

POLS 209-901

# INTRODUCTION to POLITICAL SCIENCE RESEARCH METHODS Course Syllabus

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## Overview

This course concentrates on the logic and methods that support the scientific study of political phenomena. Students will encounter topics that include causality, theory development, conceptualization and measurement, hypothesis testing, and data analysis. A major course component is an independent research project, which requires that students develop a “good” research question and test their research hypothesis using the appropriate formal/empirical methods. Upon completing the course, students will have the knowledge needed to understand *and* undertake systematic political research.

This is a writing-intensive (**W**) course, which means that students will be expected to integrate into their own work writing techniques that are suitable to the discipline of political science. The **W** designation is important because of what it implies: *to obtain a passing grade, students must submit written work that not only addresses the substance of the assignment but also meets the instructor’s expectations for writing (properly organized, grammatically correct, lucid, etc.)*. During the semester students will have several opportunities to submit outlines and drafts for review in low-pressure situations, which is to say that I will provide feedback on these assignments but not assign letter grades.

No prior experience with statistical analysis is required for this class, but you should be interested in learning these skills. We will be using **Stata for Windows**, which you can access in the Political Science Department’s labs (Allen 2002, Allen 2003) during normal business hours.

## Course Website

This course has a web site that you can access at <http://www-polisci.tamu.edu/faculty/parker-stephen>. The course page will be one way to obtain readings, assignments, data, and other useful resources.

## Materials

There is one assigned book for this course. The book is written by two of my colleagues at A&M, Paul Kellstedt and Guy Whitten. Because their book is in the process of being published by Cambridge University Press, it is not yet available for public purchase. For this reason, students who are enrolled in the course will need to purchase a photocopied version of the text.<sup>1</sup> Although unorthodox, this arrangement means that students will be able to purchase the required course materials for far less than the typical introductory course. The book is:

- Kellstedt, Paul M. and Guy D. Whitten. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. Cambridge University Press. (In Press).

There is also an important handout that will be distributed later in the semester. This handout reviews essential features of the **Stata** software package and will be available at no cost to students.

- Parker-Stephen, Evan. 2007. *Using Stata for Political Analysis*.

I also recommend (but do not require) that students obtain a book that will bring added flexibility to the estimation and presentation of statistical results using **Stata**. *The book is not required for the course* because I will provide you with a less-comprehensive handout that outlines the commands you will *need* to know (see above). The recommended book, which is available at the MSC as well as online retailers, is:

- Pollock III, Philip H. *A Stata Companion to Political Analysis*. 2006. CQ Press.

## J-Stor/Electronic Reserves:

At some points during the semester, students will be required to read professional articles and book chapters. The professional publications can be downloaded from J-Stor, an on-line journal archive that houses professional work in political science and other disciplines, at: <http://www.jstor.org>. Students can access book chapters through the University library's electronic reserves. To access electronic reserves you should do the following:

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<sup>1</sup>Additional details will be forthcoming.

1. Go to: <http://ereserves.tamu.edu/eres>
2. Select link that reads “Electronic Reserves & Reserves Pages”
3. Select “Course Reserves Pages by Instructor” (Parker-Stephen) and click “Search” link
4. Select link associated with the desired reading (.pdf format) and save/print document

## Requirements

To get a passing grade for the course students must meet basic requirements in each of the five course components: homework, a research report, a research presentation, and an exam. **Please note that make up assignments and incomplete grades will only be given in cases outlined by TAMU policies at: <http://student-rules.tamu.edu>.** The relative weighting of these course components is:

Class Participation	10%
Homework (4):	20%
Research Report (10 – 15 pages):	30%
Research Presentation	10%
Exam (October 17):	30%
Total	100%

## Class Participation

Class participation grades will be calculated based on participation in skill development exercises and attendance:

1. **Skill Development:** During the semester students will be required to complete short assignments. Some of these will be completed in class while others will be of the take-home variety. These assignments will be graded on a credit/no credit basis and will count toward 75% of your overall student participation grade.
2. **Attendance:** The other 25% of the participation grade is calculated from student attendance. Attendance is mandatory and will be taken every class period beginning on Wednesday, September 5. Here your grade is simply the proportion of classes attended. Once or twice during the semester, unforeseeable circumstances may arise that prevent you from attending. To accommodate this expectation *students are permitted THREE unexcused absences with no penalty. Each unexcused absence thereafter will be recorded as a missed class that detrimentally affects your grade.*

**What constitutes an excused absence?** Students seeking an excused absence must notify the instructor as soon as possible after the absence, but no later than the end of the second working day after the last date of absence. If the absence occurs the same day as a scheduled exam or other graded procedure, the student must notify his/her instructor by the end of the next working day after the absence.

