Research Writing: Political Science Methods

Baylor University
Political Science (PSC) 3301
Fall 2023

Instructor Information
Dr. Patrick Flavin
Email: Patrick_J_Flavin@baylor.edu
Phone: 254.710.7418
Office location: Burleson 307.01
Office hours: Mondays 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM, Wednesdays 11:30 AM – 2:30 PM
        (please email me to set an appointment)

Class Time and Location
Mondays and Wednesdays, 4:00 – 5:15 PM
Draper 341

Course Description and Goals
Why is the study of politics called political science? Is there anything scientific about it? In this course, you will find an answer to that question. Specifically, you'll learn how political scientists study the social/political world by carefully reading their research, understanding their theories and methods, and grappling with and critiquing their eventual conclusions. But, we won't stop there and sit passively on the sidelines. Instead, you'll get into the game: by the end of this class, you will proudly be able to call yourself a Political Scientist! To earn this prestigious title, however, we will need to develop and hone some very important "tools of the trade." These tools include learning how to: develop an interesting and answerable research question, generate a theory and a set of testable hypotheses, gather and interpret data, derive conclusions from your results, and explain those results to others. In short, in this course you will learn how to think systematically about the political world and develop the skills necessary to contribute to our knowledge about politics by accomplishing original research. These skills will serve you well both in your classes here at Baylor and in any future job that requires critical and systematic thinking.

As with any endeavor in life, it is important to set goals at the outset so we can evaluate our performance when we finish. So, after completing this course, you should be able to:

- Explain how the study of politics can be approached scientifically and systematically
- Read and understand political science research and distill what you learn into a clear and concise literature review
- Develop an interesting and answerable research question and articulate a plan of attack to answer that question using rigorous quantitative and/or qualitative methodology
- Present and explain your findings to others both orally and in written form

Readings
There is one textbook you will need to acquire for this course. It is available at the Baylor Bookstore or can be purchased online. Make sure you purchase the correct edition!

> Janet Buttolph Johnson, H. T. Reynolds, and Jason D. Mycoff. 2020. *Political Science Research Methods* (**9th Edition**). Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press. ISBN: 9781544331430.

In addition, there are reading assignments posted on our class Canvas page. To access them, go to the Modules tab on the left. I will also post detailed assignment directions, exam study guides, and other important class documents in this tab so you can access them at your convenience.

Course Requirements
Coming to class is a necessary, but not sufficient, part of being an active participant in the learning process. It is also crucial that you read the assigned material for each class completely and carefully. This course does not have hundreds of pages of reading per week. However, it does require very thorough attention to the reading that is assigned. Doing the assigned reading before each class session will provide important background information and greatly enhance what you learn and ultimately take away from this course. In addition, there will be questions on the exams that are taken directly from the readings. So, do the reading. All of it. Every time. If you don't, your grade for this class will suffer.

Your final grade for this class is made up of eight components. The breakdown of the course requirements as a percentage of your final grade is as follows:

100 points (20%)	Exam #1
100 points (20%)	Exam #2
25 points (5%)	Group research design presentation
50 points (10%)	Research proposal/literature review assignment
50 points (10%)	Research project detailed outline
25 points (5%)	Individual research project presentation
125 points (25%)	Final research paper
25 points (5%)	Class Attendance (after 2 absences, you lose 5 points for each additional)
500 points (100%)	

Exams
There will be two exams during the semester. They will draw on both class lectures and the assigned readings and are designed so you can demonstrate your understanding of the course material. I will post a detailed study guide prior to the exam to aid your preparation.

The exam will be available on Canvas as a Word document at 6:00 AM on the day of the exam. You are to download the document, type your answers, and then upload your completed exam in the Assignments tab on Canvas by 11:59 PM. Set aside a maximum of 1.5 hours to take the exam and while taking it you are to only use your brain (no class notes, readings, study aids, etc.).

