

PS 270  
**Research Methods**  
Fall 2008

*The dicta of methodology are nothing more mysterious than rules of thumb for improving the artistry of speculations.*

~Charles A. Lave and James G. March, 1975

*The goal for study in a political science major is to maximize students' capacity to analyze and interpret the significance and dynamics of political events and governmental processes. The purpose is not simply to arouse their curiosity, purvey factual information, or reveal the significance of political events and issues. It is to equip them for coping with political events and governmental actions and problems in the future. 'Coping with' in this context means not merely to understand, or to manage their effects on society and on them individually, but also to evaluate and seek to shape them.*

~John Wahlke, 1991

*Truthiness is what you want the facts to be, as opposed to what the facts are. What feels like the right answer as opposed to what reality will support.*

~Colbert Report, October 17, 2005

Why do political scientists call themselves scientists? How can we learn about politics using the tools of scientific inquiry? This course will introduce you to the processes and methods political scientists (and others) use to generate and answer questions about politics. The emphasis will be on the empirical study of political institutions and behavior in the United States. We will explore a wide variety of research methods, including experiments, observation, elite interviews, and surveys. In the course of this exploration, we will examine how these methods are applied to real data by real researchers to answer questions like: Did "moral issues" really matter in the 2004 election? Who are the most liberal members of Congress? Does country music encourage suicide? We will also work at critically analyzing methodological choices made and conclusions drawn by political scientists and others who employ social science data.

### **Course Objectives**

Broadly, the purpose of this course is to help you gain familiarity with the different assumptions, methods, and analytical approaches used by political scientists and cognate disciplines (e.g. economics, history, psychology, law, and others). It will therefore be helpful in future political science coursework as well as in careers where familiarity with research techniques and critical analysis is useful—including law, public policy analysis, political consulting, and political advocacy.

Specifically, you should:

1. Gain factual knowledge about social science methodology (terminology, techniques, etc.)
2. Be able to apply what we read about methodology to real-world events
3. Be able to analyzing and critically evaluating research methodologies and methodological choices

In other words, this class is fundamental to distinguishing truthiness from truth and to being able to cope.

## **Books and Readings**

The following are required books for this course:

- Janet Buttolph Johnson and H. T. Reynolds, *Political Science Research Methods*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition.
- Janet Buttolph Johnson and H. T. Reynolds, *Working with Political Science Research Methods: Problems and Exercises*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.
- David A. Rochefort, ed., *Quantitative Methods in Political Science: Readings from PS*.
- Herbert Asher, *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition.

Other required readings will typically be made available electronically, either in my PS 270 folder or through links specified in the syllabus.

## **Assignments and Grading**

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

Exams (2)	50%
Group Research Design	25%
Presentation	10%
Class participation	10%
Group participation	5%

### ***Exams***

There will be two in-class exams over the course of the semester. All exams will be closed book and consist of multiple choice, short answer, and fill in the blanks.

In the event that you must miss the first exam, you may take it at the end of the semester, during the scheduled final exam period.

### ***Group Research Design***

Over the course of the semester, you will take part in designing a research project as part of a small group. More information about this assignment will be distributed in a separate handout.

### ***Applied Research Design and Methods Presentation***

To expand our collective political knowledge and to enliven the class, each of you will present a significant and interesting piece of information about our political world (e.g. survey data, experimental results, an interview) gleaned from a non-academic source.

You will then lead the class in a brief discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of the information you selected and potential alternative approaches to its collection. When preparing, consider the following questions:

- What is the source of your information?
- How, specifically, was the information collected?
- What are the flaws in the collection of the information?
- What are the flaws in the interpretation of the information?
- What is the precise meaning of the information?

This presentation should not exceed five minutes. Your grade will be based on the relevance/significance of the information, the clarity and accuracy of the presentation, and the effectiveness of the discussion. There will be one to two presentations a week throughout the semester.

### ***Grading***

I grade on the following scale: 90-100 is A-range, 80-89 is B-range, 70-79 is C-range, 60-69 is D-range, and below 60 is an F. Not turning in an assignment will result in a 0 for that assignment. I reserve the right to raise (or lower) your final grade by up to one third of a letter grade based on a pattern of continuing improvement (or regression) during the semester.

