.

This course will cover both quantitative and qualitative research methods. *Quantitative* research relies primarily on “numerical” measurement (it emphasizes “hard” data, such as statistics). *Qualitative* research uses other kinds of evidence that are not easily “quantifiable,” but are also “empirical” (that is, “observable”). Both are valid approaches, when used appropriately. While quantitative methods have dominated the discipline since the “behavioral revolution” of the 1950s, qualitative methods have made a comeback in the last decade.

By the end of the semester, you should understand the basic scientific method and its use in political science. You should also become familiar with a number of different research methods and techniques. We will also address the importance of research ethics.

The objective of this course is to prepare you to carry out your own independent political science research. Hopefully, you will use the skills and knowledge you acquire in this course in a seminar paper or honors thesis, graduate school, or future career.

We will read selections from Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*, a study of “social capital” (the cumulative value of the social networks that bind communities together) in contemporary America. We will return to *Bowling Alone* throughout the semester as inspiration for a number of exercises in which we will do our own research on “social capital” within the Mount community.

Additionally, we will read a number of articles meant to illustrate a particular type of research approach or technique, or to help us focus on some interesting research questions. While their chief purpose is to highlight the role and uses of research methods in the social sciences, I hope you may also gain from them new and interesting perspectives.

This course fulfills the following university curriculum goals and objectives, to promote:

2. The skills of analysis, communication, and problem solving that enable students to appreciate, critique, and contribute to the Western Humanist tradition.
 - a. To become skilled readers, writers, and speakers.
 - b. To comprehend and skillfully employ quantitative reasoning.
 - d. To skillfully employ contemporary research methods, including the resources of information technology.
 - e. To recognize and evaluate claims of intellectual authority.

3. An understanding of the purposes, methods, and substance of a particular intellectual discipline.
 - a. To complete an undergraduate major.
 - b. To connect study in that major with learning in the core curriculum and electives.
5. The personal synthesis of learning and the capacity for life-long inquiry that constitute the ultimate goal of a liberal education.
 - a. To seek to integrate learning across courses and disciplines within the core curriculum.
 - b. To connect core learning with learning in the major.
 - d. To connect the whole of their learning, in class and out, to their lives as scholars, professionals, citizens, and people of faith.

This course fulfills the following objectives of the political science major:

- To understand the nature and evolution of political science as one of the social science disciplines.
- To analyze political questions using philosophical, legal, qualitative and quantitative methods.

Required Texts

- Baglione, Lisa A. 2007. *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science: A Practical Guide to Inquiry, Structures, and Methods*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Hoover, Kenneth R. and Todd Donovan. 2007. *Elements of Social Scientific Thinking*, 9th ed. Boston: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Putnam, Robert D. 2001. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Additional Readings & Materials

The following materials will be used either as supplementary texts or as reference materials for assignments. All are available through Blackboard (either as PDF files or as web links).

- Collier, David. 1993. "The Comparative Method." In *Political Science: The State of the Discipline II*, edited by Ada W. Finifter, 105-120. Washington, DC: American Political Science Association.
- Eksterowicz, Anthony J. and Paul C. Cline. 1991. "Ratification of the Constitution: The Great Debate as Portrayed in American Government Textbooks." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 24 (June): 211-215.
- Eksterowicz, Anthony J. and Robert P. Watson. 2000. "Treatment of First Ladies in American Government and Presidency Textbooks: Overlooked, Yet Influential Voices." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 33 (September): 589-595.
- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. "Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research." In *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, 1-16. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Friedman, Thomas. 1996. "Foreign Affairs Big Mac I." *New York Times* (December 8, 1996). Available online at <http://nytimes.com>
- Glaser, James M. 1996. "The Challenge of Campaign Watching: Seven Lessons of Participant-Observation Research." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 29 (September): 533-537.
- Leech, Beth L. 2002. "Asking Questions: Techniques for Semistructured Interviews." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 35 (December): 665-668.
- Levi, Margaret. 1987. "Theories of Historical and Institutional Change." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 20 (Summer): 684-688.

- Neuendorf, Kimberly A. 2002. "Defining Content Analysis." In *The Content Analysis Guidebook*, 1-25. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rosenthal, Alan. 1986. "Soaking, Poking, and Just Wallowing in It." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 18 (Autumn): 845-850.
- Werning Riversa, Sharon, Polina M. Kozyreva, and Eduard G. Sarovskii. 2002. "Interviewing Political Elites: Lessons from Russia." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 35 (December): 683-688.
- Zimbardo, Philip G. 2008. "The Stanford Prison Experiment: A Simulation Study of the Psychology of Imprisonment." <http://www.prisonexp.org>

Additionally, I expect you to keep up with contemporary campus issues by reading *The Mountain Echo* on a weekly basis. I would also recommend keeping the semester's issues in an archive box; you will use them for an assignment near the end of the semester.

