Spring 2003

INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL SCIENCE METHODS
790:300
Monday/Thursday 11:30-12:50; Hickman Hall 202

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Office Hours: Thursdays, 2:00-4:00, and by appointment
609 Hickman Hall

SYLLABUS

This course is designed to introduce students to the quantitative research methodologies routinely used in the study of politics. Quantitative research relies on the scientific method. Our main goal in this course is to gain an appreciation of this method, and to develop a basic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of various research techniques employed by political scientists. We will attempt to understand when each approach is appropriate, and just as importantly, when it is not. Students in this course will also be introduced to the fundamentals of statistical analysis. We will learn to use SPSS for Windows, one of the most complete and easy-to-use statistical packages available. This package is on all of the computers in the various computer hubs around campus.

There is much to be learned about research methods and statistics from reading books and hearing lectures. But like any applied skill, practice in actually applying what we are learning in class is the best way to learn. This semester we will design and conduct a detailed content analysis of newspaper coverage of the 2002 Senate election campaigns, and consider questions about the effects, and effectiveness, of those campaigns. Students will have the opportunity to apply several of the techniques we have learned in class and in their reading through a series of coordinated homework assignments, leading up to a final research report.

If you do not have one already, you must get a computer account in order to be able to use the computers and printers in the university's computer labs. Several homework assignments, and the data analysis for your research paper, will require the use of SPSS, and thus computers. I believe you can go to any of the computer hubs around campus (e.g., across the bridge in Loree) with your student ID to get an account set up.

Course Requirements and Grading

A major part of this course will come from the textbook that we will use. This book provides an excellent overview of how research is done and how data are analyzed. Readings will routinely be assigned from this book and supplemented with lectures by the instructor. All students are expected to complete the assigned readings *before* each class. This class is to be interactive in nature; while I will lecture, I will also expect informed class participation by all members of the class. The one required book for this course, available for purchase at the Douglass bookstore, is

Frankfort-Nachmias, C., & Nachmias, D. (1996). *Research Methods in the Social Sciences* (5th ed.) New York: St. Martin's Press.

There are a few copies of an optional "study guide" to accompany this text available in the bookstore. I have also put two copies (mine) of the "study guide" which accompanies this book on reserve at Douglass Library.

Grading

- Each student will complete 5 homework assignments during the course of the semester. Together, these assignments should prepare you to analyze and write a formal research report. In several cases, the homework assignments will require you to coordinate with a partner or small research "team." The homeworks must be completed on time. Each homework builds on the previous one, and for the most part the homeworks are coordinated with each other. Hence failure to complete one will cause a domino effect, making it almost impossible to do the rest, screwing yourself and your partner(s) on the group assignments, etc. Please consider yourself forewarned. **35%**

- There will be two multiple choice and short-answer exams, one to be administered about half-way through the semester, and the other during the regularly-scheduled final exam period (May 8, as it turns out). These exams will cover the reading (mostly) and class lectures. By the nature of this course, we will not have time to discuss in class everything in the reading. Nonetheless all of this material is important to learn to gain a full appreciation of research methods, and you are responsible for all of it on the exams. **40%**

- The final research report is designed to give students the chance to actually work with the data they have collected; and to develop and test a simple hypothesis about relationships in the data. Students will be expected to identify the research question they wish to examine, test it statistically, and write a report describing the nature of the hypothesis, the data collection technique, the mode of analysis, and the results of the hypothesis test. The research reports will be due on the last day of class, Monday, May 5. **20%**

- Class Participation **5%**

DAILY SCHEDULE

Date	Topic	Reading
Thur, Jan.23	Class Introduction	Ch. 1
	Part 1: Foundations of Empirical Research	
Mon, Jan. 27	Basic Concepts and Definitions; Variables, Values, and Hypotheses	Ch. 2
Thur, Jan. 30	The Research Process; Effects of Political Campaigns	Ch. 3
Mon, Feb. 3	Conducting Library Research [*Meet in lobby of Alexander Library*] *HW#1 assigned –Literature Review (due 2/10)*	
Thur, Feb. 6	Ethics in Research	Ch. 4
Mon, Feb. 10	Gathering Data from the WWW: Using LexisNexis [*Meet in lobby of Alexander Library*] *HW#2 assigned – Part a completed in class Thursday*	
	Part 2: Research Designs, Data Collection	
Thur, Feb. 13	Sampling [*Finish part a of HW2; assign part b, due 2/20*]	Ch. 8
Mon, Feb. 17	Experiments and Quasi-Experiments	Ch. 5
Thur, Feb. 20	Content Analysis	Ch. 13
Mon, Feb. 24	Content Analysis in Practice [*Start HW3 in Class, part a due 3/3*]	
Thur, Feb. 27	Survey Research and Sampling	Ch. 10
Mon., March 3	First Wave of Coding Due; Discussion of problems; [*Start part b of HW3 in class – due 3/10*]	Ch. 6
Thur, March 6	[Continue working on coding; meet with partner to discuss further coding difficulties]	
Mon, March 10	Catch-up and review	
Thur, March 13	**EXAM #1**	

Date	Topic	Reading
3/17 - 3/21	SPRING BREAK!	
	Part 3: Data Analysis and Statistics	
Mon, March 24	Basics of Probability: Frequency Distributions & Random Variables	Ch. 7
Thur, March 27	Coding Reliability [*HW#4 Distributed, Started in Class*]	
Mon, March 31	Univariate Statistics	Ch. 15
Thur, April 3	Using SPSS for Data Entry MEET IN LOREE 23 *HW #5 distributed and completed in class*	Ch. 14
Mon, April 7	Bivariate Statistics	Ch. 16
Thur, April 10	Bivariate Statistics (continued)	Ch. 9
Mon, April 14	Reporting Your Results (*Paper Assignment Distributed, Due 5/5*)	Appendix B
Thur, April 17	Multivariate Statistics: Control	Ch. 17
Mon, April 21	Using SPSS for Data Analysis MEET IN HICKMAN 413	Appendix. A
Thur, April 24	.Using SPSS for Data Analysis MEET IN HICKMAN 413	
Mon, April 28	Inferential Statistics	Ch. 19
Thur, May 1	Help with Data Analysis, as Needed MEET IN HICKMAN 413	
Mon, May 5	Brief Student Presentations of Findings (Voluntary) Catch-up and Course Review *Research Reports due in class today!*	
Thur, May 8	FINAL EXAM Scheduled, Hickman 202, 9:30 - 11:00 (Get a little more sleep)	