



PSC 301-01
Research Methods in Political Science
 209 Graham Building
 Tuesdays & Thursdays 12:30-1:45
 Fall 2008

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Course Description

The primary purpose of Research Methods in Political Science is to introduce students to the methods and terminology used routinely by social scientists. During the semester, we will consider basic concepts used in research (*e.g.*, theories, hypotheses, independent and dependent variables, reliability and validity, sampling, and generalizability). We will also examine basic statistical approaches used to analyze data. Such techniques include descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, correlation, and regression.

Course Goals

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- understand and interpret most research published in political science journals;
- assess the credibility of research findings reported in the media;
- critically analyze and properly interpret the results of public opinion polling;
- develop research questions and testable hypotheses;
- use data and proper statistical techniques to test these hypotheses.

Course Requirements

I expect students to come to class prepared to discuss the day's readings and/or homework assignment. Moreover, I expect students to come to class, period. This is a practical, hands-on course in which you will be discussing concepts in small groups, engaging in computer lab sessions, and considering the meaning and implications of assigned readings during class discussion. I will take attendance at the start of each class period.

The course grade will be based on an exam (December 11), three short papers, homework assignments (usually assigned during our meetings in the computer lab and due the following class period), attendance. You *cannot* make up the December 11 exam. I will allow an incomplete grade *only* under extraordinary circumstances that are carefully documented. I will provide information regarding paper assignments and homework in class.

- **Required Texts**

I have ordered the following texts for this course; they are available at the UNCG Bookstore:

Asher, Herbert. 2007. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Johnson, Janet Buttolph and H.T. Reynolds. 2008. *Political Science Research Methods*, Sixth Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Throughout the semester, I will also ask you to read articles available on JSTOR, an online database of scholarly journals available to UNCG students via the Jackson Library web page. A link to JSTOR is here: <http://library.uncg.edu/dbs/dbs-byletter.asp?showdbs=J>. Assigned articles are also available on the course Blackboard page. An asterisk (*) in the course outline below means that the reading material is available via JSTOR or Blackboard.

- **Grading**

The overall grade for the course will be determined as follows:

Attendance/participation	10%
Paper assignment #1	15
Paper assignment #2	15
Paper assignment #3	20
Homework assignments	20
Exam	<u>20</u>
	100%

Please note that failure to complete the exam as well as all of the homework and paper assignments will result in a non-negotiable F for the class.

When calculating final course grades, I will compute the overall numerical averages and use the following table to convert these averages to letter grades:

Letter scale	Numerical ranges for final grades	Letter scale	Numerical ranges for final grades
A	>92	C	>72, <77
A-	>=90, <=92	C-	>=70, <=72
B+	>=87, <90	D+	>=67, <70
B	>82, <87	D	>62, <67
B-	>=80, <=82	D-	>=60, <=62
C+	>=77, <80	F	<60

- **Special Needs**

If you have any special needs that will affect your ability to learn in this class, please inform me immediately and appropriate steps will be taken to assist you.

- **Cheating & Plagiarism**

The university's Academic Integrity Policy, which addresses the consequences of cheating and plagiarism, is available via the web at: <http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu/complete/>.

The Honor Policy defines cheating as: "Intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise." The policy defines plagiarism as: "Representing the words of another, as one's own in any academic exercise."

In other words, exams are closed book, closed notes. You may study together if you like – in fact I encourage you to form study groups – but think for yourselves. In your papers, if you are using words that are not your own, whether a sentence, a paragraph or a longer passage, put them in quotation marks and attribute them to the proper source. *Even if you paraphrase information, you must still properly cite your source.* If you have questions about the appropriate format for citations, make sure that you ask me before turning in the paper or consult this Jackson Library web site: <http://library.uncg.edu/depts/ref/handouts/turabian.asp>. Turabian is the preferred citation style for the social sciences. You can also visit the Writing Center (3211 HHRA) for additional assistance with citations. For more information, visit the Writing Center's web page at <http://www.uncg.edu/eng/writingcenter/>.

- ***Deus ex machina*: Not in this class**

In literature, the theater – and now, political science – a *deus ex machina* is any unlikely occurrence or device that magically resolves the difficulties or the seeming hopelessness of the plot – or semester. All the poor decisions leading to a story's climax are wiped away by an improbable intervention at the last moment. If you've ever read a book in which the heroine realizes that the horrors visited upon her were all just a dream, or watched a play in which the hero, facing disaster, is saved just before the curtain falls by some unlikely contrivance of the playwright, you're familiar with this literary gimmick. There will be no such last-second interventions in this class. My responsibilities to you include making my expectations transparent and treating you – and everyone else in the class – fairly. My responsibilities do not include wiping away poor decisions with last second offers of extra credit. Such behavior on my part would be unfair to others in the class who worked hard enough to meet or exceed my expectations. There are no exceptions. So don't ask for one.

Course Outline

Date	Topics	Readings	Assignments
August 26	Introduction	Syllabus	
August 28	No Class – American Political Science Association Annual Meeting		
September 2	Overview	JR chs. 1 & 2	
September 4	Reading & Writing Political Science	JR ch. 6	
September 9	Theory building	JR ch. 3 Diehl *	Paper #1 assigned
September 11 September 16	Research design	JR ch. 5, Campbell * Ansolabehere *	Homework #1
September 18	Concepts, Variables, and Measurement I: Overview	JR ch. 4, Mondak *	
September 23 September 25	Concepts, Variables, and Measurement II: Data sources	JR ch. 8 & 9 Epstein *	Paper #1 due Paper #2 assigned
September 30 October 2	Survey Research I: Sampling LAB (Graham 202)	JR ch. 7 Asher chs. 1-4	Homework #2
October 7 October 9 October 14	Survey Research II: Public Opinion Polling LAB (Graham 202)	JR ch. 10 Asher chs. 5-8	Homework #3
October 16	Graphing & Presenting Data	JR ch. 11, pp. 384-93	Paper #2 due
October 21	Fall Break		
October 23 October 28	Descriptive Statistics LAB (Graham 202)	JR ch. 11, pp. 352-83 JR ch. 12, pp. 431-39	Homework #4
October 30	Measures of Association	JR ch 12, pp. 477-82 & 490-92	
November 4	No Class – ELECTION DAY – Vote!		
November 6	LAB (Graham 202)		Homework #5
November 11 November 13	Significance Tests LAB (Graham 202)	JR ch. 11, pp. 393-end	Paper #3 assigned Homework #6
November 18 November 20 November 25	Regression LAB (Graham 202)	JR ch. 12, pp. 483-end	Homework #7
November 27	Thanksgiving		
December 2 December 4	Summary of the Research Process	JR ch. 14	Paper #3 due
December 9	Reading Day		
December 11	EXAM (Noon)		