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POLS 270-01, Research Methods. Spring 2008

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P 270
Research Methods
Spring 2008

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 in this class, including experiments, statistical analyses of large datasets, and qualitative case studies. In the course of this exploration, we will examine how these methods are applied to real data by real researchers to answer questions like: Who votes and who doesn't? How democratic is the American Constitution? How do people feel about stem cell research? Who are the most liberal members of Congress? We will also work at critically analyzing the methodological choices made and conclusions drawn by political scientists and others who employ social science data.

Course Objectives

By the conclusion of the course you should improve at:

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

In other words, the purpose of this course is to introduce you to political science as a discipline and to train you to become more educated consumers of political information. This course 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.

Books and Readings

The following are required books for this course:

- Janet Buttolph Johnson and H. T. Reynolds, *Political Science Research Methods*, 5th edition.
- Janet Buttolph Johnson and H. T. Reynolds, *Working with Political Science Research Methods: Problems and Exercises*.
- David A. Rochefort, ed., *Quantitative Methods in Political Science: Readings from PS*.
- Herbert Asher, *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*, 7th edition.

Other required readings will typically be made available electronically.

Assignments and Grading

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

Exam 1	25%
Exam 2	25%
Exam 3	25%
Participation	15%
Applied Research Methods Presentation	10%

Exams

There will be three 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. The emphasis of statistical questions will be on understanding and interpretation.

Make up exams are problematic for a number of reasons. In the event that you miss an exam, I will weight the other two at 37.5% each of the final grade.

Applied Research 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). 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. Being prepared for class enables you to construct a knowledge base on which subsequent learning rests. It also makes class more productive, purposive and enjoyable for everyone.

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, 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

Part I: Studying Politics Scientifically

Thursday, 1/10: Introduction (Yes, We're "Real" Scientists)

Tues., 1/15: Yes, We're "Real" Scientists

- Brooks, "One Nation, Slightly Divisible." *The Atlantic Monthly* (December 2001) pp. 53-65.
- Isenberg, "Boo-Boos in Paradise," *Philadelphia Magazine* (April 2004) (http://www.phillymag.com/articles/booboos_in_paradise/)
- Klinker, "Red and Blue Scare: The Continuing Diversity of the American Electoral Landscape" (Klinker.pdf in my PS 270 folder on the academic volume)

Part II: Asking Questions

Thurs., 1/17: Empirical and Normative Questions

- 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"

Tues., 1/22: Empirical and Normative Questions

- 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)

- 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/>

Thurs., 1/24: Empirical and Normative Questions

- J&R, exercises 2-2, 2-10, 2-11, 2-12

Tues., 1/29: Causal Relationships

- J&R, pp.49-53; 107-113
- Lewin, “Data on Marriage and Births Reflect the Political Divide,” *The New York Times* (October 13, 2005)
- Reuters, “Teenage Drinking Tied to Lifelong Alcohol Woes” (July 6, 2006)
- Stack and Gundlach, “The Effect of Country Music on Suicide”, (<http://www.uta.edu/depken/ugrad/3318/music-suicide.pdf>)

Thurs., 1/31: Hypotheses, Concepts and Variables

- J&R, pp. 103-129
- 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)
- Tumulty, Karen and Viveca Novak. “Goodbye, Soccer Mom. Hello, Security Mom.” *TIME* (June 2, 2003) (PS 270 folder or ProQuest)

Tues., 2/5: Hypotheses, Concepts and Variables

- J&R Exercises 4-1, 4-2, 4-3, 4-5

Thurs., 2/7: 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>)
- 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)

Tues., 2/12: Exam 1

Part III: Answering Questions (Data Collection)

Thurs., 2/14: Measurement

- J&R, pp. 153-175
- 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)

Tues., 2/19: Measurement

- Intercollegiate Studies Institute, “The Coming Crisis in Citizenship,” Summary, Introduction, Major Findings and Survey Methods (www.americancivilliteracy.org)
- Rochefort, Chapter 9: “How Americans Responded: A Study of Public Reactions to 9/11/01”
- J&R Exercises 6-1, 6-2, 6-3, 6-5

Thurs., 2/21: Experiments and Quasi-Experiments

- J&R, pp. 53-73
- Baumgartner and Morris, “The Daily Show Effect: Candidate Evaluations, Efficacy and American Youth,” *American Politics Research* (PS 270 folder or through ProQuest)

Tues., 2/26: Experiments and Quasi-Experiments

- Gerber and Green, “Do Phone Calls Increase Voter Turnout?: A Field Experiment,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 2001 (PS 270 folder or JSTOR)
- 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)

Thurs., 2/28: Non-experimental Design

- J&R, pp. 74-88; 96-96
- Rochefort, Chapter 16: “Monica Lewinsky’s Contribution to Political Science”

Tues., 3/4: No Class (Spring Break)

Thurs. 3/6: No Class (Spring Break)

Tues., 3/11: 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

Thurs., 3/13: Making Observations

- J&R, pp. 185-205
- Hughes, “The Method to Our Madness: The Garbage Project Methodology,” *American Behavioral Scientist*, September/October 1984 (handout)

Tues., 3/18: Making Observations

- Fenno, *Home Style*, “Note on Method: Participant Observation” (handout)
- Homework: Are most Rhodes students liberal or conservative?

Thurs., 3/20: No Class (Easter Break)

Tues., 3/25: Document Analysis

- J&R, Chapter 8
- 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)

Thurs., 3/27: Exam 2

Tues., 4/1: Elite Interviewing

- J&R, pp. 270-275
- Pika, “Interviewing Presidential Aides: A Political Scientist’s Perspective” in *Studying the Presidency*, Edwards and Wayne, eds.
- 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*

Thurs., 4/3: Sampling

- Asher, Chapter 4

Tues., 4/8: Sampling

- J&R Exercises 9-2, 9-3, 9-4, 9-7, 9-8, 9-9

Part IV: Answering Questions (Data Analysis)

Thurs., 4/10: Survey Research and Polling

- Asher, Chapters 1 and 2

Tues., 4/15: Survey Research and Polling

- Asher, Chapter 5

Thurs., 4/17: Survey Research and Polling

- Asher, Chapter 8

Tues. 4/22: Data Analysis

- J&R, pp.305-336
- Rochefort, Chapter 4: “The Real Invisible Hand”

Thurs., 4/24: Data Analysis

- J&R, pp. 339-350; 360-366

Wed., 4/30, 5:30 p.m.: Final Exam