

Introduction to Political Research
PLSC 308 - 001
Spring 2024
TuTh 1:35PM - 2:50PM, Music Bldg 117

Instructor: Cassandra Tai

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Office Hours: F 11:00AM–13:00PM & By appointment

Course Description: This course introduces students to the research process in political science. It is intended to give political science majors the skills needed to conduct research in political science, or in related fields such as public policy. The course introduces students to the scientific approach to accumulating knowledge. Students will learn how to develop a new theory, construct testable causal inferences, and design different approaches to test theories empirically. This course also provides an introduction to basic statistical concepts and the interpretation of data. Emphasis will be on an active hands-on learning environment and full interaction between the instructor and students.

Learning Objectives: There are three related learning goals that underpin the design and content of this course. Students who successfully complete the course will develop:

- A mastery of the basic principles of scientific research and a diverse set of examples in political science research designs
- A competence in developing their own research designs following the principles of social science research.
- A capacity to convey the motivations and designs of projects to non-specialists.

Required Book

- Title: Political Science Research Methods
- Author: Johnson, Janet B. / Mycoff, Jason D.
- Publisher: SAGE, 9TH 20

Penn State honors and values the socioeconomic diversity of our students. If you require assistance with the costs of textbooks for this course, contact the Office of Student Care and Advocacy (129 Boucke Building, 814-863-2020, <http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/studentcare>). For additional need related to socioeconomic status please visit <http://sites.psu.edu/projectcahir>.

Other Readings:

- The “Bit by Bit” book Chapter 2 is available online at <https://www.bitbybitbook.com/en/1st-ed/observing-behavior/>.
- Joseph F. Healey, *The Essentials of Statistics: A Tool for Social Research* 4th Edition. 2015. Cengage Learning. (Referred to as EoS)
- Philip H. Pollock, *The Essentials of Political Analysis* 5th Edition. 2015. Cq Press. (Referred to as EoPA)

All the other readings are provided in Canvas.

Article Component Presentation: Each Thursday beginning on 1/25, the class will consist of five or six student presentations (each presentation up to 8 minutes). Each student is responsible for delivering two presentations over the course of the semester. Each of the two presentations must be delivered on a different day, and cover a different article component (i.e., students may not give more than one presentation on a given day or on a given article component). Each presentation will provide a brief overview of a particular component of the research article that the class reads for that day. The article components are drawn from the Huck reading (assigned for 1/9 & 1/11), and are listed below. A PDF version of the slides to be presented must be uploaded to Canvas by the student by 11:59AM on the presentation date. Students should sign up for their presentations on this **Google Sheet**, by Thursday 11:59AM, 1/18.

- Background & Purpose (see Huck)
- Theory & Hypotheses (see Huck)
- Operationalization & Data & Method (see Huck)
- Results & Takeaways (see Huck)

- Commentary & Critique

Team Research Project: Students are required to complete a team research design paper by the end of the semester. Each student will be assigned to one team. Each team consists of three to four students. The paper is expected to be original research—applying the research design principles covered in the course. The final paper is due on 5/3.

- **Topic:** The project can address virtually any topic in which team members are interested. This document should include a discussion of why this is a GOOD topic and of what we know and do not know about the topic. There should be a clear and important research question. Please provide proper citation/reference for any literature discussed in the topic document. The topic of the research project should be written up in a one-page document. This is due on 2/16. *(5% of final grade)*
- **Theory and Hypothesis:** Teams should write up literature review, theories and hypothesis. This document will consist of literature review, theory and hypotheses, with research design section yet to come. There are two constraints in terms of a hypothesis. First, students must define at least one hypothesis that constitutes an “effect of a cause” statement. Second, the hypothesis should be amenable to a design that can be implemented before the end of the semester. The document should justify your hypotheses. Please provide proper citation/reference for any literature discussed in the document. The paper should be 500 - 1,000 words. This is due on 3/15 11:59 PM. *(5% of final grade)*
- **Presentation:** Teams will present their research design in their final project in Week 15 (4/23 & 4/25). For both, each team will present for 10-12 minutes and have 5-8 minutes for Q/A. The expectation for the presentation is as follows: *Introduction (Topic and Puzzle), Literature Review, Theory and Hypotheses, Research Design (Model Plan and Data)*. *(10% of final grade)*
- **Final Paper:** The paper is expected to be original research—applying the research design principles covered in the course. The final paper is due on 5/3. *(15% of final grade)*

Peer Review Reports: There will be two 1-page peer review reports. The assignment will be to read one other group’s topic and hypothesis document and write up comments, especially constructive suggestions, for the other group. The review reports will be shared

with the group. I find that opportunities like this substantially improve the quality of the final work. Take advantage of this opportunity!

