

Scientific Study of Politics
PLSC 10
Spring 2022
Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays 10:10 AM - 11:00 AM
Willard Building 073

Instructor:

Jeremy M. Ladd
Room 230 Pond Lab
j.ladd@psu.edu
Office Hours: Mondays 2:30 to 4:00 PM

Teaching Assistant:

Sang Yeon Kim
szk922@psu.edu
Office Hours: Thursdays 9:00-10:30 AM via Zoom:
<https://psu.zoom.us/j/96905333048?pwd=ZktKWVZXMklxZVhwMklWL2NOVHpqdz09>

Remember that masks are currently required in all indoor settings on campus. All students (and instructors, and TAs) must be masked at all times while indoors until the university administration says otherwise.

Course Description

This course introduces students to the scientific study of politics. This course has two main parts. The first covers essential elements of the scientific process, including theory building, causation, research design, conceptualization, and the operationalization and measurement of concepts. The second surveys some of the methodological approaches commonly utilized in political science research, such as experiments, surveys, and interviews. The first part of this course is meant to provide students with the tools and common language to craft and assess research, while the second is meant to familiarize students with specific methodological approaches in political research.

At the end of the course students will be able to:

- 1) Describe the steps in the process of studying politics scientifically
- 2) Identify the theories, hypotheses, variables, and methods in a research project
- 3) Explain the essential features of the methodological approaches covered in this course, and provide examples of research utilizing these approaches

Required Course Materials

Brancati, Dawn. Social Scientific Research. Sage, 2018.

Additional course materials, as noted in the schedule, are available online through Penn State Libraries, or through Canvas. The rule for this material is that book chapters have been made available to you via Canvas, **but you are expected to download journal articles yourself through the library.**

I may assign additional readings in class or via Canvas, or alter assigned readings. You are responsible for checking Canvas announcements and email.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

In Class Exercises		
Generating Explanations	5%	Jan 28
Assessing Causal Claims	5%	Feb 11
Working through the scientific method	5%	Feb 25
Short Assignments		
Examining Experiments in Practice	5%	March 4
Designing a survey questionnaire	5%	March 25
Interview assignment	5%	April 8
In Class Tests		
Test 1	5%	Feb 4
Test 2	5%	Feb 18
Test 3	10%	March 18
Test 4	10%	April 23
Final Paper		
Checkpoint 1	10%	Feb 21
Checkpoint 2	15%	April 1
Final Paper	15%	May 2

Note that late work will not be accepted in the absence of a legitimate excuse provided before work is due.

Letter Grade Conversion

Letter Grade	Numeric Grade
A	94% or above
A-	90-93%
B+	87-89%
B	84-86%
B-	80-83%
C+	77-79%
C	70-76%
D	60-69%
F	59% or below

Exercises and Short Assignments, 30%

Exercises and short assignments are opportunities for students to apply the approaches they are learning about to political science questions that interest them (or to the question they are working on for their final paper, see below). These are to be no more than 2 double spaced pages in length, and can be completed individually, or in a group of no more than three students. Groups are encouraged to facilitate discussion and critical debate about the application of the skills you are learning, but you are welcome to work alone. The primary difference between exercises and short assignments is that for the former students will have time in class, and for the latter students will not.

Further detail on these assignments will be available on Canvas and provided in class.

In-class tests 30%

In class tests will assess student's knowledge of the material covered in the course. Students will be responsible for both assigned readings and lecture material.

Test 1 - Scientific study of politics, theory in social and political science, causality, research design and causality

Test 2 - Conceptualization, operationalization, and measurement; sampling

Test 3 - Experiments, surveys

Test 4 - Interviews, focus groups, participant observation, archival research, big data

Final Paper 40%

Political scientists utilize many approaches to learn about and explain political phenomena. In this course we discuss a number of these approaches in-depth. To demonstrate your understanding of the material in this course you will work either individually, or in a group of up to three students, to (co)write a research design paper that applies what you have learned in the course to a research question about politics that interests you. You are required to choose two approaches discussed in the course and explain how you would use them to study your question.

The goal of this paper is to explain how the approaches you have chosen would answer your question, and why they are appropriate for doing so. You will be graded on how well you demonstrate mastery of the approaches you have selected, and thoughtfulness in their application and about their limitations.

Note that if you choose to work as a group (recommended), your group will receive one grade.

The final paper assignment will be completed through two checkpoints, and one final submission. Checkpoint 1 will be worth 10% of your final grade, and checkpoint 2 15%. This means your final submission will be worth 15% of your final grade. These checkpoints are an incentive to begin early, and an opportunity to receive feedback before your final submission.

Further detail on the criteria the final paper and each checkpoint must satisfy will be provided on Canvas and in lecture.

Your final submission at the end of the course should not exceed 12 double spaced pages.

Subject to Change

Note that the assignments described above, their due dates, and the schedule of readings detailed below, may be altered by the instructor while the course is ongoing.

Course Schedule

Week 1 and 2 (Weeks of 10 and 17 Jan) - Introduction, the scientific study of politics, theory in political science

Introduction to the course

Brancati chapter 1

The nuts and bolts of theory in political/social science

Brancati chapter 3-4

Recommended

Paul Kellstedt and Guy Whitten. Chapter 2: The Art of Theory Building in The Fundamentals of Political Science Research 3rd Edition, pp 25-52.

