

Research Methods in Political Science

Spring 2019, 26:790:491:01; Tuesday, Thursday, 11:30am-12:50pm
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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

January 22: Introduction.

January 24: What is history? What is politics? What is political science?

January 29, 31: How does political science differ from other disciplines? What do political science and policymaking have in common? Ontology, epistemology, methodology.

February 5, 7: Empirical evidence, truth claims, facts, and norms; cherry picking; variables and constants.

February 12, 14: 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. **1st paper due Feb. 12.**

February 19, 21: What are concepts? Where do they come from? Whose concepts are best? Culture, values, norms, clarity, and parsimony. **2nd paper due Feb. 19.**

February 26, 28: In-class writing exercises and thought experiments.

March 5, 7: What are definitions? How to define. Semantic fields.

March 12, 14: What is description? How to describe. **3rd paper due March 12.**

March 26, 28: What is interpretation? How to interpret. Intent, language, signs, and symbols. **4th paper due March 26.**

April 2, 4: What is explanation? How to explain using necessary, sufficient, facilitating conditions. **5th paper due April 2.**

April 9, 11: Theoretical paradigms: structure (realism, Marxism, institutionalism) vs agency (rational choice, constructivism). **6th paper due April 9.**

April 16, 18: Research approaches: case study, comparison, large N. **7th paper due April 18.**

April 23, 25, 30: Theoretical pluralism, hegemony, political correctness, norms, and policy; university/multiversity dynamics, publish or perish; policymaking exercises.

May 2: Summation.

Requirements and Grades

Each student will formulate a simple abstract causal statement (of the 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%).

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 “X causes Y”) 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 February 12: 10 lines. Topic: Formulate a simple abstract causal statement and explain why it’s important and worth pursuing.
- 2nd paper due February 19: 10 lines. Topic: Make an empirical truth claim and provide convincing evidence (at least five impeccable sources) of its empirical validity.
- 3rd paper due March 12: 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.
- 4th paper due March 26: 10 lines. Topic: Describe the empirical phenomenon discussed in your empirical truth claim.
- 5th paper due April 2: 10 lines. Topic: Interpret an instance of the empirical phenomenon discussed in your empirical truth claim.
- 6th paper due April 9: 10 lines. Topic: Explain the effect in your simple abstract causal statement using necessary, sufficient, and facilitating conditions.
- 7th paper due April 18: 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.