

# Scope and Methods in Political Science

PS 9501a

University of Western Ontario

Fall 2012

## Class Information:

Thursday 9:30am-11:30pm  
SSC 4255

## Instructor Information:

Dr. Laura Stephenson

Office: SSC 4228

Office Hours: Thursday 1pm – 3pm or by appointment

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## Course Description:

The objective of this course is to provide MA students with an understanding of research methods used in the discipline. There are many ways of doing political science. By the end of the course students will be able to recognize the value of using different methodological approaches for different research questions. Students will also be able to critically evaluate the methodological approaches of others.

This course aims to make students informed consumers of research, in whatever tradition or form it might take. To achieve this, the course is divided into three sections: approaches, methods, and analyses. In each section, students will be introduced to a broad overview of the issues and debates. The course will not cover *every* method, or *every* approach, or *every* type of analysis – there simply is not time. However, it is expected that by the end of the course each student will be better readers of research, and will also have a better understanding of how to conduct an original research project.

### Note:

One's choice of approach, method and analysis can be a controversial decision. Many supporters of specific methods are unsympathetic to others. This course endeavours to present an encompassing overview of the various approaches and methodologies in political science, and thoughtful critiques of all methods will be encouraged. Students are expected to come into the course with an open mind and be prepared to learn, think, analyze, challenge, and come out with a much greater understanding of how research is conducted by political scientists.

## Required Books:

- David Marsh and Gerry Stoker, ed., *Theory and Methods in Political Science* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, (New York: Palgrave, 2010).

- Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

#### *References for Reading Statistics:*

Should you come across statistical analyses in the readings that are difficult for you to interpret, I suggest that you refer to one of the following sources for some clarification. You can also come to my office hours and request assistance.

- Daniel Rubinfeld, "Reference Guide on Multiple Regression."
- Alan Sykes, 1993, "An Introduction to Regression Analysis," *Chicago Working Paper in Law and Economics*.
- Ilsa L. Lottes, Alfred DeMaris and Marina A. Adler, 1996, "Using and Interpreting Logistic Regression," *Teaching Sociology* 24(3): 284-98.
- Cameron D. Anderson and Laura B. Stephenson, "Reading Political Behaviour Research: A Note on Methodology," available at [http://www.politicalscience.uwo.ca/faculty/stephenson/reading\\_political\\_behaviour\\_research-a\\_note\\_on\\_methodology.pdf](http://www.politicalscience.uwo.ca/faculty/stephenson/reading_political_behaviour_research-a_note_on_methodology.pdf).

### **Assignments:**

#### ***Reaction Papers – 40% (2x20%)***

Students are required to submit 2 5-page (double-spaced) reaction papers. The first paper is to be written in response to the readings assigned in week 3 or 4 (choose 1 week); the second paper is to be a response to the readings in week 5 or 6 (choose 1 week). These papers are expected to develop a single argument pertaining to the material discussed in the readings. There is considerable flexibility here – you may focus on a common theme or core issue, you may argue against certain positions, or you might criticize one author in light of another's position. Students should synthesize ideas from the texts and provide thoughtful critiques (identify strengths and weaknesses as they relate to the paper's argument) but summaries of the readings should be minimal. Other class material may be drawn upon to help in the critique if desired, although it is not necessary. I expect students to share their arguments with fellow students during class to add to the discussion.

*Due date:* Paper 1: October 11  
Paper 2: October 25

#### ***Position Paper – 40%***

This is the major assignment of the course. Students must choose a research question they are interested in and debate the merits of using two different strategies to study it, to be chosen from one of the following pairs:

- critical and institutional
- critical and rational choice
- interpretivist and institutional
- interpretivist and rational choice
- quantitative data analysis and qualitative data analysis

The papers should outline the research question to be analyzed, provide a detailed discussion of the benefits and drawbacks of using each strategy for the research project they have chosen, and consider what kind of insight is likely to result from each. All arguments must be supported by scholarly literature, both class materials and outside research. Papers are expected to be 10 pages (double-spaced) in length, use Chicago style for referencing (reference list style), footnotes instead of endnotes, 12-pt font and one-inch margins, and include a reference list.

*Due date:* December 6

***Participation – 20%***

This course is not lecture-based so attendance and active participation are essential. Participation marks will be awarded for participating in class discussions and showing evidence of preparedness for class.

## Topics and Readings:

1. September 6 - **Introduction**
  - Marsh and Stoker, Introduction
  
2. September 13 - **Research, Knowledge and Knowing**
  - Marsh and Stoker, chs. 9 and 10
  - Terence Ball, 1976, "From Paradigms to Research Programs." *American Journal of Political Science* 20(1): 151-175.
  - Brian Fay and J. Donald Moon, 1977, "What Would an Adequate Philosophy of Social Science Look Like?" *Philosophy of Social Science* 7: 209-227.
  
3. September 20 - **Positivism, or the "Science" in Political Science**
  - Marsh and Stoker, ch. 1
  - Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, 1994, *Designing Social Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), ch. 1.
  - Robert A. Dahl, 1961, "The Behavioral Approach in Political Science: Epitaph for a Monument to a Successful Protest," *American Political Science Review* 55(4): 763-772.
  