The exams will be on the following dates and will take the place of our class meeting that day:
  Exam #1: Monday, September 25
  Exam #2: Wednesday, November 8

Group Research Design Presentation
Research in the academic world (and, really, in any job you may hold in the future) is often a collaborative process. This assignment is designed to give you hands-on experience in the research process and introduce you to the advantages and challenges of collaborative research. You will be divided into groups of 4-5 students. Each group will choose from a list of possible research topics or come up with a topic of its own (pending instructor approval). Your assignment is to prepare a 12-15 minute class presentation where you explain in detail how you would answer the topic you've chosen using the research framework we've discussed in class. I will post a detailed assignment description/grading rubric as we get closer to the presentation dates on Monday, October 2 and Wednesday, October 4. The group presentation will be graded out of a possible 25 points and all group members will earn the same score.

Individual Research Project
The ultimate goal of this course is to allow you to proudly call yourself a political scientist. To earn this title, you will produce your own original empirical political science research project. High quality research, however, requires time and effort. So, your individual research project is broken up into a series of four specific steps you will complete during the semester:

1. Research proposal/literature review assignment (3-5 pages)
2. Research project detailed outline (3-5 pages)
3. Individual research project presentation (8-10 minutes)
4. Final research paper (10-15 pages)

I will post a detailed assignment description/grading rubric in advance of the due date for each component (see detailed semester schedule below for due dates).

Class Attendance
Students who regularly miss class will not do well in this course. At the beginning of every class, I will pass an attendance sign-in sheet around the classroom. It is your responsibility to make sure you sign the sheet for every class session. If you do not sign the sheet, you will be counted as absent for that day.

Each student is allowed **two** unexcused absences during the semester without penalty. For the third and each subsequent absence, a student will lose 5 points (1% of their final course grade) from the Class Attendance component of their grade. In accordance with the Baylor University College of Arts and Sciences' official attendance policy, any student who misses more than seven class sessions (i.e. attends less than 75% of the classes) will automatically receive a failing

grade for the semester. So, you are strongly encouraged to attend each and every class session. If you have any questions about your attendance record during the semester, please contact me.

Questions About Graded Assignments
I am happy to answer any questions about your grade on an exam or written assignment. However, you are required to wait 24 hours after the grade is posted before contacting me to discuss your grade.

Letter Grade Breakdown
I will use the following metric when calculating your semester letter grade. Please note that there will be no "rounding up" for borderline grades. You can view your scores for completed assignments at any time during the semester on our class Canvas page in the Grades tab.

A	465-500 points	(93-100% of the total points possible)
A-	450-464	(90-92.8%)
B+	435-449	(87-89.8%)
B	415-434	(83-86.8%)
B-	400-414	(80-82.8%)
C+	385-399	(77-79.8%)
C	365-384	(73-76.8%)
C-	350-364	(70-72.8%)
D+	335-349	(67-69.8%)
D	315-334	(63-66.8%)
D-	300-314	(60-62.8%)
F	299 or less	(less than 60%)

Late Assignments Policy
Assignments that are uploaded to Canvas late will still be accepted, but with a penalty. For each part of a 24 hour period the assignment is late, your grade will be reduced by 10 points. For example, if you submit your paper two hours late, you will incur a 10 point deduction. If your paper is one day and two hours late, you will incur a 20 point deduction; and so on. So, it certainly benefits you to get all assignments turned in on time.

Academic Integrity
Plagiarism or any form of cheating involves a breach of student-teacher trust. This means that any work submitted under your name is expected to be your own, neither composed by anyone else as a whole or in part, nor handed over to another person for complete or partial revision. Be sure to document all ideas that are not your own. Instances of plagiarism or any other act of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Honor Council and may result in failure of the course. Not understanding plagiarism is not an excuse. I expect you, as a Baylor student, to be intimately familiar with the Honor Code at: http://www.baylor.edu/honorcode/.

Baylor University Equity, Civil Rights, and Title IX
Baylor University does not tolerate unlawful harassment or discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, race, color, disability, national origin, ancestry, age (over 40), citizenship, genetic information or the refusal to submit to a genetic test, past, current, or prospective service in the uniformed services, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal, Texas, or local law (collectively referred to as Protected Characteristics).