### ***Late Assignments and Extensions***

As a rule, I do not accept late assignments or give extensions. The only exceptions may be in cases of documented medical emergencies. Extra curricular obligations, computer problems, family and job obligations can be anticipated and managed. Late assignments are those received after the deadline. When an assignment is due in class, the deadline is the beginning of that class (i.e. the first 5 to 10 minutes).

### ***Class Attendance and Participation***

Regular attendance is critical to effective participation. Although near perfect attendance is expected, I do realize that there may come a day when you need to miss class. Therefore:

- You may accrue up to three absences over the course of the semester with impunity.
- A fourth absence will result in a maximum participation grade of 75%. Additional absences will lower the participation grade further.

In other words, you may miss as many as three class periods *for whatever reason* over the course of the semester without being penalized. There are, therefore, no such things as “excused” or “unexcused” absences. I assume all reasons for missing class are good ones; I do not need them explained. If you miss a class, you are still responsible for the readings, lecture material, and other assignments for that day.

Although near perfect attendance is expected, it is not the same as participation. Learning is not a spectator sport. Fundamentally, the responsibility to learn is yours; you must take an active role in the process. Consequently, I expect you to come to class

prepared and ready to learn, meaning you have done the assigned reading before class, considered it in light of the study questions, and have questions and/or ideas of your own about it in mind.

Class participation is not limited to discussion. You may also be asked to lead a brief discussion, take part in small group activity, etc. This is part and parcel of class participation and is required.

### **Academic Support**

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services at x3994 as soon as possible. The SDS website (<http://www.rhodes.edu/disability>) provides detailed information about Rhodes' policies and procedures in this regard.

I strongly encourage you to take advantage of Rhodes' many academic support services, and to rely on each other as study partners for this course. If you find yourself desiring or needing any of these forms of academic support, contact me at any time and I will do what I can to help.

### **Academic Dishonesty**

Quite simply, any type of academic dishonesty (cheating, plagiarism, etc.) is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. You are responsible for knowing the Rhodes College Honor Code, and its rules and regulations concerning these matters. Please read them carefully in the Rhodes College Honor Council Constitution at: <http://www.rhodes.edu/Rhodes/CampusCommunity/PoliciesandProcedures/Student-Handbook.cfm>. In any case, ignorance of the law is not an excuse. Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be referred immediately to the Honor Council.

### **Contacting Me**

I have office hours every week (see page 1). During that time, unless otherwise announced, I am in my office (305 Buckman) and at your disposal. I strongly encourage you to drop by with any questions or concerns about the course, or if you want to discuss topics including, but not limited to: politics, graduate school, Brett Favre's "retirement," and/or why you should not go to law school.

You may also contact me by email, but be forewarned: I do not always check my email every day, nor do I usually check it at all on weekends. Therefore, unless I make specific arrangements with you to the contrary, it may take a few days for you to receive a response.

## **Class Schedule**

### **Wed. 8/27: Introduction: Science and Other Ways of Knowing**

### **Fri. 8/29: Studying Politics Scientifically: Why Bother?**

- Brooks, "One Nation, Slightly Divisible." *The Atlantic Monthly* (December 2001) pp. 53-65. (<http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2001/12/brooks.htm>)
- Isenberg, "Boo-Boos in Paradise," *Philadelphia Magazine* (April 2004) ([http://www.phillymag.com/articles/booboos\\_in\\_paradise/](http://www.phillymag.com/articles/booboos_in_paradise/))

### **Mon. 9/1: No Class (Labor Day)**

### **Wed. 9/3: Yes, We're "Real Scientists"**

- J&R, Chapter 2 (Studying Politics Scientifically), pp. 45-55
- Fiorina, Moe. 2005. "Chapter 2: A 50:50 Nation? The Red and Blue States" from *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (handout)

### **Fri. 9/5: The Empirical and the Normative**

- New York Times editorial blog entry entitled "Democracy it Ain't" at: <http://theboard.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/01/03/report-from-iowa-democracy-it-aint/>
- Lijphart, "Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma," *American Political Science Review* (March 1997) pp.1-14 (Lijphart.pdf in my PS 270 folder; [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org))

