Introduction to Political Inquiry
RPOS 516-0001 – Fall 2016

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Seminar: Husted Hall 017
Tuesday 1:15PM-4:45PM
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Course Description
This course is designed to provide students with an introduction to political inquiry in the social sciences. Students will learn how to ask and answer empirical research questions, using different approaches to explore political phenomenon across different subfields of political science. Students will also evaluate the merits of a wide range of methods including experiments; large-n statistical analysis; historical case studies; content analysis; field research and ethnography; and interview and survey research. Students will be expected to construct research designs suitable for answering different research questions. Students will be exposed to different software tools for conducting empirical research and analyzing data. Finally, students will examine the ontological and epistemological debates relevant to the discipline of political science. This is a required course in the Department’s doctoral program curriculum.

Goals
After taking this course, students will be able to:

1. Ask and defend interesting research questions related to empirical political phenomenon;
2. Evaluate the merits of different methodological choices;
3. Propose a range of research design strategies to answer different research questions;
4. Use software to manage research, analyze data, and communicate findings;
5. Provide constructive feedback to improve colleagues’ research projects;
6. Construct research projects related to students’ interests; and
7. Demonstrate mastery of foundational debates about the study of the social world.

Assignments
Aside from completing weekly readings, students will be expected to contribute to weekly discussions and complete weekly assignments, which are listed on the syllabus.

Students are also expected to submit two different research prospectuses. In each prospectus, students will propose an argument about the empirical world; defend the argument’s importance; identify evidence necessary to determine whether the argument is correct; and explain how you propose to collect the evidence. Each prospectus must be limited to five pages. The first prospectus is due on October 18, 2016. The second prospectus is due on November 22, 2016.

Finally, students will compose a draft grant application based on a prospectus. The grant application is limited to fifteen pages (all inclusive) and is due on December 14, 2015. If you find it useful, consider as a...


Grading & Evaluations

You will be evaluated according to your progress toward the goals of this course. Evaluations will occur regularly in class, on quizzes and exams, and on your final paper. The relative weights of each portion of the evaluation are listed below:

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<tr>
<td>Exercises</td>
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<td>Participation</td>
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Materials & Resources

Most of the readings will be made available via the course Blackboard website. I have ordered books through Mary Jane Books (215 Western Ave, Albany, NY). Please obtain copies of the following books:


Policies

Student participation in this course is governed by the University’s Standard of Academic Integrity. Failure to comply with the Standard of Academic Integrity can result in a failing grade and dismissal from the course. Other academic discipline by the University may also result. Those standards are outlined here:


Every Student is expected to go through the following tutorial:

Schedule

August 30. Introduction.

September 6. Research Ethics.


Brooks, Sarah. 2010. “Interview Research and IRBs: Navigating the Regulations for the Ethical Treatment of Human Subjects in Social Science Field Research.” In Mosley, Layna, ed. Interview Research in Political Science. [Chapter 4].

MacLean, Lauren Morris. 2010. “Neither God, Nor Native: The Power of the Interviewer in Political Science Research.” In Mosley, Layna, ed. Interview Research in Political Science. [Chapter 5].


Assignment: Complete the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) available at: https://www.citiprogram.org/

September 13. Research and Its Implications for Knowledge.


September 20. Multiple Research Traditions.


September 27. From Theories and Hypotheses to Concepts and Measurements.

October 4. Causation.
Assignment: Write down three substantive questions whose answers are causal in nature. Suggest a variable-centered answer to each of these questions. Focus on making sure that you understand what a causal mechanism is, and what makes it distinct from a variable.

October 11. Experiments.


**Assignment:** Critique this article: Gilens, Martin. 1996. “‘Race Coding’ and White Opposition to Welfare.” American Political Science Review 90(3): 593-604.

**October 18. Observational Research I.**


**Assignment:** Find a political science article in an area related to your prospectus proposal that uses large-N statistical analysis. Prepare a short (5 minute) presentation for class about the article and be prepared to defend the article’s argument to your colleagues.

**October 25. Observational Research II.**


**Assignment:** Find a political science article or chapter in an area related to your prospectus proposal that uses a case study. Prepare a short (5 minute) presentation for class about the article and be prepared to defend the article’s argument to your colleagues.

**November 1. Case Selection & Sampling.**


**November 8. Foundations.**


**November 15. Data Visualization.**

**November 22.**

**November 29. Presentations I.**

**December 6. Presentations II.**

Last updated: August 30, 2016