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PSC 502.01: Research Methods

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Political Science 502
RESEARCH METHODS

Professor Tompkins
Fall Semester 1994

Office: LA 352 (243-2721)
Office Hours: Almost any time

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course covers the essential ingredients for successfully designing and carrying out social science and applied research. These ingredients include defining the problem, reviewing the literature, formulating hypotheses and research questions, operationalizing variables, and choosing appropriate methods for gathering data and analyzing results. Special attention is given to the scientific method as a way of knowing.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

To further develop:

1. research skills
2. problem-solving skills
3. writing and organizational skills
4. team-building skills

REQUIRED TEXTS

Chava Frankfort-Nachmias and David Nachmias, Research Methods in the Social Sciences (New York: St. Martins, 1992.)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students are required to read all reading assignments, be prepared to discuss them in class, write a research design, and take one in-class examination.

MA Students

MA students will write two versions of a thesis prospectus. The short version will be three pages in length and will contain the elements set out in the handout entitled "Research Project Prospectus." The longer version will be 8-12 pages and will contain the elements set out in the attached "Scoresheet for Evaluating Research Designs." (An MA thesis normally does not employ experimental designs or causal models, but in most other respects the prospectus should conform to the Scoresheet).

MPA Students

MPA students will write a 10-15 page social science research design containing the elements set out in the attached "Scoresheet for Evaluating Research Designs."

GRADING

Grades will be determined as follows:

First Half of Design	25%
First Draft of Whole Design	25%
Final Draft of Design	25%
Examination	25%

Research Designs will be graded based on the Scoresheet and evidence that the student has read and understood the reading assignments.

NOTE: Assignments submitted late will be reduced in score by one-half grade per day.

READING ASSIGNMENTS

Aug. 29 Elements of an Effective Research Design

Sept. 5 ****Labor Day Holiday****

Sept. 12 The Scientific Method

Read Chapters 1 and 2.

Sept. 19 Concepts, Variables, and Hypotheses

Read Chapter 3.

Sept. 26 Concepts, Variables, and Hypotheses (continued)

Oct. 3 ****No Class**** (Students are to work on research designs due Oct. 11)

Oct. 10 ****Columbus Day Holiday****

****First half of research design is due Tuesday, Oct 11****

Oct. 17 Types of Research Designs

Read Chapters 5 and 6.

Oct. 24 Measurement and Sampling

Read Chapters 7 and 8.

Oct. 31 ****In-Class Exam****

Nov. 7 Survey Research and Questionnaire Construction

Read Chapters 10 and 11.

Nov. 14 Data Collection Methods

Read Chapters 9, 12, and 13.

****Entire Research Design due by Friday, Nov. 18.****

Nov. 21 ****No class: Drop by my office Monday or Tuesday to pick up Designs****

Nov. 28 Evaluating Students' Research Designs

****Bring two copies of your rewritten research design to class; they will be evaluated by fellow students in class****

Dec. 5 **** MA prospectuses are due****

Dec. 5 - Dec. 19 Student Presentations

Each student will make a 10-15 minute formal presentation of their research design, clearly laying out the research problem, the hypotheses/research questions, and methodology. Other class members will then offer constructive comments for 5-10 minutes.