COURSE SUMMARY

Are democracies less likely to go to war with each other than with non-democracies? Do incumbents hold an electoral advantage against challengers? Does economic development cause authoritarian regimes to fall? To rigorously engage such questions, an understanding of social science methodology is essential.

This course will introduce you to the basics of research design and provide you with the methodological foundations for more advanced courses in Political Science. The course covers experimental, quantitative, and qualitative methods. Although this is not a course in statistics, we will consider some basic statistical concepts in order to become better consumers of quantitative approaches. Beyond your career at Northwestern, the course aims to develop a skill set with relevance not only to academic research but also to the business and public policy worlds.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to complete all required readings prior to each lecture and to attend all lectures and discussion sections. If a student has a legitimate reason to miss a session (e.g., a religious holiday), please discuss this with the professor and TA at the beginning of the term. Doing the readings and reviewing the lecture slides without attending the lectures themselves will not sufficiently prepare you for the exams.

Evaluation in the course will be decided as follows:

Assignment #1: 15%
Assignment #2: 15%
Midterm: 25%
Final: 35%
Attendance and Participation: 10%

Assignment #1 will require you to write a short essay (2-3 double-spaced pages) identifying the key components of a research design in a reading to be assigned. This assignment will be due by noon on Friday, April 24. Assignment #2 will require you to write a short essay (2-3 double-spaced pages) critically assessing a provocative statement of your choosing by a politician, journalist, or other public figure using tools and concepts from this class. This assignment will be due by noon on Friday, May 29. Additional information about these assignments will be provided at a later date.

The midterm will be held on Thursday, April 30 during the regular lecture time. The final exam will be held on Monday, June 8 from 12:00-2:00PM.

Late assignments will be penalized, with the exception of documented cases of illness or family crisis. In such cases, a request must be made to the professor and TA prior to the assignment’s due date. Failure to turn in an assignment on time will result in a half-grade deduction per day late (i.e., an A becomes an A-).

RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENT

Students enrolled in this course are required to complete a research assignment that can include up to four hours of research study participation. These studies require that students set up an appointment to complete participation at a laboratory on campus (or via an on-line survey). Students will learn how studies are conducted and will receive a synopsis at the conclusion of the quarter describing the study’s goal, result, and relevance to the class. Students who prefer not to participate in research as a subject may opt for an alternative that entails reading any one chapter about political science research and writing a 5-page reaction paper. The typical chapter is about 20 pages and thus reading it and writing a 5-page paper should take approximately four hours.

During the first week of the quarter, students will receive an e-mail asking them whether they prefer study participation or the alternative assignment. The e-mail will also include details on how to complete either requirement. Failure to complete the requirement during the quarter will
result in an incomplete. Failure to complete the requirement during the following quarter will result in a failing grade for the class. *Note that if you are enrolled in multiple classes that require participation, you only need to satisfy the requirement one time. Also, if you already completed the requirement in another course in a previous quarter, you are excused from the requirement.*

**IN-CLASS ELECTRONICS POLICY**

Please turn all phones off before the lecture. Note that this implies no texting as well as no calls. Laptops may be used for note taking only. Use of email, Facebook, or other activities unrelated to lecture is strictly prohibited and may result in a grade deduction.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Instructors are required by university policy to report violations of academic integrity standards to the Dean’s Office. A non-exhaustive list of behaviors that violate standards of academic integrity includes: cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, obtaining an unfair advantage, aiding and abetting dishonesty, falsification of records and official documents, and unauthorized access to computerized academic or administrative records or systems. Note that even unintentional plagiarism is still plagiarism. If you are unsure about whether to cite or how to cite a source, then confer with the professor or teaching assistant. Information about Northwestern’s academic integrity policies can be found at [http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/students/integrity/](http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/students/integrity/).

You are strongly encouraged to take issues of academic integrity seriously. Nearly 20 Northwestern students were suspended last year due to violations of academic integrity standards. Such violations can end up on your academic record and may become a red flag for employers and graduate schools.

**ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

All necessary accommodations will be made for students with disabilities. Please contact the professor at the beginning of the term so that we can work together with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities to make arrangements.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

By the end of the course, the aim is that you will have improved your ability to:

- Identify, describe, and assess the strengths and weaknesses of prominent methodological approaches to the study of Political Science;
- Consume empirical research at a sophisticated level in preparation for upper-level Political Science courses;
- Understand the key concepts used in applied statistical analysis;
- Critically evaluate empirical statements by policymakers, journalists, business leaders, and others as you move forward in your career of choice.
COURSE MATERIALS

There is one required book for this course:


Other readings will be made available through Canvas. The following textbook, from which we will read excerpts, is recommended but not required:


Another helpful resource, which I will post on Canvas, is the Methodological Glossary compiled by Jason Seawright and David Collier for the book *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, edited by Henry Brady and David Collier.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Week 1: Introduction & Overview of Political Science
Tuesday, March 31 & Thursday, April 2

Key Themes:

• Overview of course
• Importance of social science methods
• Overview of political science as a discipline

Readings:

• Kellstedt and Whitten, Sections 1.1-1.4
• Charles Cameron, “What is Political Science?” in *A Quantitative Tour of the Social Sciences*, edited by Andrew Gelman and Jeronimo Cortina (Cambridge University Press, 2009) (Canvas)
• Jacqueline Stevens, “Political Scientists are Lousy Forecasters,” *The New York Times* (June 23, 2012) (Canvas)

Week 2: Theories & Hypotheses
Tuesday, April 7 & Thursday, April 9

Key Themes:

• Components of research process
• Independent and dependent variables
• Generating hypotheses
• Types of empirical studies
• Causality
• Pitfalls to causal inference

Readings:

  o Chapter 4 (Canvas)
• Kellstedt and Whitten, Chapter 3
  o pp. 75-79, 82-85 (Canvas)

**Week 3: Experimental Research**
*Tuesday, April 14 & Thursday, April 16*

Key Themes:

• Overview of experimental approaches
• Types of experiments
• Pros and cons of experiments
• Examples of experimental research

Readings:

• Kellstedt and Whitten, Sections 4.1-4.2
• Susan Hyde, “The Observer Effect in International Politics: Evidence from a Natural Experiment,” *World Politics* 60, 1 (2007): 37-63 (Canvas)
• Sasha Issenberg, “Dept. of Experiments,” *Politico* (February 27, 2014) (Canvas)

**Week 4½: Surveys, Samples, & A Little Bit of Statistics**
*Tuesday, April 21; Thursday, April 23; & Tuesday April 28*

Note: **ASSIGNMENT #1 due by noon on Friday, April 24**

Key Themes:

• Different types of variables
• Measuring and operationalizing variables
• Sampling and surveys
• Basics of descriptive statistics
• Introduction to hypothesis testing

Readings:

  o pp. 354-376 (Canvas)
  o Chapter 19 (Canvas)
  o Chapter 12 (Canvas)
• *Recommended*: Kellstadt & Whitten, Chapters 5-6

**Week 5: MIDTERM**
*Thursday, April 30*

**Week 6: Quantitative Research**
*Tuesday, May 5 & Thursday May 7*

Key Themes:

• Overview of quantitative approaches
• Bivariate relationships
• Intro to regression analysis
• Pros and cons of quantitative research
• Examples of quantitative research

Readings:

• Kellstedt and Whitten, Sections 4.3-4.4
  o Chapters 2, 8, and 12 (Canvas)
  o Chapter 4: “Political Institutions and Redistribution” (Canvas)
• *Recommended*: Kellstedt and Whitten, Chapters 7-8

**Week 7: Qualitative Research**
*Tuesday, May 12 & Thursday, May 14*
Key Themes:

- Overview of qualitative approaches
- Case studies and process tracing
- Method of agreement and difference
- Pros and cons of qualitative research
- Examples of qualitative research

Readings:

  - pp. 3-7 (Canvas)
- James Mahoney and Gary Goertz, “A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research,” *Political Analysis* 14, 3 (2006): 227-249 (Canvas)
- Theda Skocpol, *States and Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge University Press, 1979)
  - pp. 1-5, 33-42

**Week 8: Cutting-Edge Research Approaches**
*Tuesday, May 19 & Thursday, May 21*

Key Themes:

- Multi-method approaches
- Advanced causal techniques
- Big data

Readings:


**Week 9: Getting Your Own Research Started/Political Science & Public Policy**  
*Tuesday, May 26 & Thursday, May 28*

Key Themes:

• Tips for conducting research  
• Impact evaluation for improving public policy  
• Contentious debates in political science

Readings:

  o Chapter 3 (Canvas)  
  o Executive Summary  

**FRIDAY, MAY 29: ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE BY NOON**

**MONDAY, JUNE 8, 12:00-2:00PM: FINAL EXAM**