



Scope and Methods in Political Science

PS 9501a

University of Western Ontario

Fall 2019

Class Information:

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

Instructor Information:

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Office Hours: Thursday 1-3pm or by appointment

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Course Description:

The objective of this course is to provide graduate students with an understanding of the fundamental principles that underlie research in political science. By the end of the course students will be able to recognize the value of different approaches, and will be able to critically evaluate the theories, empirical strategies, causal claims and validity of other research. The course will not cover *every* method or *every* approach, but 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 controversial. Many supporters of specific methods are unsympathetic to others. This course endeavours to present an overview of the various approaches in political science. Thoughtful critiques of *all* methods will be encouraged. No one method is perfect; in fact, not all methods are equally appropriate, depending on the research question at hand. 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.

Learning Objectives:

- This course will help you to understand the scientific method, why political science is a “science”, and also why many political scientists object to that characterization.
- By the end of this course, you should be able to identify and assess the positive and negative qualities of major approaches to the study of political problems.
- Through the topics covered, you will gain an appreciation of major issues related to research design.

Course Materials:

Required Books [*PDFs may be available online*]

- John Gerring, 2012, *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*, (New York: Cambridge University Press). [referred to as Gerring below]
- Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, 1994, *Designing Social Inquiry*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press). [referred to as KKV below]

Note: Readings not included in these books will be available electronically, either on the course OWL site or through one of the library’s databases. A search for the journal title on the main library site will usually turn up the electronic site.

Assignments:

Participation – 20%

Short Assignments – 40%

1/ Approach Defense Paper - 20%

2/ Article Theory and Causal Design Paper – 20%

Article Comparison – 40%

1/ Proposal – 5%

2/ Comparison Report – 35%

Participation:

All students are expected to be active participants in the class. This means being prepared by finishing the assigned readings, **preparing at least three discussion questions for the week (to be posted on OWL by 5pm Wednesday before each class)**, and engaging in discussion.

Short Assignments (20% each)

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Approach Defense Paper:

Students are expected to choose an approach covered in Week 3 and argue why they believe it is superior to the other approaches discussed that week for addressing their research interests. Students are required to discuss at least two alternative approaches to the one they prefer. This is intended to be a thoughtful reflection on what the student believes are the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches discussed through the lens of the student’s own research interests, drawing upon the course readings. The assignment should be at least 3 and no more than 5 pages in length (double-spaced) and is due on September 26.

Article Theory and Causal Design Paper:

This assignment has two parts.

1. Theory Analysis

Students are expected to find an article in a peer-reviewed, scholarly Political Science journal (for example, Canadian Journal of Political Science; American Political Science Review; American Journal of Political Science; Electoral Studies; International Organization; Journal of Politics; if you are unsure please ask the instructor) and analyze the theory design put forth by the author. As will be discussed in class, theories are made up of hypothesized relationships between components that lead to specific outcomes. Part of critically reading research is being able to understand the underlying theoretical structure.

2. Causality Study

Students must design a comparative study or experiment to identify causality in the theory put forth in the article. If the article already does this, the student is expected to design a different study. (If the article theory design topic is not appropriate, the student should consult with the instructor about an appropriate research question.) The paper should identify the cases or subjects to be studied, the variables that will be isolated and how that will be done, and how causality will be evaluated.

Papers are expected to be at least 3 and no more than 5 pages in length, and to include a diagram that clarifies the theory. Papers are due on October 31.

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Article Comparison:

This is the major assignment of the course. The purpose of this assignment is to consider how approaches and methodology can affect research findings. Students are required to choose two academic articles from peer-reviewed publications that address the same research topic. Students must submit a proposal for approval that identifies the research topic and the two articles on **November 14**. The full assignment is due on **December 5** (minimum 15 - maximum 17 pages, double-spaced). The assignment will have two parts. In the first part, students are expected to outline the methodological approaches used by the authors and compare and contrast their findings. In the second part, students are expected to use information learned in the course to consider how the methodology contributed to the similarities or differences in findings.

Topics and Readings

September 5

Introduction

September 12

Is Political Science a science?

- KKV, ch. 1.
- Gerring, ch. 1.
- Ruth Grant, 2002, "Political Theory, Political Science, and Politics," *Political Theory* 30(4): 577-595.
- Ian Shapiro, 2002, "What's Wrong with Political Science," *Political Theory* 30(4): 596-619.