Quizzes: There will be four quizzes administered throughout the semester. Each quiz will include a combination of multiple choice and true/false questions covering material that has previously been covered in lectures. If you miss a quiz day with an excused absence, you will be given the opportunity to make up the quiz. The objective of these quizzes is to assure that students are keeping up with the lecture material.

Grading:

- Class Performance: 20% (Attendance: 10%, In-class Activity: 15%)
- Article component presentations: 10%
- Peer Review: 10%
- Team Project: 35%
- In-class Quizzes: 20%

Critical Dates:

- 2/16: Topic document
- 2/20: Peer Review for Topic document
- 3/15: Theory and Hypotheses
- 3/20: Peer Review for Theory and Hypotheses
- 4/23: Project Presentation slides
- 4/25: Project Presentation
- 5/3: Project paper

Grading Scale: Grade values will not be rounded. That is, any grade value that is greater than or equal to 'Lower' and less than 'Upper' will receive the respective grade.

Grade	Lower	Upper
A	92	101
A-	90	92
B+	88	90
B	82	88
B-	80	82
C+	78	80
C	72	78
C-	70	72
D+	68	70
D	62	68
D-	60	62
F	0	60

Course Schedule: The schedule below gives the required reading. The readings listed for a particular day should be read before class time that day.

1. Week1: 1/9, 1/11, Reading a scientific study
 - Tue: Syllabus/course overview, online survey
 - Thur: Chapter 1, “Reading Statistics and Research,” Schuyler W. Huck.
2. Week2: 1/16, 1/18, Being a political SCIENTIST
 - Tue: JM, Chapter 2
 - Thur: King (2006), Group Project Kickoff: In-class activity: Topic Brainstorming
3. Week3: 1/23, 1/25, Background and Research Objectives (Where Does A Question Come From?)
 - Tue: JM, Chapter 3
 - Thur: ACP on Kim and Menninga (2020); In-class activity: Topics Refinement
4. Week4: 1/30, 2/1, Theory and causality
 - Tue: JM, Chapter 4, P 73-88 & Chapter 6
 - Thur: Quiz 1; ACP on Peyton (2020)

5. Week5: 2/6, 2/8, Quantitative measurement

- Tue: JM, Chapter 4, P 88- 99;
- Thur: ACP on Tai, Lin and Desmarais (2023); In-class activity: Research on Topic

6. Week6: 2/13, 2/15, Making Senses of Data

- Tue: JM, Chapter 11
- Thur: ACP on Bolet, Green and Gonzalez-Eguino (2023); Group project: Topic Document

7. Week7: 2/20, 2/22, Introduction to Political Science Research Methods

- Tue: EoPA, Chapter 3
- Thur: Quiz 2; ACP on Li and Wright (2023); Peer Review discussion

8. Week8: 2/27, 2/29, Quantitative Research Design

- Tue: JM, Chapter 9
- Thur: ACP on Visconti (2022); In-class activity: Example of a Theory and Hypotheses

3/3 - 3/9, Spring Break, No Classes

9. Week9: 3/12, 3/14, Research Strategies with Big Data

- Tue: Salganik, Chapter 2
- Thur: ACP Siegel, Nikitin, Barberá, Sterling, Pullen, Bonneau, Nagler, Tucker et al. (2021); Group project: Hypothesis Document

10. Week10: 3/19, 3/21, Sampling + Statistical inferential

- Tue: JM, Chapter 5
- Thur: Quiz 3; ACP on Bos, Greenlee, Holman, Oxley and Lay (2022); Peer Review discussion

11. Week11: 3/26, 3/28, Testing Relationship

- Tue: JM, Chapter 12;
 - Thur: ACP on Hobbs and Lajevardi (2019)
12. Week12: 4/2, 4/4, Qualitative Study
- Tue: JM, Chapter 7 & 8; ACP on Fairfield and Garay (2017)
 - No class
13. Week13: 4/9, 4/11, Hypothesis Testing with p-Values
- Tue: EoS, Chapter 7.
 - Thur: Quiz 4, ACP on Krcmaric (2023)
14. Week14: 4/16, 4/18, Prediction and Forecasting for Political Research
- Tue: TBU, ACP on Schmidhuber, Ingrams and Hilgers (2021)
 - Thur: Group project
15. 4/23, 4/25, Project Week
- Tue: Project presentations
 - Thur: Project presentations

Instruction Mode: The instruction mode is in-person. However, some classes might be offered remotely or asynchronously under certain circumstances. Any change to the mode of instruction will be announced in advance.