### **Mon. 9/8: The Empirical and the Normative**

- Rochefort, Chapter 1: "The State of Undergraduate Research Methods Training in Political Science"
- Rochefort, Chapter 10: "The 'Most Liberal Senator'? Analyzing and Interpreting Congressional Roll Call Votes"

### **Wed. 9/10: The Empirical and the Normative**

- J&R Exercises 2-2, 2-3

### **Fri. 9/12: Thinking About Relationships**

- J&R, pp. 60-65
- Rochefort, Chapter 12: "Untangled Web: Internet Use During the 1998 Election"
- Reuters, "Teenage Drinking Tied to Lifelong Alcohol Woes" (July 6, 2006) (PS 270 folder)

### **Mon. 9/15: Thinking About Relationships**

- J&R Exercise 5-1
- Liptak, Adam. 2008. "Gun Laws and Crime: A Complex Relationship." *The New York Times* (June 29)
- Stack and Gundlach, "The Effect of Country Music on Suicide", (<http://www.uta.edu/depken/ugrad/3318/music-suicide.pdf>)

**Wed. 9/17: Hypotheses, Concepts, and Variables**

- J&R, Chapter 3 (Hypotheses, Concepts and Variables), pp.70-81
- J&R Exercises 3-1, 3-2

**Fri. 9/19: Hypotheses, Concepts, and Variables**

- Write down 4 to 6 good (see J&R) hypotheses related to your research question

**Mon. 9/22: Hypotheses, Concepts, and Variables**

- J&R, Chapter 3 (Hypotheses, Concepts and Variables), pp. 81-87
- MacGregor, “The New Electoral Sex Symbol: NASCAR Dad”, *The New York Times* (January 18, 2004)
- “NASCAR Fad, *Mother Jones*, 2004  
([http://www.motherjones.com/news/dailymojo/2004/02/02\\_722.html](http://www.motherjones.com/news/dailymojo/2004/02/02_722.html))
- Tumulty, Karen and Viveca Novak. “Goodbye, Soccer Mom. Hello, Security Mom.” *TIME* (June 2, 2003) (PS 270 folder or ProQuest)

**Wed. 9/24: Hypotheses, Concepts, and Variables**

- J&R, Chapter 3 (Hypotheses, Concepts and Variables), pp.60-70
- Elder, Laurel and Steven Greene. 2007. “The Myth of ‘Security Moms’ and ‘NASCAR Dads’: Parenthood, Political Stereotypes, and the 2004 Election.” *Social Science Quarterly* (March). (PS 270 folder or ProQuest)

**Fri. 9/26: Hypotheses, Concepts, and Variables**

- Mayer, William G. 2007. “The Swing Voter in American Presidential Elections.” *American Politics Research* (May)  
(<http://apr.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/35/3/358>)

**Mon. 9/29: Literature Review**

- J&R, Chapter 6 (Conducting a Literature Review), skim 189-199
- J&R Exercise 6-1

**Wed. 10/1: Literature Review**

- Philpot, “A Party of a Different Color? Race, Campaign Communication, and Party Politics,” pp. 249-254 (PS 270 folder)
- Formatting In-Text Citations and References in Political Science (handout)

**Fri. 10/3: Measurement**

- J&R, Chapter 4, pp. 88-104
- J&R Exercises 4-2, 4-4

**Mon. 10/6: Measurement**

- Rochefort, Chapter 13: “Tuning In, Turning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America”
- Norris, “Does Television Erode Social Capital? A Reply to Putnam” *PS: Political Science and Politics* (September 1996) (PS 270 folder)

**Wed. 10/8: Measurement**

- J&R, Chapter 4, pp. 104-118
- Exercise 4-1 [re levels of measurement]

**Fri. 10/10: Measurement**

- Rochefort, Chapter 9: “How Americans Responded: A Study of Public Reactions to 9/11/01”
- J&R Exercises 4-5, 4-6

