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PSCI 480.01: Political Research Goals and Strategies

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POLITICAL RESEARCH GOALS AND STRATEGIES - PSCI 480, Sections 01 & 80

Fall 2014

Monday 3:40 - 6:00, LA 344

Draft Syllabus – Subject to Modification

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

- Professor Christopher Muste
- Phone: 406-243-4829
- Office: 416 Liberal Arts
- [E-mail](mailto:christopher.muste@umontana.edu): christopher.muste@umontana.edu
- Office Hours: Monday 12-1, Wednesday 12-2, and by appointment
- Political Science Department - 350 Liberal Arts; Phone 406-243-5202

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Political Science is a broad discipline that addresses a range of questions and employs a wide variety of research methodologies, including those used in other social sciences. In this course, we explore the questions raised and methods used in the main subfields of political science: Theory, Comparative, International Relations, and American politics. Because many of the fundamental questions and methodological issues are common to all of the subfields, as well as to social science more generally, we will begin by briefly examining basic issues in the philosophy of science, including the ways in which political science is and is not “scientific.” In the second part of the course, we will study how political scientists seek methodological rigor in their research, exploring the meaning and analysis of causation, the fundamentals of research design, the formation of concepts and hypotheses, common measurement problems, and case selection and sampling issues.

In the final part of the course, we examine the methodologies characteristic of work in the four main subfields of political science, such as ordinary language analysis and textual analysis in Theory; case studies, process tracing, and qualitative comparative analysis in Comparative; strategic-interaction modeling, cognitive and group research in International Relations; and historical and institutional analysis, survey research and quantitative analysis in American politics. The goal of the course is for you to become familiar with these approaches, learn how to evaluate research that uses these approaches, and to use these tools to develop methodologically sound research of your own.

READINGS

Most course readings will be available on electronic course reserves (ERES) at the Mansfield Library. The readings for each week are listed in the “Course Topics and Readings” section below. I may change some readings to reflect political events and the interests of students in the class. The ERES password for this course will be given out in class.

There is one required basic textbook for this course, *The Craft of Political Research, 9th edition*, 2012 by W. Phillips Shively; the 8th edition is also useful and some chapters from that edition will be on ERES.

GRADES AND COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Each week there will be a set of readings broadly covering that week’s topic, often of divergent perspectives and levels. The assigned readings are varied, sometimes complex and theoretical, so students are expected to do all the readings and be prepared to discuss them each week. Being prepared will contribute to your understanding of the material and success in the course. Participation in class discussions will be 10% of the course grade.

In selected weeks, students will write a 2-4 page (double-spaced) analysis of the week’s readings. This analysis can be an overview comparing a single theme in several readings for that week, an intensive comparison of two or more of the readings, or an analysis of the week’s readings that relates them to relevant readings from previous weeks. These weekly analyses must be turned in by 1:00 pm the day class meets (Monday) to my [E-mail](mailto:christopher.muste@umontana.edu): christopher.muste@umontana.edu . They will provide the basis for our class

discussions. Papers turned in between 1:00-2:00 will receive half credit, and papers not turned in by 2:00 will receive no credit unless cleared with me by 10 am.

There are twelve weeks with possible reading analyses. All students must do analyses for the first two weeks, the readings for September 8 and September 15 in the “Course Topics & Readings” section of this syllabus. After September 15, undergraduate students will choose two more weeks in which to do reading analyses of the remaining ten weeks, selected largely by you based on your interests. Graduate students will choose four more weeks to do reading analyses. This will be a total of four reading analyses for undergrads, each worth 7.5% of the grade, for a total of 30%. For grad students, each of the six reading analyses will be worth 5% of the grade, also 30%. Note: No more than half of your Reading Analysis weeks can be from the last four weeks of the course.

As noted above, engaging in class discussion is an important part of learning complex and unfamiliar material. Intelligent and frequent participation in class discussion is 10% of the overall course grade.

There will be a midterm exam at the end of the second section of the course, which will cover the readings and discussions up to that time. The midterm exam is worth 30% of the course grade.

The other requirement for this course is to prepare a research design for a research project you plan to carry out, based on your interests in political science. The research design must incorporate a research question, literature review, theory(ies), hypotheses, a comprehensive plan of the research process and the research strategies and methods that will be used to carry out the plan, and preliminary search for and analysis of some evidence or data. The first draft of your research design will be due in November, and we will discuss the projects and strengths and problems in the research design and potential solutions. The final version of the research design paper is due Monday, December 8 of finals week, when we will meet to discuss all the projects. The research design is worth 30% of the course grade.

GRADES:

Grades will be calculated according to the following percentages:

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Percentages</i>	<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Percentage of Grade</i>
A	93-100	Participation in discussion	10%
A-	90-92.9	Reading Analyses	30%
B+	87-89.9	Midterm exam	30%
B	83-86.9	Final paper	30% of course grade
B-	80-82.9		
C+	77-79.9		
C	73-76.9		
C-	70-72.9		
D+	67-69.9		
D	63-66.9		
D-	60-62.9		
F	<60		

PSCI 400:

Due to the intensive writing in this course, it satisfies the PSC 400 Writing requirement for Poli Sci majors. If you want PSCI 400 credit for this course, complete an override slip and PSCI 400 signup form from Karen Boice in the PSCI office, then bring them both to me to sign.