Attendance: I will take attendance at the beginning of every class. You are given three (free) absences (i.e., no excuse is needed), but any absences beyond that will result in ONE WHOLE GRADE REDUCTION per absence regardless of the excuse, except for serious medical reasons or participating in University-sponsored events. Further, if you are part of any University-sponsored event that may cause more than three absences, you should let me know at least 24 hours before the fourth absence and show me the verification that you are the formal or necessary participant of the event. Non-University sponsored events are not excusable absences. You should use your free absences for them. The ratio of the times of your attendance to the total number of the classes minus three will determine how much you will get from the 10% attendance grade. If the ratio is equal or above one, you will get

full 10% attendance grade. Confused? Come see me sooner rather than later if you need clarification of this policy.

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.

Late Submission Policy: A penalty of 20% will accrue for each (rounded up) day that an assignment is late.

Office Hours: Office hours will be held at the designated time. To meet the instructor for office hours, students can walk in.

Disability Accommodation Statement: 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 more information, 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.

Academic Integrity Statement: Penn State defines academic integrity as “the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner” (Senate Policy 49-20). Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without permission from the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Students facing allegations of academic misconduct should not drop the course; those who do will be added to the course again and will be

expected to complete course work and meet course deadlines. If the allegations are dismissed, then the drop will be permitted. Students found responsible for academic misconduct often receive academic sanctions, which can be severe, and put themselves at risk for disciplinary sanctions assigned by the University's Office of Student Conduct (see Senate Policy G-9). Students with questions about academic integrity should visit <http://www.la.psu.edu/> and then click on "Academic Integrity."

Counseling and Psychological Services Statement: 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

Educational Equity/Report Bias Statement: 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/>)

Syllabus Change Policy: This syllabus is a guide and every attempt will be made to provide an accurate overview of the course. However, circumstances and events may make it necessary for the instructor to modify the syllabus during the semester and may depend, in part, on the progress, needs, and experiences of the students.

References

- Bolet, Diane, Fergus Green and Mikel Gonzalez-Eguino. 2023. “How to Get Coal Country to Vote for Climate Policy: The Effect of a “Just Transition Agreement” on Spanish Election Results.” *American Political Science Review* pp. 1–16.
- Bos, Angela L, Jill S Greenlee, Mirya R Holman, Zoe M Oxley and J Celeste Lay. 2022. “This one’s for the boys: How gendered political socialization limits girls’ political ambition and interest.” *American Political Science Review* 116(2):484–501.
- Fairfield, Tasha and Candelaria Garay. 2017. “Redistribution under the right in Latin America: Electoral competition and organized actors in policymaking.” *Comparative Political Studies* 50(14):1871–1906.
- Hobbs, William and Nazita Lajevardi. 2019. “Effects of divisive political campaigns on the day-to-day segregation of Arab and Muslim Americans.” *American Political Science Review* 113(1):270–276.
- Kim, Yooneui and Elizabeth J Menninga. 2020. “Competition, Aid, and Violence against Civilians.” *International Interactions* 46(5):696–723.
- King, Gary. 2006. “Publication, publication.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 39(1):119–125.
- Krcmaric, Daniel. 2023. “Does the International Criminal Court Target the American Military?” *American Political Science Review* 117(1):325–331.
- Li, Jia and Joseph Wright. 2023. “How Personalist Parties Undermine State Capacity in Democracies.” *Comparative Political Studies* p. 00104140231169014.
- Peyton, Kyle. 2020. “Does trust in government increase support for redistribution? Evidence from randomized survey experiments.” *American Political Science Review* 114(2):596–602.
- Schmidhuber, Lisa, Alex Ingrams and Dennis Hilgers. 2021. “Government openness and public trust: The mediating role of democratic capacity.” *Public Administration Review* 81(1):91–109.
- Siegel, Alexandra A, Evgenii Nikitin, Pablo Barberá, Joanna Sterling, Bethany Pullen, Richard Bonneau, Jonathan Nagler, Joshua A Tucker et al. 2021. “Trumping Hate on Twitter? Online Hate Speech in the 2016 US Election Campaign and its Aftermath.” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 16(1):71–104.

- Tai, Yuehong Cassandra, Yu-ru Lin and Bruce A Desmarais. 2023. “Public officials’ online sharing of misinformation: Institutional and ideological checks.” *Working Paper* .
- Visconti, Giancarlo. 2022. “After the flood: Disasters, ideological voting and electoral choices in Chile.” *Political Behavior* 44(4):1985–2004.