4. September 27 - **Rational Choice, Institutionalism and Path Dependence**
  - Marsh and Stoker, chs. 2 and 3
  - Donald P. Green and Ian Shapiro, 1994, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory*, New Haven: Yale University Press, ch. 2.
  - Mancur Olson, 1965, *The Logic of Collective Action*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, ch. 1.
  - Paul Pierson, 2000, "Increasing Returns, Path Dependence and the Study of Politics," *American Political Science Review* 94(2): 251-67.
  
5. October 4 - **Interpretivist Approaches to Political Science**
  - Marsh and Stoker, ch. 4
  - Charles Taylor, 1971, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," *Review of Metaphysics* 25: 3-51.
  - Joel D. Schwartz, 1984, "Participation and Multisubjective Understanding: An Interpretivist Approach to the Study of Political Participation," *The Journal of Politics* 46(4): 1117-1141.
  - Murray Edelman, 1985, "Political Language and Political Reality," *PS* 18(1): 10-19.

6. **October 11 - Critical Approaches to Political Science**
  - Marsh and Stoker, chs. 6 and 7
  - Susan J. Carroll and Linda G. Zerilli, 1993, "Feminist Challenges to Political Science," in *Political Science: The State of the Discipline II*, ed. Ada W. Finifter (Washington, D.C.: American Political Science Association).
  - Egon G. Guba and Yvonne S. Lincoln, 2004, "Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues," in *Approaches to Qualitative Research*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy, (New York: Oxford University Press).
  
7. **October 18 - The Comparative Method and Experimentation**
  - Marsh and Stoker, chs. 14 and 15
  - Arend Lijphart, 1971, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method," *American Political Science Review* 65(3): 682-693.
  - Blais André, Maxime Héroux-Legault, Laura Stephenson, William Cross, and Elisabeth Gidengil, forthcoming, "Assessing the Psychological and Mechanical Impact of Electoral Rules: A Quasi-Experiment." *Electoral Studies*.
  
8. **October 25 - Research Design and Conceptualization**
  - Marsh and Stoker, ch. 11
  - Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, 1994, *Designing Social Inquiry*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), chs. 2 and 3
  - Giovanni Sartori, 1970, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics," *American Political Science Review* 64: 1003-53.
  - Jane Jenson, 1975, "Party Loyalty in Canada: The Question of Party Identification." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 8(4): 543-553.
  
9. **November 1 - Measurement, Sampling and Issues of Validity**
  - Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, 1994, *Designing Social Inquiry*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), chs. 4 and 5
  - Yvonna Lincoln, 1995, "Emerging Criteria for Quality in Qualitative and Interpretive Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 1(3): 275-289.
  - Barbara Geddes, 1990, "How the cases you choose affect the answers you get," *Political Analysis* 2: 131-150.
  - David Collier and James Mahoney, 1996, "Insights and Pitfalls: Selection Bias in Qualitative Research," *World Politics* 49(1): 56-91.
  
10. **November 8 - Research using Existing Sources**
  - Ian S. Lustick, 1996, "History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias," *American Political Science Review* 90(3): 605-618.
  - Royce A. Singleton, Jr. and Bruce C. Straits, 2005, *Approaches to Social Research*, (New York: Oxford University Press), ch.11.

- Robert W. Jackman, 1985, "Cross-National Statistical Research and the Study of Comparative Politics," *American Journal of Political Science* 29(1): 161-82.
- Miriam A. Golden, 2001, "Why Do Trade Unions Call Strikes That Seem Sure to Fail?" in *Political Science as Puzzle Solving*, ed. Bernard Grofman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press).

#### 11. November 15 - **Qualitative Research**

- Marsh and Stoker, ch. 12
- Clifford Geertz, 1973, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*, ed. Michael Martin and Lee C. McIntyre (Cambridge: MIT Press), ch. 14.
- Gerardo L. Munck, 2004, "Tools for Qualitative Research," in *Rethinking Social Inquiry*, ed. Henry E. Brady and David Collier, Toronto: Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 105-122.
- Richard Fenno, Jr., 1986, "Observation, Context, and Sequence in the Study of Politics," *American Political Science Review* 80(1): 3-15.
- John Gerring, 2004, "What is a Case Study and What is it Good For?" *American Political Science Review* 98(2): 341-54.

#### 12. November 22 - **Quantitative Research**

- Marsh and Stoker, ch. 13
- Henry Brady, 2000, "Contributions of Survey Research to Political Science," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 33(1): 47-57.
- Mark Franklin, 2008, "Quantitative analysis," in *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences*, ed. Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating, (New York: Cambridge University Press), ch. 13.
- Tricia D. Olsen, Leigh A. Payne and Andrew G. Reiter, 2010, "The Justice Balance: When Transitional Justice Improves Human Rights and Democracy," *Human Rights Quarterly* 32(4): 980-1007.

#### 13. November 29 – **Research Ethics**

- Carolyn Ellis, 2007, "Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives," *Qualitative Inquiry* 13(1): 3-29.
- Royce A. Singleton, Jr. and Bruce C. Straits, 2005, *Approaches to Social Research*, (New York: Oxford University Press), ch.16.
- Laura R. Woliver, 2002, "Ethical Dilemmas in Personal Interviewing," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35(4): 677-678.

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**(Graduate) Statement of Academic Offences**

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)