

Political Science 209
Introduction to Political Science Research Methods
Spring Semester 2007
Tuesday and Thursday, 1:30-2:45
Allen 1005

Instructor: Dave Peterson
Office: 2037 Bush Academic Building
Phone: 845-6783
Email: dave@polisci.tamu.edu

Office hours: Tuesday 10:30-11:30, and by appointment. If the scheduled times do not work, contact me to arrange a different time.

The best way to get a hold of me is through email. Please keep in mind that I am unlikely to check my email much later than 8:00 PM on any given night. If you try to contact me after that time, assume that I will not read my mail until the next morning.

Description: In this class we are going to be studying how to think scientifically about politics. I assume you all have some interest in government and politics. This course is intended to teach you how one can formulate questions and hypotheses about politics and then test them rigorously. We will seek to understand how one formulates questions in a scientific manner, what types of data should one use, and how to go about testing our theories, rather than simply making uninformed arguments. A central element to this is statistics. You will be expected to learn why statistics are powerful tools for understanding the world (political and otherwise) and what are appropriate and inappropriate uses of statistics. What you learn in this course will help you read and understand things in your other political sciences courses and help you be an informed participant in political debates and discussions.

Student Responsibilities: Students should come to class having read the material assigned for that day. You will be evaluated based on a research project, a mid term, an oral presentation and an editorial paper. I WILL NOT—repeat, NOT negotiate over the due dates for assignments. Under very rare circumstances, I will consider changing grads given on exams or papers. However, any request for a re-evaluation must 1) be in writing (typed), justifying why you believe you deserve a better grade and 2) turned in to me in one of the two class session immediately following the assignment is returned. Be warned: if your request is reasonable, the assignment will be re-evaluated. This may cause your grade to go up, but it may cause it to go down.

- **Books:** The main textbook for this course is in the process of being published. It is written by two of my colleagues, Paul Kellstedt and Guy Whitten. I will make copies of the chapters available to you over the course of the semester. While I like lots of this book, I wish it had more practical exercises for the homework. I would like you to also acquire (however possible legally): Philip H. Pollock III. 2005. *An SPSS Companion to Political Analysis*. Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press. This is available through the standard online ordering places. Choose your favorite.

Assignments

There are 4 parts to your grade:

1. Homework. There will be regular homework assignments for this class.
2. A data project. Each student will design and implement an original research project that involves analyzing and reporting social sciences data. Results of the research will be reported in a series of short assignments, culminating in a ten to fifteen page final paper (Due the last day of class). Details are provided on a separate assignment handout.
3. An exam: note there is no final exam.
4. Presentation. Each student will present his or her data project and answer audience questions. Presentations will last around ten minutes.

Grades

Your grade will be based on the five things mentioned above.

- Homework: 30%
- Final Data Project: 30%
- Exam: 30%
- Presentation: 10%

Note on attendance and participation: I expect that you will attend class and participate in discussions. At the same time, I am realistic. You are all adults, and you are here to learn. If you feel you need to miss a class for some reason that is your prerogative. While I do not assign points for participation, when it comes time to assign final grades, I will keep the amount you participated in mind. Those who demonstrate that they understand the material and have learned something in this class may have their grades improved. Basically, I will not punish you for not being involved in class, but I will reward you if you are prepared and participate.

Topics and Assigned Readings

January 16	Introduction - K&W Chapter 1
January 18	What is meant by theory? - K&W Chapter 2
January 23, 25,	Research Design - K&W Chapter 3
January 30	Formal Theory - K&W Chapter 4
February 1 & 6	Measurement - K&W Chapter 5
February 8 & 13	Descriptive statistics - K&W Chapter 6

February 15 & 20	Sampling & inference - K&W Chapter 7
February 22	Review Day
February 27	EXAM!
March 6, 8, & 20	Cross tabulations - K&W Chapter 8
March 22 & 27	Tests of significance - K&W Chapter 9
March 29– April 12	Regression - K&W Chapter 10-12
April 17 – April 26	Presentations

I expect that all students will conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent with the Aggie Code. Any lying or cheating in this class will be handled in accordance with Texas A&M policy.

ADA Statement:

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, Services for Students with Disabilities in Room 126 of the Koldus Building, or call 845-1637.

Course Materials/Copyright Statements

The handouts used in this course are copyrighted. By “handouts,” I mean all materials generated for this class, which include but are not limited to syllabi, quizzes, exams, lab problems, in-class materials review sheets, and additional problem sets. Because these are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy the handouts, unless I expressly grant permission.

Plagiarism Statement

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 latest issue of the Texas A&M University Student Rules, under the section “Scholastic Dishonesty.”