Week 3 and 4 (Weeks of 24 and 31 Jan) - Causality, Research Design and Causality, Test 1

Brancati chapter 6

Recommended

Paul Kellstedt and Guy Whitten. Chapter 3: Evaluating Causal Relationships in The Fundamentals of Political Science Research 3rd Edition, pp 56-74.

Week 5 (Week of 7 Feb) - Conceptualization, Operationalization, and Measurement

Brancati chapter 5

Stefaan Walgrave, Anke Tresch, and Jonas Lefevere. 2015. The Conceptualization and Measurement of Issue Ownership. West European Politics 38(4): 778-796.

Week 6 (Week of 14 Feb) - Sampling, Test 2

Brancati chapter 9

Recommended

Brians, Willnat, Manheim, Rich. Chapter 7: Who, What, Where, When: The Problem of Sampling in Empirical Political Analysis 8th Edition, pp 131-149.

Week 7 (Week of 21 Feb) - Experiments

Brancati chapter 19

Experiments in practice

Lauren Young. 2019. The Psychology of State Repression: Fear and Dissent Decisions in Zimbabwe. *American Political Science Review* 113: 140-155.

Gerber, Alan S., Donald P. Green, and Christopher W. Larimer. "Social pressure and voter turnout: Evidence from a large-scale field experiment." *American political Science review* (2008): 33-48.

Week 8 and 9 (Weeks of 28 Feb and 14 March) - Survey Research, Test 3

Brancati chapter 18

Survey research in practice

John Gainous, Jason Abbott, Kevin Wagner. 2019. Traditional Versus Internet Media in a Restricted Information Environment: How Trust in the Medium Matters. *Political Behavior* 41: 401-422.

Week 10 (Week of 21 March) - Interviews, Focus Groups

Brancati chapters 10-11

Interviewing in practice

Yana Gorokhovskaia. 2019. What it takes to win when the game is rigged: the evolution of opposition electoral strategies in Moscow, 2012-2017. *Democratization* 26(6): 975-992.

Week 11 (Week of 28 March) - Participant Observation

Brancati chapter 12

Participant observation in practice

Michael Schatzberg. *Ethnography and Causality: Sorcery and Popular Culture in the Congo in Political Ethnography*, ed. Edward Schatz, pp 183-200. University of Chicago Press.

Week 12 (Week of 4 April) - Archival Research

Earl Babbie and Lucia Benaquisto. Chapter 10: Unobtrusive Research in Fundamentals of Social Research 2nd Edition, 286-295. Nelson Education.

Archival research in practice

Ora John Reuter and David Szakonyi. 2019. Elite Defection Under Autocracy: Evidence from Russia. American Political Science Review 113 (2): 552-568.

Week 13 (Week of 11 April) - The impact of new technologies on political science: big data and social data

Brancati chapter 17

Bond, Robert M., Christopher J. Fariss, Jason J. Jones, Adam D.I. Kramer, Cameron Marlow, Jamie E. Settle, and James H. Fowler. 2012. "A 61-Million Person Experiment in Social Influence and Political Mobilization." Nature. 489: 295-98.

Jennifer Larson, Jonathan Nagler, Jonathan Ronen, and Joshua Tucker. 2019. Social Networks and Protest Participation: Evidence from 130 Million Twitter Users. American Journal of Political Science 63(3): 690-705.

Week 14 (Week of 18 April) - Mixed Methods Research, Test 4

Brancati Chapter 8

Mixed methods research in practice research in practice

Jason Seawright. Chapter 1 Party System Collapse in South America in Party System Collapse: The Roots of Crisis in Peru and Venezuela. Stanford University Press. ***available as an ebook through PSU library

Week 15 (Week of 25 April) - Review, Catch Up, and Wrapping Up

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner. Academic integrity is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at The Pennsylvania State University, and all members of the University community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. Consistent with this expectation, the University's Code of Conduct states that all students should act with personal integrity, respect other students' dignity, rights and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts.

Academic integrity includes a commitment by all members of the University community not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of work completed by others.

Information on procedures related to academic adjustments identified by the Office of Disability Services

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. Every Penn State campus has an office for students with disabilities. Student Disability Resources (SDR) website provides contact information for every Penn State campus (<http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/disability-coordinator>). For further information, please visit Student Disability Resources website (<http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/>).

In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: See documentation guidelines (<http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/guidelines>). If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus disability services office will provide you with an accommodation letter. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early as possible. You must follow this process for every semester that you request accommodations.

Information on available Counseling & Psychological Services

Many students at Penn State face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

Counseling and Psychological Services at University Park (CAPS)
(<http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/counseling/>): 814-863-0395

Counseling and Psychological Services at Commonwealth Campuses

(<http://senate.psu.edu/faculty/counseling-services-at-commonwealth-campuses/>)

Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400 Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741

Reporting Educational Equity Concerns through the Report Bias site

Penn State takes great pride to foster a diverse and inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff. Consistent with University Policy AD29, students who believe they have experienced or observed a hate crime, an act of intolerance, discrimination, or harassment that occurs at Penn State are urged to report these incidents as outlined on the University's Report Bias webpage (<http://equity.psu.edu/reportbias/>)

Extended Absences

During your enrollment at Penn State, unforeseen challenges may arise. If you ever need to miss an extended amount of class in such a circumstance, please notify your professor so you can determine the best course of action to make up missed work. If your situation rises to a level of difficulty you cannot manage on your own with faculty support, reach out to the Student Care Advocacy office by phone at (814-863-2020) or email them at StudentCare@psu.edu. Office hours are Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.