

## Research Methods in Political Science

Fall 2019, 26:790:491:01; Tuesday, Thursday, 11:30am-12:50pm, Conklin 446  
Prof. Alexander J. Motyl, 728 Hill Hall, ajmotyl@rutgers.edu

### 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 IN CONTEMPORARY AND/OR HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

### 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

**September 3, 5:** Introduction: What do we know? What do we think we know? Thought experiments.

**September 10, 12:** What is history? What is politics? What is political science?

**September 17, 19:** How does political science differ from other disciplines? What do political science and policymaking have in common? What forms of political science do political scientists practice? Ontology, epistemology, methodology.

**September 24, 26:** Empirical evidence, truth claims, facts, and norms; cherry picking; variables and constants.

**October 1, 3:** What do theories do? Causes, effects; generalizations; predictions; intervening variables; the structure of theories; theories of everything, nothing, and something; ceteris paribus; norms and values. **1<sup>st</sup> paper due Oct. 1.**

**October 8, 10:** What are concepts? Where do they come from? Whose concepts are best? Culture, values, norms, clarity, and parsimony. **2<sup>nd</sup> paper due Oct. 8.**

**October 15, 17:** In-class writing and thinking exercises.

**October 22, 24:** What are definitions? How to define. Semantic fields.

**October 29, 31:** What is description? How to describe. **3<sup>rd</sup> paper due Oct. 29.**

**November 5, 7:** What is interpretation? How to interpret. Intent, language, signs, and symbols. **4<sup>th</sup> paper due Nov. 5.**

**November 12, 14:** What is explanation? How to explain using necessary, sufficient, facilitating conditions. **5<sup>th</sup> paper due Nov. 12.**

**November 19, 21:** Theoretical paradigms: structure (realism, Marxism, institutionalism) vs agency (rational choice, constructivism). **6<sup>th</sup> paper due Nov. 19.**

**November 26, December 3:** Research approaches: case study, comparison, large N.

**December 5, 10:** Theoretical pluralism, hegemony, political correctness, norms, and policy; university/multiversity dynamics, publish or perish; policymaking exercises; perfect societies; radicalism vs piecemeal social engineering. **7<sup>th</sup> paper due Dec. 5.**

## 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) and participate in several writing exercises. Final grades will be based on the one 2-page paper (50%) and the six 10-line papers (50%). In-class participation may result in extra credit.

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 must be handed in at the beginning of class. No late papers accepted. No electronic papers accepted (except in emergencies).

Attendance is mandatory. Students will not be able to complete the assignments without attending class.

## 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.**

- 1<sup>st</sup> paper due October 1: 10 lines. Topic: Formulate a simple abstract causal statement and explain why it's normatively important and worth pursuing.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> paper due October 8: 10 lines. Topic: Make an empirical truth claim and provide convincing evidence of its empirical truth.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> paper due October 29: 10 lines. Topic: Define the cause and effect in your simple abstract causal statement, situate both concepts in the appropriate semantic fields, and show how your two concepts differ from other concepts in the semantic fields.
- 4<sup>th</sup> paper due November 5: 10 lines. Topic: Describe some empirical phenomenon, if possible one related to your empirical truth claim.
- 5<sup>th</sup> paper due November 12: 10 lines. Topic: Interpret a specific instance of the empirical phenomenon discussed in your empirical truth claim.
- 6<sup>th</sup> paper due November 19: 10 lines. Topic: Explain the effect in your simple abstract causal statement using necessary, sufficient, and facilitating conditions.
- 7<sup>th</sup> paper due December 5: 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.

## Recommended Readings

- Arthur C. Danto, *Narration and Knowledge*, Columbia University Press, chap. 13.
- Alexander J. Motyl, *Revolutions, Nations, Empires*, Columbia University Press, Introduction.
- Peter Phelan and Peter Reynolds, *Argument and Evidence*, Routledge.
- Giovanni Sartori, “Guidelines for Concept Analysis,” in Sartori, ed., *Social Science Concepts*, Sage.
- Arthur Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories*, University of Chicago Press.
- Philip E. Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgment*, Princeton University Press, chap. 8.

- John Ziman, *Real Science*, Cambridge University Press, chap. 10.