## Homework

Students will be required to complete regular homework assignments that are altogether worth 20% of the total course grade. Students should expect the homework assignments to touch on lectures and in-class exercises. Some of the homework assignments will require data analysis and interpretation of results using **Stata**.

## Research Report

Students will conduct an original study during the semester that will culminate in a 10–15 page research report. Details will be provided as the semester progresses. For now, what follows is a sketch of what this project will entail. The report is worth up to 30% of the final course grade. It will be due on the last day of class, December 3. This report should: (1) introduce an original research question that is situated in the relevant political science literature, (2) put forward a working research hypothesis that is testable using formal/empirical methods, (3) conduct tests of the research hypothesis using the appropriate method(s), and (4) discuss specific findings and broader implications of the analysis.

Given the importance of writing in this course, the final report will be graded according to the writing standards outlined by the instructor. Throughout the semester students will complete incremental writing assignments intended to move the research project forward, including a study proposal, an outline of the report, and drafts of particular sections. I will grade these assignments on a credit/no-credit basis and offer feedback. This low-pressure environment allows students to revise their study considerably before handing in the final research report for grading on December 3.

## Research Presentation

Toward the end of the semester students will present the findings from their research (see above) to the class. This will be your opportunity to present to your classmates the theory, methods, and findings that comprise your research project. Audience members will be expected to offer comments on the strengths/weaknesses of their classmate's study, which the presenter can then incorporate into the final research report if desired.

## Exams

There is one exam in this class, which will be given on October 17 in class. (*There is no final exam.*) This mid-semester exam will be a combination of multiple choice and semi-short essays or problems. I will hold a review session prior to the exam but will only take questions from students, which is to say that I will not prepare anything for the review.

## Aggie Honor Code

“An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do.”

The Aggie Honor Code is in effect in this class and all others at the University. Aggie Honor Code violations are treated seriously and students are expected to be familiar with its terms set out on the University’s website: <http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor>. If you have any questions, it is your responsibility to ask me or your academic advisor about the Code’s application.

**Academic Dishonesty:** As commonly defined, plagiarism consists of passing off as one’s own the ideas, words, writings, etc., which belong to another. In accordance with the definition, you are committing plagiarism if you copy the work of another person and turn it in as your own, even if you should have the permission of the person. Plagiarism is one of the worst academic sins, for the plagiarist destroys the trust among colleagues without which research cannot be safely communicated. If you have any questions regarding plagiarism, please consult the Aggie Honor System Office website or the latest version of the Texas A&M University Student Rules under the section “Scholastic Dishonesty.”

## Students with Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Department of Student Life, Disabilities Services in Room B118 of Cain Hall, or call 845-1637.

## Extra Credit

Due to the numerous and varied assignments and exams, this course gives you ample opportunity to showcase your academic strengths. This being the case, there will be no opportunities for extra credit.

## Email Policy

The best way to contact me is via email. Students are expected to allow 24 hours for a response. If you have not heard from me after 24 hours a second email is then allowed. Please note: the 24-hour rule does not apply on weekends; for emails sent on Saturday or Sunday, the 24-hour “email clock” starts at Monday’s class time (i.e., at 1:15 pm).

## Course Schedule

Week 1: August 27–31<sup>2</sup>  
Why Research Methods?

*Readings:*

- Kellstedt & Whitten, Chapter 1

*Notes:*

- No class Friday, August 31

Week 2: September 3–7  
Theory is Our Guide

*Readings:*

- Kellstedt & Whitten, Chapter 2

*Notes:*

- No class Monday, September 3

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<sup>2</sup>Please be aware that the specific dates of lectures and assignments are subject to change.

Week 3: September 10–14

Research Design: Space and Time, and “What Ifs?”

