

# Research Methods in Political Science

PSC 301

Spring 2009

Instructor: Professor McAvoy  
Office: Graham 213 B  
E-mail: gemcavoy@uncg.edu  
Office Phone: 256-0517

Class: T,Th 9:30-10:45  
Office Hours: T,Th 11:00-12:00  
and by appointment

## Course Outline

This course will give students an overview of the research methods used by political scientists. The goal is to provide students with the background to better understand political science questions and the types of evidence that researchers rely on to answer them. Topics the course will cover include: the design of a research project, development of theories, selection of measures, and methods to gather and analyze data. Students will also learn how to construct and interpret graphs and tables using political science data as well as to conduct basic statistical analysis.

## What You Will Learn in this Class:

- How to design research projects
- How to use primary data to answer questions about politics
- How to integrate data analysis into your writing
- How to be an informed readers of public opinion polls

## Required Texts

1. Janet Buttolph Johnson and H.T. Reynolds. 2008. *Political Science Research Methods*, 6th edition. Washington, D. C.: Congressional Quarterly Press.
2. Morris Fiorina. 2005. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, 2nd Edition. New York:Longman

In the course schedule (below) Johnson and Reynolds is referred to as JR. There are a couple of readings available through electronic reserve and this is indicated by (R) next to the reading. Occasionally, you will be asked to read a daily newspaper or news magazine in order to find examples of concepts or issues for class discussions.

## Course Requirements

Students are expected to come to class fully prepared to discuss the assigned readings or homework assignments. You should bring the assigned readings to class since we will often refer to these in our discussions. We will have class and small group discussions in order to apply the course material to specific examples, and meaningful participation in these is required. Grades for the course will be determined on the basis of the following course requirements: quizzes (10%), one paper (20%), a midterm (25%), homework assignments (20%), and a final project (25%). Some quizzes are noted in the course schedule but others may be added as needed and will be announced beforehand. Written assignments will be marked down half a grade for each day that they are late. **All course assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade in the class.**

Letter grades are assigned as follows:

A (100-94)	B+ (89-86)	C+ (79-76)	D+ (69-66)
A- (93-90)	B (85-83)	C (75-73)	D (65-63)
	B- (82-80)	C- (72-70)	D- (62-60)

## Academic Integrity

A fundamental tenet of all educational institutions is academic honesty; academic work depends upon respect for and acknowledgment of the work and ideas of others. Misrepresenting someone else's work as one's own is a serious offense in any academic setting and it will not be condoned. Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, providing or receiving assistance in a manner not authorized by the instructor in the creation of work to be submitted for academic evaluation (e.g. papers, projects, examinations and assessments - whether online or in class); presenting, as one's own, the ideas, words or calculations of another for academic evaluation; doing unauthorized academic work for which another person will receive credit or be evaluated; and presenting the same or substantially the same papers or projects in two or more courses without the explicit permission of the instructors involved. A student who knowingly assists another student in committing an act of academic misconduct shall be equally accountable for the violation, and shall be subject to the sanctions and other remedies described in The Student Code. Violations of the university honor code will be prosecuted. The full text of the Academic Integrity Policy can be viewed at: <http://www.uncg.edu/reg/Policy/HonorPolicy.html>.

Do NOT engage in either cheating or plagiarism. The penalties for both offenses range from the need to re-do assignments to expulsion from the University, depending upon the severity of the cheating or plagiarism offense. If you have any questions regarding what constitutes either cheating or plagiarism, please see me immediately.

**Etiquette** During class sessions, I do not check my cell phone for messages, walk out of the room to take calls, text message, surf the Internet, check my email, go get something to eat from the vending machine, and neither should you.

## Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Readings	Assignment
<i>Overview of the Research Process</i>			
20-Jan	Introduction	Syllabus	
22-Jan	6 Parts of the Research Process	JR 1	
<i>Theory Building and Testing</i>			
27-Jan	What are theories and concepts?	JR 2	
29-Jan	What are hypotheses?	JR 3	
3-Feb	Examples of theories and hypotheses	Fiorina 1-3	Quiz Paper Assigned
<i>Issues of Measurement</i>			
5-Feb	Operationalization	JR 4, Asher 2 (R)	
10-Feb	Validity, and Reliability	JR 8	Quiz
12-Feb	Validity, and Reliability		Paper Due
17-Feb	Examples	Fiorina 4-6	Quiz
19-Feb	Graphing and Presenting Data (Meet in Graham 202)		Homework #1
<i>Research Design</i>			
24-Feb	Experiments	JR 5, 122-147	
26-Feb	Quasi-Experiments	JR 5, 147-175	
3-Mar	Sampling	JR 7	
	Optional Assignment	Gary Taubes NYT	Extra credit
5-Mar	<b>Midterm Examination</b>		
10-12 Mar	<b>Spring Break</b>		
17-Mar	Survey Research and Polling	JR 10, Asher 3 (R)	
<i>Data Analysis</i>			
19-Mar	Graphing and Frequency Distributions (Meet in Graham 202)	JR 11, 384-393	Homework #2
24-Mar	Descriptive Statistics	JR 11 JR 12, 431-439	
26-Mar	(Meet in Graham 202)		Homework #3
31-Mar	Measures of Association	Fiorina 7-9	Quiz
2-Apr	<b>No Class, Midwest Political Science Meeting</b>		
7-Apr	Measures of Association, cont'd	JR 12, 477-482	

9-Apr	(Meet in Graham 202)	490-492 (Correlation)	Homework #4
14-Apr	Significance Tests	JR 11, 393-416	
16-Apr	(Meet in Graham 202)		Homework #5
21-Apr	Regression	JR 12, 483-498	
23-Apr	(Meet in Graham 202)		Homework #6
28-Apr	Summary of the Research Process	Fiorina 10	Quiz
30-Apr	(Meet in Graham 202)		Homework #7
			<b>Final Project Handed Out</b>

**Final Project Due: Tuesday, May 12th.**