**Mon. 10/13: Midterm Exam****Wed. 10/15: Experiments and Quasi-experiments**

- J&R, Chapter 5, pp. 122-142 (up to “Field Experiments”)
- Rochefort, Chapter 8: “Traditional Versus Technology-Aided Instruction: The Effects of Visual Stimulus in the Classroom”

**Fri. 10/17: Experiments and Quasi-experiments**

- Baumgartner and Morris, “The Daily Show Effect: Candidate Evaluations, Efficacy and American Youth,” *American Politics Research* (PS 270 folder or through ProQuest)

**Mon. 10/20: No Class (Fall Break)****Wed. 10/22: Experiments and Quasi-experiments**

- J&R, Chapter 5, pp. 142-147
- J&R, Gerber and Green, “Do Phone Calls Increase Voter Turnout?: A Field Experiment,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 2001 (PS 270 folder or JSTOR)

**Fri. 10/24: Experiments and Quasi-experiments**

- Campbell and Ross, “The Connecticut Crackdown on Speeding: Time-Series Data in Quasi Experimental Analysis”, *Law and Society Review*, 1968 (PS 270 folder or JSTOR)

**Mon. 10/27: Non-experimental Design**

- J&R, pp. 147-166
- Rochefort, Chapter 16: “Monica Lewinsky’s Contribution to Political Science”

**Wed. 10/29: Non-experimental Design**

- Rochefort, Chapter 19: “Moral Issues and Voter Decision Making in the 2004 Presidential Election”
- J&R Exercises 3-5, 3-9, 3-10

**Fri. 10/31: Making Observations**

- J&R, Chapter 8, pp. 243-262
- Hughes, “The Method to Our Madness: The Garbage Project Methodology,” *American Behavioral Scientist*, September/October 1984 (handout)

**Mon. 11/3: Making Observations**

- Fenno, *Home Style*, “Note on Method: Participant Observation” (handout)
- Glaser, “The Challenge of Campaign Watching: Seven Lessons of Participant-Observation Research,” (Jstor or PS 270 folder)

**Wed. 11/5: Making Observations**

- Homework: Measuring Rhodes’ students political ideology through observation (distributed in class on Monday)

**Fri. 11/7: Document Analysis**

- J&R, Chapter 8

**Mon. 11/10: Document Analysis**

- Dolan, “Do Women Candidates Play to Gender Stereotypes? Do Men Candidates Play to Women? Candidate Sex and Issue Priorities on Campaign Websites,” *Political Research Quarterly* (March 2005) (PS 270 folder or JSTOR)

**Wed. 11/12: Elite Interviewing**

- J&R, Chapter 10, pp. 338-344
- Pika, “Interviewing Presidential Aides: A Political Scientist’s Perspective” in *Studying the Presidency*, Edwards and Wayne, eds.

**Fri. 11/14: Elite Interviewing**

- Lawless and Fox, “I’m Just Not Qualified: Gendered Self-Perceptions of Candidate Viability” (Chapter 6) in *It Takes A Candidate: Why Women Don’t Run for Office*

**Mon. 11/17: Sampling**

- J&R, Chapter 7, pp. 209-227

**Wed. 11/19: Sampling**

- Asher, pp. 83-99
- J&R, Exercises 7-1 and 7-2

**Fri. 11/21: Sampling**

- J&R, Chapter 7, pp. 227-238

**Mon. 11/24; Survey Research**

- J&R, pp. 297-316
- Asher, Chapter 2: The Problem of Nonattitudes

**Wed. 11/26 No Class (Thanksgiving)**

**Fri. 11/28: No Class (Thanksgiving)**

**Mon. 12/1: Survey Research**

- Asher, Chapter 3: Wording and Context of Questions
- J&R, pp. 317-331

**Wed. 12/3: Survey Research**

- Asher, Chapter 5: Interviewing and Data Collection Procedures

**Fri. 12/5: Survey Research**

- Asher, Chapter 7: Polls and Elections

**Mon. 12/8: Survey Research**

- Asher, Chapter 8: Analyzing and Interpreting Polls

**Wed. 12/10: Concluding Discussion**

**Saturday, 12/13, 8:30 a.m.: Final exam**