*Readings:*

- Kellstedt & Whitten, Chapter 3
- Lieberman, Stanley. 1985. *Making it Count*, Chapter 3: “Comparisons, Counterfactual Conditionals, and Contamination.” (Electronic Reserve)

Week 4: September 17–21

Formal Theory

*Readings:*

- Kellstedt & Whitten, Chapter 4
- Lave, Charles A. and James G. March. 1975. *An Introduction to Models in the Social Sciences*, Chapter 3: “The Evaluation of Speculations.” (Electronic Reserve)
- Schelling, Thomas. 1978. *Micromotives and Macrobehavior*, Chapter 3: “Thermostats, Lemons, and Other Families of Models.” (Electronic Reserve)

*Assignments:*

- Homework 1 distributed

Week 5: September 24–28

Concepts and Measurement

*Readings:*

- Kellstedt & Whitten, Chapter 5
- Mondak, Jeffery J. 2001. “Developing Valid Knowledge Scales.” *American Journal of Political Science*. 45(1): 224-38. (J-Stor)
- Lieberman, Stanley. 1985. *Making it Count*, Chapter 5: “Variation, Levels of Analysis, and the Research Question” (Electronic Reserve)

*Assignments:*

- **Homework 1 due Wednesday, September 26**

- Homework 2 distributed

*Notes:*

- Parker-Stephen, Evan. 2007. *Using Stata for Political Analysis*: distributed this week.

*Lab:*

- Lab Session: Introduction to Stata in Department lab (Room TBA)

Week 6: October 1–5  
Single-variable Statistics

*Readings:*

- Kellstedt & Whitten, Chapter 6
- Weisberg, Herbert F., Jon A. Krosnick, and Bruce D. Bowen. 1996. *An Introduction to Survey Research, Polling, and Data Analysis*, Chapter 9: “Single-variable Statistics.” (Electronic Reserve)
- *Using Stata for Political Analysis* (pp. - TBD)

*Assignments:*

- **Homework 2 due Friday, October 5**

Week 7: October 8–12  
Sampling Theory, Inference

*Readings:*

- Kellstedt & Whitten, Chapter 7

*Assignments:*

- **One-page research proposal due Wednesday, October 10**

*Notes:*

- No class Friday, October 12 (Reading Day).

Week 8: October 15–19  
Review, Exam, Lab Exercise

*Readings:*

- None

*Exam:*

- **Exam: Wednesday, October 17**

*Assignments (not required):*

- Prepare questions for Monday's exam review session

*Lab:*

- Lab Session: Practical advice for working with data in Stata.

Week 9: October 22–26  
Cross-tabs and Control Tables

*Readings:*

- Kellstedt & Whitten, Chapter 8
- *Using Stata for Political Analysis* (pp. - TBD)

*Supplemental Readings (not required):*

- Weisberg et al., Chapters 11–13 (Electronic Reserve)

*Assignments:*

- **Outline of research report due Wednesday, October 24**

- Homework 3 distributed

Week 10: October 29–November 2  
Statistical Significance, Chi-Square Test

*Readings:*

- Kellstedt & Whitten, Chapter 8
- *Using Stata for Political Analysis* (pp. - TBD)

*Lab*

- Lab Session: Testing for the presence and significance of relationships using **Stata**.

Week 11: November 5–9  
Correlation and Regression I

*Readings:*

- Kellstedt & Whitten, Chapter 10
- *Using Stata for Political Analysis* (pp. - TBD)

*Assignments:*

- **Homework 3 due Wednesday, November 2**
- Homework 4 distributed

Week 12: November 12–16  
Correlation and Regression II, Extensions, Tables & Figures

*Readings:*

- Kellstedt & Whitten, Chapters 11–12
- *Using Stata for Political Analysis* (pp. - TBD)

*Assignments:*

- **Draft of research report sections due no later than Wednesday, November 14 (Introduction, Theory/Literature Review, Data and Methods)**

Week 13: November 19–23

Student Presentations

*Readings:*

- None (work on research report)

*Assignments:*

- **Homework 4 due Wednesday, November 21**

*Notes:*

- No class Friday, November 23 (Thanksgiving)

Week 14: November 26–30

Student Presentations

*Readings:*

- None (work on research report)

Week 15: December 3

Concluding Remarks

*Assignment:*

- Research report due Monday, December 3