

Research Methods in Political Science
Spring 2022, 26:790:491:01; Tuesday, Thursday, 11:30am-12:50pm
Prof. Alexander J. Motyl, 728 Hill Hall, ajmotyl@rutgers.edu

In order to protect the health and wellbeing of all members of the Rutgers-Newark community, masks must be worn by all persons inside campus buildings when in the presence of others, and in buildings in non-private enclosed settings (e.g., common workspaces, workstations, meeting rooms, classrooms, etc.). Masks should securely cover the nose and mouth. Masks must be worn during class meetings. Each day before you arrive on campus or leave your residence hall, you must complete the brief survey on the My Campus Pass symptom checker self-screening app found at: [myRutgers Portal](#)

Learning Objectives

DEVELOP ARGUMENTS IN CLEAR AND COHERENT TEXTS AND ORAL COMMUNICATIONS; READ A VARIETY OF TEXTS FOR MEANING AND INFORMED ANALYSIS; EVALUATE INFORMATION CRITICALLY; PRODUCE IDEAS AND TEXTS CREATIVELY; UNDERSTAND AND USE METHODS AND FORMS OF INQUIRY SPECIFIC TO THE BROAD DISCIPLINARY CATEGORY (OR CATEGORIES) WITHIN WHICH THE COURSE FALLS; UNDERSTAND PAST AND PRESENT INTERRELATIONSHIPS AMONG DIVERSE POLITICAL, SOCIAL, CULTURAL, RACIAL, ETHNIC, AND/OR GENDER GROUPS; UNDERSTAND AND ADDRESS DEFINING SOCIAL, POLITICAL, CULTURAL, AND/OR INTELLECTUAL QUESTIONS.

Course Goals

The class will explore what political science as a discipline is and is not, how truth claims, concepts, and theories are constructed, and how political science research is conducted. This is an intensely hands-on course requiring regular attendance and involving multiple writing and speaking exercises.

Schedule

January 18: Introduction

January 20, 25: Consistency, Contradiction, Hypocrisy. What do we really know and how do we know that we really know it? What do we think we know? What is science? What is critical thinking? What is nonsense? What are logical consistency and contradiction? Do reason and logic matter? What are values, norms, and discourses? What are opinions and propaganda? Why do these distinctions matter? Is social change possible without knowledge? Reading:

<https://andrewsullivan.substack.com/p/the-grim-trade-off-of-blm-29d?token=eyJ1c2VyX2lkIjoxMzI3NzIyMiwiG9zdF9pZCI6Mzc0NDg3MDYsIi8iOiJLUkhTdyIsImIhdCI6MTYyNDg4NzAzNSwiZXhwIjoxNjI0ODkwNjM1LCJpc3MiOiJwdWItNjEzNzEiLCJzdWIiOiJwb3N0LXJlYWN0aW9uIn0.kUqKoyoiaAahunaoQQfqehS6O9vXUrU8qPGxIImBZZ2M>

January 27: What is politics? What is political science? What is the point of political science? What do political science and policymaking have in common? Is prediction possible/desirable?

February 1, 3: How does political science differ from other disciplines? Is political science a science or an art? Which forms of political science do political scientists practice? Why do ontology, epistemology, and methodology matter?

February 8, 10: In-class thought experiments

February 15, 17: Do verifiable truths exist or is everything fake news? Is there a mind-independent reality or is everything a social construction? Is everything a narrative? How do we know something is true? That something happened? That a condition exists? May generalizations be made? Empirical evidence, truth claims, facts, values, cultures, power, and norms; cherry picking; political correctness; discursive hegemony. Reading:

<https://www.persuasion.community/p/jonathan-rauch-the-constitution-of?token=eyJ1c2VyX2lkIjoxMzI3NzIyMiwiG9zdF9pZCI6MzgwNDk0MzEsIi8iOiJLUkhTdyIsImIhdCI6MTYyNDg4NjI2MSwiZXhwIjoxNjI0ODkwNTYxLCJpc3MiOiJwdWItNjE1NzkiLCJzdWIiOiJwb3N0LXJlYWN0aW9uIn0.kUqKoyoiaAahunaoQQfqehS6O9vXUrU8qPGxIImBZZ2M>

February 22, 24: What do theories do? Theories as maps. Causes, effects; generalizations; predictions; intervening variables; the structure of theories; theories of everything, nothing, and something; ceteris paribus; norms and values; variables and constants. Validating and invalidating theories. **1st paper due Feb. 22.**

March 1, 3: What are concepts? Where do they come from? Whose concepts are best/worst? Culture, values, norms, clarity, and parsimony. **2nd paper due March 1.**

March 8, 10: What are definitions? Why do definitions matter? How are concepts defined? Semantic

fields, substitution principle.

March 15, 17: spring break

March 22, 24: What is description? How can phenomena be described? **3rd paper due March 22.**

March 29, 31: What is interpretation? What are symbols? How are symbols interpreted? Language, signs, subjectivity, lifeworld. **4th paper due March 29.**

April 5, 7: What is explanation? How are phenomena explained using necessary, sufficient, facilitating conditions? **5th paper due April 5.**

April 12, 14: Research approaches: case study, comparison, large N. **6th paper due April 12.**

April 19, 21: Theoretical paradigms: structure (realism, Marxism, institutionalism) vs agency (rational choice, constructivism).

April 26, 28: In-class thought experiments. **7th paper due April 26.**

Requirements and Grades

Each student will formulate a simple abstract causal statement (of the 3-word form, A causes B, where A and B are abstract concepts) and devote all the exercises to its exploration.

Students are expected to write seven papers (six 10-line papers and one 2-page paper). Final grades will be based on the one 2-page paper (40%) and the six 10-line papers (60%). No extra-credit work.

Except for the third paper, each 10-line paper must be exactly 10 lines long (NOT 10 sentences!), with standard margins and 12-point font. The 2-page paper must be exactly 2 pages long, single spaced, with standard margins and 12-point font: no footnotes, no long citations, no bibliography. Papers will be graded on the basis of grammar, spelling, and punctuation (4 pts.) and quality of argument (16 pts.).

Papers must be sent to ajmotyl@rutgers.edu by 11:30AM on the due date. No late papers accepted.

Attendance and participation are mandatory. Students will not be able to complete the assignments without attending class and actively participating. **NO EXTRA CREDIT, NO RESUBMISSIONS.**

Assignment Schedule

Each student will formulate a simple abstract causal statement (of the form “A causes B”) and devote all the exercises to its exploration. Follow the below instructions exactly: do not write more or less than what is required.

- 1st paper due Feb. 22: 10 lines. Topic: Formulate a simple abstract causal statement and explain both why it matters and is worth pursuing and why it does not matter and is not worth pursuing.
- 2nd paper due March 1: 10 lines. Topic: Make an empirical truth claim and provide convincing evidence of both its empirical truth and its empirical falsehood.
- 3rd paper due March 22: *up to 10 lines*. Topic: Provide two contrasting definitions of both the cause and the effect in your simple abstract causal statement.
- 4th paper due March 29: 10 lines. Topic: Describe some empirical phenomenon in two different ways.
- 5th paper due April 5: 10 lines. Topic: Provide two competing interpretations of some empirical phenomenon.
- 6th paper due April 12: 10 lines. Topic: Explain the effect in your simple abstract causal statement using necessary, sufficient, and facilitating conditions.
- 7th paper due April 26: 2 pages. On p. 1, argue that your simple abstract causal statement is valid; on p. 2, argue that your simple abstract causal statement is invalid.