Course Requirements

Since this is an advanced level required course for the political science major (as well as an advanced level elective for other majors), it involves a great deal of reading and writing. These will be supplemented with traditional in-class exams.

The semester grade is based on the following components:

Participation	10%
In-class exams (x2)	30% (15% each)
Short essays (x2)	10% (5% each)
Research reports (x3)	30% (10% each)
Research proposal	15%
Final exam	5%

Participation. Although methods classes seem less conducive to class discussions than other classes, we will have plenty of time for discussion and reflection, as well as several workshops and in-class exercises. You are expected to come to class having read the assigned readings *before* class and ready to discuss them. Please note that *attendance* is not the same as *participation*. Your participation grade will be based on your willingness to participate, your degree of preparedness, and the quality of your participation.

In-class exams. I will give two in-class exams during the semester. Each will cover course materials (reading, handouts, discussions) covered up to that point. Each will include three short essay prompts; you will select two of your choice to answer. I will hand out the questions in the previous class and you will be allowed one 3x5 index card with notes.

Additionally, each in-class exam will include a vocabulary quiz component, which will ask you to correctly identify a number of key concepts related to social science research methods. Each vocabulary quiz will involve five key terms, worth one point each (for a total of five possible points for the vocabulary quiz).

Short essays. You are responsible for two short essays (1½-2 pages) throughout the semester.

- The first is based on our discussion about research ethics. It will ask you to evaluate two popular reality television shows (*Survivor* and *Big Brother*) as "social experiments." Due September 19.
- The second is based on a well-known op-ed by Thomas Friedman. In it, you will sketch out an empirically testable hypothesis that could explain Friedman's observation. Due October 10.

Your grade on each will depend on your ability to demonstrate a firm grasp on the concepts in question and the overall quality of your argument. Additional guidelines will be handed out prior to each assignment.

Research exercises and reports. In the latter part of the semester, we will explore some specific research methods or techniques. You will have an opportunity to practice these techniques with the following research exercises:

- *Ethnographic fieldwork.* This is a short (3-4 pages) report based on your fieldwork observations based on three full hours in the field. Due November 17.
- *Interviews.* This is a short (3-4 pages) report based on three, 20-minute interviews. Due December 1.
- *Content analysis.* This is a short (3-4 pages) report based on your content analysis of one month of *Mountain Echo* issues. Due December 10.

Your grade on each will depend on your ability to demonstrate a firm grasp on the concepts in question and the overall quality of your execution. Additional guidelines will be handed out prior to each assignment.

Research proposal. You are also responsible for a research proposal on a topic of your own choosing. A research proposal is unlike a “typical” research paper. It is a statement outlining the scope and methods of a proposed research project. I highly encourage you to use this as a head start on your senior seminar paper and/or honors thesis.

A research proposal includes three basic components:

- a statement of the research question (what do you want to find out?)
- a literature review (what have scholars written about this subject?)
- a research design (what methods will you use?)

The research proposal must be 5-6 pages long, use proper reference citations (*Chicago Manual of Style*) and include a reference bibliography (not included in the page count). Additional guidelines will be handed out later in the semester. The research paper is due November 24.

Final exam. The final exam will consist of one analytical essay question using the data you gathered in your research reports.

Grading Criteria

Grades will be assigned on the basis of the following four university criteria:

- understanding of material
- articulation and communication of course material
- application and integration of course materials
- fulfillment of basic course requirements

To earn an “**A**” you must demonstrate mastery of relevant materials, strong analytical reasoning and critical thinking skills that go beyond merely repeating factual information, and polished presentation (this means, among other things, high quality writing skills).

To earn a “**B**” you must demonstrate a solid understanding of relevant materials, make a serious attempt to employ analytical reasoning and critical thinking skills, and show a marked effort to present a polished final product (this means solid, if not exceptional, writing ability).

To earn a “C” you must demonstrate a basic grasp of the relevant materials, evidence of a thoughtful effort to go beyond the basic readings, and signs that the final product was edited (this means, minimally, correct spelling and attention to basic grammar issues).

To earn a “D” you must demonstrate at least a minimal understanding of course materials, as well as an effort to follow assignment guidelines.