ACADEMIC HONESTY AND PLAGIARISM

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the [Student Conduct Code](#). The Code is available for review online at (http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php)

The University of Montana Student Conduct Code prohibits plagiarism, which is “representing another person’s words, ideas, data, or materials as one’s own.” This is a serious academic violation that can result in penalties up to suspension or expulsion from the University. **I take academic honesty very seriously, and do my utmost to prevent, uncover, and penalize any form of dishonesty.** Read the [UM plagiarism warning](http://www.umt.edu/catalog/academics/academic-policy-procedure.php) (<http://www.umt.edu/catalog/academics/academic-policy-procedure.php>) and Student Conduct Code above. Please contact me with any questions or concerns about academic honesty.

CLASS COURTESY

In order to have a pleasant and effective learning environment in a class this size, we need to observe a few basic courtesies. This is a small campus, so it is possible to get to the classroom on time from all other campus buildings; arriving late or leaving early disrupts the class and disturbs other students and the instructor. **Please turn off all cell phones and all other electronic devices before class begins.** Please don’t read a newspaper or other non-course material, eat during class, or use text messaging, web browsers, or similar communications. You may take class notes using a computer but do not use it for other purposes. If you have a question or comment about the material, please raise your hand instead of discussing it with your neighbor. We’ll all benefit if we remember we’re in the room together to learn.

DROP POLICY AND INCOMPLETES

You can [drop on Cyberbear](#) through September 15, and from September 16 to October 27 using a drop slip signed by me. Starting October 28, you must go through the more formal and difficult “late drop” petition process. I will sign late drop petitions until October 31, and after that only under unusual circumstances, as stated at <http://www.umt.edu/catalog/academics/academic-policy-procedure.php> under “Adding, Dropping, and Other Course Changes – Summary Tables” Incompletes will only be permitted when all the conditions set forth in the [official University policy](#) are met – the policy is at (<http://www.umt.edu/catalog/academics/academic-policy-procedure.php>) under “Incomplete Grade Policy”

DSS STUDENTS

Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Students with disabilities requesting accommodations on exams, papers, or other course requirements should contact me as soon as possible, and must contact the DSS office in order to arrange for and provide to me a letter of approval for accommodations from DSS. The DSS office is in Lommasson Center 154.

E-MAIL AND MOODLE

Moodle has replaced Blackboard on the UM campus. In order to do some of the assignments for the course and to access your grades and other course information, you will need to sign into the Moodle website that has been created for this course. Information on how to [access your account](#) is at: (<http://umonline.umt.edu/>) Moodle and Cyberbear both send my e-mails to your official UM e-mail account, so you should check it frequently. If you use another e-mail account, go into CyberBear to have your official UM e-mail forwarded to your preferred e-mail account, and check that account frequently.

GRADUATE STUDENTS

Graduate students taking this course must complete supplemental graduate-level readings for each course topic as specified by the instructor, six reading analyses, and complete a 20-25 page research paper consisting of a research design with a well-defined research question, theory, hypothesis, literature review, data collection and analysis, and an analysis that synthesizes the five components.

COURSE TOPICS AND READINGS

NOTE: “*GS” designates readings only required for Graduate Students

PART I: POLITICAL SCIENCE AS A SCIENCE?

Date	Topic and Readings
Aug. 25	Introduction
Sept. 1	LABOR DAY - NO CLASS
Sept. 8	Who’s Right? What’s Important? What Makes Social Science a Science? and Analyzing Research Claims <i>Note: this first set of readings repays close attention and thought. They raise a number of important issues and questions, and are the basis for your first reading analysis short paper. We will analyze these articles intensively in class, so bring a copy of these readings to class.</i>
Sept. 15	Natural Science and Social Science: Causation, Interpretation, and Alternatives

PART II: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Date	Topic and Readings
Sept. 22	Natural Science and Social Science: Causation, Interpretation, and Alternatives
Sept. 29	Developing Research Questions, Concepts, and Hypotheses
Oct. 6	Problems in Measuring Political Phenomena: Reliability and Validity
Oct. 13	Sampling in Quantitative and Qualitative Research
Oct. 20	MIDTERM EXAM - TENTATIVE DATE And Library Research, Archival Research, and Data Collection: Part I
Oct. 27	Library & Archival Research, Data Collection II; and Research Design, Analysis and Writing in Political Science

PART III: SUBFIELD RESEARCH EXAMPLES

Date	Topic and Readings
Nov. 3	International Relations: Variety in Methods of Analysis
Nov. 10	NO CLASS DUE TO VETERAN’S DAY HOLIDAY
Nov. 17	Comparative: Case Studies, Least-similar/Most-similar, QCA, and Single State Studies
Nov. 24	American Politics: Quantitative Analysis, Survey Research & Other Methods
Dec. 1	Political Theory: Analytic and Normative, Explanation and Interpretation
Dec. 8 3:40 p.m	FINAL RESEARCH DESIGN PAPERS DUE IN CLASS Summary Discussion of Final Research Designs & Methods (We will re-schedule this if we have scheduling conflicts for students in T/Th 1:10 classes)