September 19

Approaches

- David Marsh and Paul Furlong, 2002, "A Skin not a Sweater: Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science," in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, 2nd edition, ed. David Marsh and Gerry Stoker. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).
- James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, 2008, "Elaborating the "New Institutionalism"," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, ed. Sarah A. Binder, R.A.W. Rhodes and Bert A. Rockman.
<https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199548460.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199548460-e-1>
- Frank Fischer, 2005, "Beyond Empiricism: Policy Inquiry in Post positivist Perspective," *Policy Studies Journal* 27(1): 129-46.
- Dvora Yanow, 2003, "Interpretive Empirical Political Science: What Makes This Not a Subfield of Qualitative Methods," *Qualitative Methods*, Fall.
- David Marsh and Heather Savigny, 2004, "Political Science as a Broad Church: The Search for a Pluralist Discipline," *Politics* 24(3): 155-68.
- Keith Dowding, 2016, "Analytic Political Philosophy," *The Philosophy and Methods of Political Science* (London: Palgrave), ch. 9 (pp. 213-242).

September 26

Research Questions and Theories

Approach Defense Paper Due

- Gerring, chs. 2-4
- Jeffrey W. Knopf, 2006, "Doing a Literature Review," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 39(1): 127-132.
- Karl Gustafson and Linus Hagström, 2017, "What is the point? Teaching graduate students how to construct political science research puzzles." *European Political Science* 17(4): 634-648.

October 3

Description, Conceptualization and Measurement

- Gerring, chs. 5-7.
- KKV, chs. 2, 4-5

October 10

Causality

- Gerring, chs. 8, 9, 12
- KKV, ch. 3
- Tulia G. Falleti and Julia F. Lynch, 2009, "Context and Causal Mechanisms in Political Analysis." *Comparative Political Studies* 42(9): 1143-66.

October 17

Comparative Method and Experiments

- KKV, ch. 6.
- Arend Lijphart, 1975, "The Comparable-Cases Strategy in Comparative Research," *Comparative Political Studies* 8(2): 158-177.

- Charles Ragin, 1987, *The Comparative Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press), ch. 6
- Rebecca B. Morton and Kenneth C. Williams, 2008, "Experimentation in Political Science." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, ed. Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady and David Collier. New York: Oxford University Press.

October 24

NO CLASS. USE THE TIME TO WORK ON YOUR ARTICLE THEORY AND CAUSAL DESIGN PAPER.

October 31

Process Tracing and Studying Cases

Article Theory and Causal Design Paper Due

- John Gerring, 2004, "What is a Case Study and What is it Good for?" *American Political Science Review* 98(2): 341-354.
- Jason Seawright and John Gerring, 2008, "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options." *Political Research Quarterly* 61(2): 294-308.
- David Collier, 2011, "Understanding Process Tracing," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44(4): 823-30.
- Brady, Henry E. 2010. "Data-Set Observations versus Causal-Process Observations: The 2000 U.S. Presidential Election." In *Rethinking Social Inquiry*, 2nd ed., ed. Henry E. Brady and David Collier (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Arthur Conan Doyle. "The Adventure of Silver Blaze." Originally published in *Strand Magazine* Vol. 4 (December 24, 1892): 645–60.

November 7

FALL BREAK – NO CLASS

November 14

Qualitative Observational Data

- Katherine J. Cramer, 2016, *The Politics of Resentment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), ch. 2.
- Elisabeth Jean Wood, 2007, "Field Research," in *The Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (New York: Oxford University Press), ch. 5 (pp. 123-146).
- Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, 1995, "Choosing Interviewees and Judging What They Say," in *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (Sage 1995), ch. 5.
- Various authors, 2002, "Symposium: Interview Methods in Political Science," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35(4):663-688.
- Layna Mosley, 2013, "'Just Talk to People'? Interviews in Contemporary Political Science." In *Interview Research*, ed. Layna Mosley (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), pp. 1-28.

November 21

Quantitative Observational Data

- Chava Frankfort-Nachmias and David Nachmias, 2008, *Research Methods in the Social Sciences* (Worth Publishers), ch. 8.
- Nora Cate Schaeffer and Stanley Presser, 2003, "The Science of Asking Questions." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29: 65-88.
- Richard Johnston, 2008, "Survey Methodology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, ed. Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady and David Collier (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Henry E. Brady, "Contributions of Survey Research to Political Science," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 33(1): 47-57.

November 28

Ethics

- Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, ch. 1 (Ethics Framework). <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy->

[politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/Default/](#)

- Tony Porter, 2008, "Research Ethics Governance and Political Science in Canada," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 4(3): 495-499.
- Christie Aschwanden and Maggie Koerth-Baker, 2016, "How Two Grad Students Uncovered An Apparent Fraud - And A Way To Change Opinions On Transgender Rights." <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-two-grad-students-uncovered-michael-lacour-fraud-and-a-way-to-change-opinions-on-transgender-rights/>
- Arthur Lupia and Colin Elman, 2014, "Openness in Political Science: Data Access and Research Transparency." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 47(1): 19-42.

December 5

Proposal Workshop

Article Comparison Due

- Students will act as the audience while PhD students present their research proposals and receive prepared feedback from their discussant. Time for open discussion and questions from students will be set aside for each paper.
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