

Introduction to Political Inquiry

RPOS 516-0001 – Fall 2015

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Monday 3:45PM-5:45PM

Course Description

This course is designed to provide students with an introduction to academic political inquiry. 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 a number of 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. Both prospectuses are due on **November 23, 2015**, but they may be submitted anytime before this deadline. Each prospectus must be limited to *five pages*.

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 guide: Pzeworski, Adam and Salomon, Frank, "On the Art of Writing Proposals" (Social Science Research Council, 1995 rev., 1988), available at:

<http://www.ssrc.org/publications/view/the-art-of-writing-proposals/>.

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:

Exercises	15%
Participation	25%
Prospectus	30%
Grant Application	30%

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:

Brady, Henry and David Collier, eds. 2010. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards* 2nd ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. 2015. *Between the World and Me*. New York: Spiegel & Grau.

Epp, Charles R., Steven Maynard-Moody, and Donald P. Haider-Markel. *Pulled Over: How Police Stops Define Race and Citizenship*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

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:

http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html.

Every Student is expected to go through the following tutorial:

<http://library.albany.edu/usered/plagiarism/index.html>.

Schedule

August 31, 2015: Introduction

Eidlin, Fred. 2011. "The Method of Problems versus the Method of Topics." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44(4): 758-61.

Assignment: Create a list of five research questions that a political scientist might want to answer. Please send me a copy before class.

Assignment: Enter the citations for this week's and next week's readings into a citation manager. If you do not have a citation manager, you will find a free (and extremely useful) option here: <https://www.zotero.org/>. Generate a bibliography and bring it to class.

September 7, 2015: Labor Day (No Class)

September 14, 2015: Rosh Hashanah (No Class)

September 21, 2015: Research and Its Implications for Knowledge

Epp, Charles R., Steven Maynard-Moody, and Donald P. Haider-Markel. *Pulled Over: How Police Stops Define Race and Citizenship*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. 2015. *Between the World and Me*. New York: Spiegel & Grau.

Schwartz-Shea, Peregrine and Dvora Yanow. 2013. "Starting from Meaning: Contextuality and Its Implications," *Interpretative Research Design: Concepts and Processes*. London: Routledge. [Chapter 3].

September 28, 2015: Multiple Research Traditions

King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press (1994). Chapter 1 and pp. 34-49.

Brady, Henry and David Collier, eds., *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards* 2nd ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield (2010), pp. 1-26, 177-196, and skim Glossary.

Yanow, Dvora. "Neither Rigorous Nor Objective? Interrogating Criteria for Knowledge Claims in Interpretive Science." Chapter 4 in Yanow, Dvora and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, eds. *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Methods and the Interpretive Turn*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe (2006).

Bevir, Mark. 2008. "Meta-methodology: Clearing the Underbrush." In Box-Steffensmeyer, Janet, Henry Brady and David Collier, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*. New York: Oxford University Press (2008) [Chapter 3].

October 5, 2015: Causation

Copi, Irving M, and Carl Cohen. 1994. "Causal Connections: Mill's Methods of Experimental Inquiry." In *Introduction to Logic*. London: Macmillan [Chapter 12].

Brady, Henry. 2008. "Causation and Explanation in Social Science" In Box-Steffensmeyer, Janet, Henry Brady and David Collier, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*. New York: Oxford University Press [Chapter 10, skip pp. 253-266].

King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press [Chapter 3].

Mahoney, James. 2004. "Strategies of Causal Inference in Small-N Analysis." *Sociological Methods and Research* 28(4):387-424.

Wendt, Alexander. 1998. "On Constitution and Causation in International Relations." *Review of International Studies* 24(5): 101-18.

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 12, 2015: Experiments

Campbell, Donald and H. Laurence Ross. 1968. "The Connecticut Crackdown on Speeding: Time-Series Data in Quasi-Experimental Analysis." *Law & Society Review* 3(1): 33-54.

Gerber, Alan and Donald Green. 2008. "Field Experiments and Natural Experiments." In Box-Steffensmeyer, Janet, Henry Brady and David Collier, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*. New York: Oxford University Press [Chapter 15].

Dunning, Thad. 2010. "Design-Based Inference: Beyond the Pitfalls of Regression Analysis." in Brady, Henry and David Collier, eds. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards* 2nd ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield [Chapter 14].

McDermott, Rose. 2002. "Experimental Methods in Political Science." *Annual Review of Political Science*.

Posner, Daniel. 2004. "The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi." *American Political Science Review* 98(4): 529-45.

MacLean, Lauren Morris. 2010. *Informal Institutions and Citizenship in Rural Africa*. New York: Cambridge University Press [Chapters 1-2].

Assignment: Think of a political science questions you would like to answer, and then imagine a scenario in which you could use a natural experiment or quasi-experiment to answer it. How likely is it that the necessary conditions for the use of a quasi-experimental design would exist on the ground? If those conditions did not exist, what other methods would you turn to in order to answer your question?