If you or someone you know would like help related to an experience involving:
1. Sexual or gender-based harassment, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, stalking, intimate partner violence, or retaliation for reporting one of these types of prohibited conduct, please visit www.baylor.edu/titleix, call 254.710.8454, or email TitleIX_Coordinator@baylor.edu.
2. Harassment (excluding those issues listed in #1) or adverse action based on Protected Characteristics, please visit www.baylor.edu/civilrights, call 254.710.7100, or email Civil_Rights@baylor.edu.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
Any student who needs academic accommodations related to a documented disability should inform me immediately at the beginning of the semester. You are required to obtain appropriate documentation and information regarding your accommodations from the Office of Access and Learning Accommodation (OALA). Stop by the first floor of Sid Richardson, East Wing in the Paul L. Foster Success Center or call 254.710.3605 or email OALA@baylor.edu.

Detailed Reading/Assignment Schedule for the Semester
Below, I list the class topic and assigned reading for each day of our semester together. You should have the assigned reading completed in time for the class session it is listed next to. So, for example, you should read Chapters 1 and 2 in our *Political Science Research Methods* textbook before coming to class on Wednesday, August 23. Dates when assignments are due (posted to Canvas by 11:59 PM) are indicated with **BOLD LETTERS**.

The following abbreviations are used to indicate where to find the assigned reading for each class session:
- **PSRM** = *Political Science Research Methods* (textbook)
- **C** = Reading available on our class Canvas page (Modules → Class Readings)

Day	Date	Class Topic	Reading/Assignment Due
PART I. WHAT IS POLITICAL SCIENCE?			
Monday	August 21	What is Political Science? (and introductions)	Read syllabus carefully
Wednesday	August 23	Studying politics scientifically	PSRM Ch. 1 & 2
Monday	August 28	Jumping right in: How to read and understand political science research	(1) PSRM Ch. 15 (2) C: "District Voter Turnout and Dyadic Representation in Congress"

		PART II. DESIGNING YOUR OWN RESEARCH PROJECT	
Wednesday	August 30	Asking an answerable research question	(1) PSRM p. 49-53 (2) C: "Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America"
Monday	September 4	NO CLASS – HAPPY LABOR DAY!	
Wednesday	September 6	Writing a literature review	PSRM p. 54-71
Monday	September 11	Workshopping your research question!	Come to class with your research idea/question & two articles
Wednesday	September 13	Formulating a theory	**DUE: Research proposal/ literature review assignment**
Monday	September 18	Thinking in terms of independent and dependent variables	PSRM p. 73-88
Wednesday	September 20	Generating testable hypotheses	C: "The Missing Link: Exploring the Relationship Between Higher Education and Political Engagement"
Monday	September 25	**EXAM #1**	
Wednesday	September 27	Finding and acquiring the right data to answer your research question	PSRM Ch. 8
Monday	October 2	**Group research design presentations**	
Wednesday	October 4	**Group research design presentations**	
Monday	October 9	Measurement: Reliability, validity, and precision	PSRM p. 88-99
Wednesday	October 11	Association vs. causation	PSRM Ch. 6
		PART III. METHODS FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH ("THE TOOLS OF THE TRADE")	
Monday	October 16	Getting to know different types of research designs	PSRM Ch. 9
Wednesday	October 18	Qualitative Analysis: Content analysis and case studies	PSRM Ch. 7
Monday	October 23	Qualitative Analysis: Field research and interviews	**DUE: Research project detailed outline**
Wednesday	October 25	Public opinion surveys	PSRM Ch. 5 & 10
Monday	October 30	Quantitative Analysis: Hypothesis testing and statistical inference	PSRM Ch. 11 & 12
Wednesday	November 1	Quantitative Analysis: Investigating relationships between variables	PSRM Ch. 13 & 14
Monday	November 6	Quantitative Analysis: Hands-on fun with Excel	Bring a computer with Excel to class (or share with a classmate)

Wednesday	November 8	**EXAM #2**	
Monday	November 13	Workshopping your project!	Come to class ready to explain/discuss your empirical analysis plan
PART IV. PRESENTING YOUR RESEARCH TO OTHERS			
Wednesday	November 15	**Individual research presentations**	Work on final research paper
Monday	November 20	NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK!	
Wednesday	November 22	NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK!	
Monday	November 27	**Individual research presentations**	Work on final research paper
Wednesday	November 29	**Individual research presentations**	Work on final research paper
Monday	December 4	**Individual research presentations**	Work on final research paper
Wednesday	December 6	**Individual research presentations**	Work on final research paper
Tuesday	December 12		**DUE: Final research paper**