Time Management Tips

Most weeks, you should spend about as much time reading and preparing for class each week as the time we spend in class (in other words: three hours). As a loose guideline, I recommend spending one hour reading and taking notes for each class, with 5 minutes of reviewing your notes before class and another 5 minutes reviewing your notes after each class.

If you keep good notes (both from your reading and from class discussion), you should have little trouble preparing for exams or assignments. Keep in mind that each in-class exam requires you to write two short essays in addition to a vocabulary quiz component. If you plan to spend 10 minutes on the vocabulary quiz, that leaves you 20 minutes to write a short essay on each of your selected prompts. Use your index cards wisely. The bulk of your study time before each exam should involve organizing your notes into a short essay outline, and transferring these to your index card.

You will also notice that there are a few days late in the semester when we are not scheduled to meet. This is not “free” time. These are meant to give you more time for working outside of class on your research exercises. You may work on your data collection during that time, or shift some of your other study time.

Late Work and Special Accommodations

I do not accept late work. If you give yourself plenty of time to work on your assignments, and avoid procrastinating, you will be prepared for any crisis. And you can always submit work early. I am, however, willing to make special accommodations when necessary and appropriate. It is your responsibility to inform me of such circumstances as early as possible and appropriate.

Academic Honesty

It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the Mount’s guidelines regarding academic honesty. Pay close attention to page 50–51 of the university’s undergraduate manual, particularly regarding cheating and plagiarism. Plagiarism (in its many forms) is a serious offense that may lead to your expulsion from the university. If you have doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, be sure you see me right away (it’s not plagiarism until you submit an assignment in for a grade).

Semester Schedule

Week 1 August 27–31
Independent study assignment (important for your research proposal!)

Week 2 **Introduction to Social Science (and “Social Capital”)**
September 1
Read: Hoover & Donovan, Chapter 1

September 3
Read: Hoover & Donovan, Chapter 6

September 5
Read: Putnam, Chapter 1

Week 3 September 8
Read: Hoover & Donovan, Chapter 2

September 10
Read: Putnam, Chapter 10

September 12
Read: Putnam, Chapter 16

Week 4 September 15
Read: Putnam, Chapter 24

September 17
Read: Zimbardo, "The Stanford Prison Experiment"

September 19
Discussion: Reality television & social experiments
First short essay due

Week 5 September 22
First in-class exam

Doing Social Science: Fundamentals

September 24
Read: Baglione, Chapter 2

September 26
Read: Hoover & Donovan, Chapter 3

Week 6 September 29
Read: Baglione, Chapter 3

October 1
Read: Levi, "Theories of Historical and Institutional Change"
Literature review guidelines handed out (part of research proposal assignment)

October 3
Literature review workshop in library

Week 7 October 6
Read: Baglione, Chapter 4

October 8
Read: Hoover & Donovan, Chapter 4

October 10
Read: Friedman, "Foreign Affairs Big Mac I"
Second short essay due

- Week 8**
- October 20
Read: Baglione, Chapter 6
Research design guidelines handed out (part of research proposal assignment)
- October 22
Read: Collier, “The Comparative Method”
- October 24
Research design workshop in class
- Week 9**
- October 27
Read: Hoover & Donovan, Chapter 5
- October 29
Read: Baglione, Chapter 7
- October 31
Continued discussion
- Week 10**
- November 3
Second in-class exam
- Doing Social Science: Methods & Techniques**
- November 5
Read: Glaser, “The Challenge of Campaign Watching”; Rosenthal, “Soaking, Poking, and Just Wallowing in It”
- November 7
Read: Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, “Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research”
- Week 11**
- November 10
Field observation workshop in cafeteria
- November 12
Instead of meeting in class, you will spend time “in the field”
- November 14
Bring your fieldnotes to class (this will be useful as you prepare your reports)
- Week 12**
- November 17
Read: Leech, “Asking Questions”; Werning, Kozyreva & Saravskii, “Interviewing Political Elites”
Ethnographic reports due
- November 19
Interviewing workshop in class
- November 21
Instead of meeting in class, you will spend time scheduling/conducting interviews

- Week 13** November 24
Research proposals due
- Week 14** December 1
Neuendorf, “Defining Content Analysis”
Interview reports due
- December 3
Read: Eksterowicz & Cline, “Ratification of the Constitution” Eksterowicz & Watson, “Treatment of First Ladies in American Government Textbooks”
- December 5
Content analysis workshop in class (bring several *Mountain Echo* issues)
- Week 15** December 8
Instead of meeting in class, spend time on content analysis
- December 10
Content analysis report due
- December 12
Final exam review
- Finals Week** December 17—9 am
Final exam