Research Methods in Political Science  
Department of Political Science  
Rutgers University-Newark  
Spring 2020 Course Syllabus

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Office Hours: Thursday 5-6 p.m. and by appointment

Course Identification
Course Name: Research Methods in Pol. Sci  
Course Number: 21:790:491:63

Course Location: Hill Hall 210  
Class Time: Thursday 6:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Course Description & Objectives
This course will introduce students to the fundamentals of research methods in political science. The course explores the nonlinear nature of the research process and emphasize how to: 1) formulate appropriate research questions; 2) conduct helpful literature reviews; 3) minimize research problems to ensure proper research design; and 4) make valid inferences. The goal is to help students understand how to critically assess their own research designs and those of others. Students will complete three writing assignments and present their research papers in class.

Learning Goals
The course is designed to help students:

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<th>Objective</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
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<td>A) Acquire and demonstrate writing conventions and processes.</td>
<td>Class discussions and written assignments</td>
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<td>B) Familiarize themselves with what drives the political scientist through the scholarly research process.</td>
<td>Class discussions</td>
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<td>C) Develop their ability to ask appropriate research questions and conduct political science research.</td>
<td>Class discussions and written assignments</td>
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<td>D) Select and conduct rewarding literature reviews.</td>
<td>Written assignments</td>
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<td>E) Critically evaluate their own research designs and the work of others and develop effective presentation skills.</td>
<td>Class discussions, written assignments</td>
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<td>F) Enhance their ability to overcome the different challenges to making inferences (e.g., avoiding poor research questions).</td>
<td>Presentations, class discussions, Term Paper</td>
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<td>G) Enhance their research and writing skills and be able to conduct good political science research and analysis.</td>
<td>Class discussions, written assignments</td>
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Course Requirements and Grades
1) Readings are assigned for each class session. It is imperative that students complete all required readings on time in order to be able to participate actively in class discussions.
All readings will provide background information on the research process and challenges presented in the course. As class discussions are an important element of the learning process, student participation will be highly valued by the instructor.

2) Regular, punctual attendance is a course requirement. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class session. **More than two unexcused absences** will draw a penalty on the participation portion of your grade.

3) Starting from the second week, a team of 2-3 students will open each class session with a 15-20-minute oral presentation based on assigned readings.

The final grade earned in this course will be based on student performance in the following areas:

- a.) Class Attendance & Participation – 20%
- b.) Paper 1 – 15%
- c.) Paper 2 – 15%
- d.) Presentation – 10%
- e.) Final Exam – 40%

**Course Format**

Class meetings are divided into lectures and class discussions. The two formats are intended to complement each other and are both integral parts of the course. The lectures will provide contexts to the theoretical themes and research process and will offer interpretations for students’ consideration. Students should attend classes and actively participate in the learning process.

**Academic Integrity**

As scholars at Rutgers University-Newark, all students are held to the university’s Academic Integrity and Student Conduct Codes as well as to their instructor’s expectations, which include NO engaging in obscene and/or offensive behavior, utilizing inappropriate language or profanity. Academic dishonesty and or plagiarism on term papers and exams will not be tolerated and may result in an immediate and final course grade of “F.” Please note that serious cases will be reported directly to the Chair of the Department of Political Science, which may result in academic probation and/or suspension from the university. See Rutgers University-Newark Academic Integrity Policy at [http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/](http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/)

**Disability Services**

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University’s educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must complete and submit the Registration Form, schedule and complete an intake meeting, and submit appropriate documentation. If your request for reasonable accommodations is approved, you will receive a Letter of Accommodations (LOA), which you should present privately to the instructor as early in the semester as possible. Accommodations are not retroactive and are effective only upon submission of the LOA to the instructor. Please begin the process, by completing and submitting the Registration Form, available at [https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/applying-for-](https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/applying-for-)
services

Religious Holiday Policy
Students are advised to provide timely notification to the instructor about necessary absences for religious observances and are responsible for making up the work or exams according to an agreed-upon schedule.

Required Text
Maryann Barakso, Daniel M. Sabet and Brian F. Schaffner, Understanding Political Science Research Methods: The Challenge of Inference (New York and London: Routledge, 2014). This text is available for purchase at Rutgers University-Newark Bookstore.

This syllabus is subject to change. Students are responsible for keeping track of announcements and assignments.

Schedule of Classes

Week 1: Jan 23: Introductory/Organizational Meeting
  • Lecture/Discussion on understanding Political Science research methods

Week 2: Jan 30: Read Barakso, et el., pp.1-8.
  • Lecture/Discussion on the role of Inference in Political Science research

Week 3: Feb 6: Read Barakso, et el., pp. 11-33:
  Toshko, “Types of Research and Research Questions,” pp. 23-54
  • Presentation, discussion, and lecture on descriptive and causal inference

Week 4: Feb 13: Read Barakso, et el., pp. 36-55: What makes a good research question?
  • Presentation, discussion, and a lecture on the research process.

Week 5: Feb 20: Presentation and Discussion
  • Presentation and discussion of students’ research proposals

  • The role of theory in research and why theories are important and valuable

Week 7: Mar 5 Read Barakso, et el., pp. 56-80. Linking theory to inference
  • Lecture on literature review and theory building


Week 9: Spring Break
Mar 19: No class meeting

**Week 10:** March 26: Read Barakso, et el., pp. 83-114.
- Lecture and discussion on the challenge of descriptive inference approach

**Week 11:** Apr. 2: Read Barakso, et el., 116-148.
- Lecture and discussion on experiments as a research approach

**Week 12:** Apr. 9: Read Barakso, et el., pp. 149-176.
- Lecture and discussion experiments

**Week 13:** Apr. 16: Read Barakso, et el., pp. 177-204.
- Large-n observational studies as a research approach

**Week 14:** Apr 23: Read Barakso, et el., pp. 205-225.
- Review and evaluation of various approaches and methods

**Week 15:** Apr. 30: **Presentations and Discussion of per**
- Presentations and Discussion of Final Paper

**Week 16:** Final Exams week:
- May 5 & 6: **Reading Day**
- May 12: Final Paper Due

**ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE**

**Paper 1:**
- The first paper due February 13: Submit 1-2 pages research proposal on a topic of your choice. The topic should be within the realm of Political Science. The purpose of this paper is to help the student pick a research area for their final paper.

**Paper 2:**
- The 2nd assignment is due on March 12: Building on the research proposal, students will write 3-5 pages literature review that reflects the goal of their research project.

**Annotated Bibliography**
- The purpose of the annotated bibliography is to help the student understand their sources. Each citation should include 2-3 sentences of what the article, book or book chapter is about. The student is required to annotate a minimum of ten sources.

**Final Paper:**
The final paper will combine papers 1 & 2 and will add methodologies studied in class to answer the research question and the findings of the student’s research. A good research paper will have three major components: a introduction, a body, and a conclusion.