PSCI 491.01A: Political Research Goals and Strategies

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POLITICAL RESEARCH GOALS AND STRATEGIES - PSCI 491, Sections 01A & 80
Fall 2013
Monday 3:40 - 6:00, LA 106 / LA 344 (starting 9/9)
Draft Version

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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 is

There is one recommended basic textbook for this course, The Craft of Political Research, 9th
dition, 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.
GRADES AND COURSE REQUIREMENTS (CONTINUED)

In selected weeks, students will write a two 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 christopher.muste@umontana.edu  . They will provide the basis for our class discussions. Papers turned in between 1:00-2:00 will receive only half credit, and papers not turned in by 2:00 will receive no credit.

There are twelve weeks with possible reading analyses. All students must do analyses for the first two weeks, the readings for September 9 and September 16 in the “Course Topics & Readings” section of this syllabus. After September 16, 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 selected 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 10 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:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A−</td>
<td>90-92.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89.9</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>83-86.9</td>
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<td>B−</td>
<td>80-82.9</td>
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<td>C−</td>
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<td>D+</td>
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<td>D−</td>
<td>60-62.9</td>
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<td>below 60=F</td>
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Participation in discussion: 10%
Reading Analyses: 30%
Midterm exam: 30%
Final paper: 30% of course grade

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://life.umt.edu/vpsa/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 potentially resulting in suspension or expulsion from the University. I take academic honesty very seriously, and will do my utmost to prevent, uncover, and penalize any form of cheating in this course. Read the UM plagiarism warning http://www.umt.edu/catalog/academic/policy.htm#plagiarism and Student Conduct Code above. Please contact me if you have 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 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. 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 just keep in mind the reason we’re in the room together.

DROP POLICY AND INCOMPLETES:
You can drop on Cyberbear through September 16, and from September 17 to October 28 using a drop slip signed by me. Starting October 29, you must go through the more formal and difficult “late drop” petition process. I will sign late drop petitions until October 29, and after that only under extraordinary circumstances, as stated at http://www.umt.edu/catalog/academic/policy.htm#add under “Beginning the forty-sixth...” 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/acad/acadpolicy/default.html 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?

August 26  Introduction
September 2  LABOR DAY - NO CLASS

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 the readings to class.


September 16  Natural Science and Social Science: Causation, Interpretation, and Alternatives

*GS = Optional for Grad Students:
*GS Fay, Brian, and J. Donald Moon. 1977/1994. “What Would an Adequate Philosophy of Social Science Look Like?” in Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science, Martin and McIntyre,
PART II: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

September 23 Natural Science and Social Science: Causation, Interpretation, and Alternatives

September 30 Developing Research Questions, Concepts, and Hypotheses
Review: Hoover & Donovan, "Strategies" and "Refinements"

October 7 Problems in Measuring Political Phenomena: Reliability and Validity
review: Hoover & Donovan, “The Elements of Science” pp. 16-29 only; "Strategies" pp. 46-56 only; and "Refinements" pp. 77-80 only.

New Readings:

October 7 continued next page..
October 7 (continued) Problems in Measuring Political Phenomena: Reliability and Validity

More New Readings:

Supplemental Readings:

October 14 Sampling in Quantitative and Qualitative Research
These two are general readings about case selection and sampling

These readings apply the ideas about good case selection and sampling to political research.

October 21 MIDTERM EXAM - TENTATIVE DATE
And Library Research, Archival Research, and Data Collection: Part I
October 28

Library & Archival Research, Data Collection II; and Research Design, Analysis and Writing in Political Science


UM Library Website: Under “Research Tools” read first four links starting with “Library Catalog.” Under “Subject Guides” read “Popular or Scholarly?” “Successful Researching and Writing” (the first six topics therein), “Techniques for Refining and Focusing Searches,” and “Evaluating Web Pages” (under “Internet”).


Research design, analysis, writing:


UM Library Website: Under “Research Tools” click on “Subject Guides” (in the left margin) and read “Successful Researching and Writing.”
PART III: SUBFIELD RESEARCH EXAMPLES

November 4 International Relations: Variety in Methods of Analysis


Read three of the following articles; your selection should be guided by your substantive and methodological interests.


Holsti, Ole R. 2001. “Politicization of the United States Military: Crisis or Tempest in a Teapot?” *International Journal* 57: 1-18. Holsti uses data from surveys of civilian and military leaders as well as the public to explore the potential for division among these groups.


**NOVEMBER 11: NO CLASS DUE TO VETERAN’S DAY HOLIDAY**
November 18  Comparative: Case Studies, Least-similar/Most-similar, QCA, and Single State Studies


Read two of the following seven articles; your selection should be guided by your substantive and methodological interests.

Dreze, Jean and Amartya Sen. 1989. “China and India.” In Dreze and Sen, Hunger and Public Action. This is an example of a small-N comparison examining the factors involved in the development of two countries - is it a most-different or most-similar design?

Skocpol, Theda. 1979. “Explaining Social Revolutions: Alternatives to Existing Theories” and “Causes of Social Revolutions in France, Russia and China.” Chapter 1 in States and Social Revolutions, pp. 3-43. Classic small-n study, selecting for the same value on the dependent variable.


Steinmo, Sven. 1989. “Political Institutions and Tax Policy in the United States, Sweden, and Britain.” World Politics 41: 500-535. Another small-N comparison - is it a most-different or most-similar design? Compare this to...

Steinmo, Sven and Caroline J. Tolbert. 1998. “Do Institutions Really Matter?: Taxation in Industrialized Democracies.” Comparative Political Studies 31:2 (April) 165-87. Steinmo here increases the number of cases, providing an interesting comparison to his 1989 article, above.


November 25: American Politics: Quantitative Analysis, Survey Research & Other Methods


Read two of the following articles; your selection should be guided by your substantive and methodological interests.


Kingdon, John W. 1977. “Models of Legislative Voting.” *Journal of Politics* 39: 563-595. This is an analysis of competing models of Congressional voting and methods used to evaluate the models.

[Nsupplemental: Shepsle and Weingast on “Positive Theories of Legislative Institutions” in *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 1994.]


Hochschild, Jennifer. 1981. “Why There is No Socialism in the United States” (part) and “Alternative Patterns of Belief, (part) in *What’s Fair? American Beliefs About Distributive Justice*, pp. 17-26 and 228-237. This is an example of in-depth, small-N research using in-person interviews.

Gilens, Martin. “The News Media and the Racialization of Poverty.” Chapter 5 in *Why Americans Hate Welfare*, pp. 102-132. This is a content analysis of news media.

December 2  Political Theory: Analytic and Normative, Explanation and Interpretation


This is a clear overview of recent developments in political theory, organized in terms of the topics that political theorists are investigating.

A strong view that categorizes the various ways that political theory has been studied, and how students can use the categories to understand theory better.

Focuses specifically on democracy and its role in theory.

An excerpt from one of the most widely cited and respected books on political theory from the last 50 years, analyzes the idea of representation, using a method called “ordinary language analysis.”

An introduction to another influential book, this one an attempt to see if it’s possible to develop an idea of justice that people with different interests and from different cultures would agree on.

Optional Readings:

December 9, 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)