PS 375: Scope and Methods of Political Science

Western Oregon University

Spring 2024

Dr. Dickinson
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Introduction, Course Goals and Objectives

This course explores the scope and methods of political science. We will consider the ways in which social scientists study politics, address the history and nature of political science as a discipline, examine qualitative and quantitative research methods used by political scientists, and look at a variety of important conceptual tools that political scientists use to make sense of politics. The goal is to help students understand the connections among the epistemological, theoretical, methodological, and practical elements of political science. The course is also meant to enable you to design and carry out your own empirical studies, critically interpret and assess the work of other political scientists, and understand the world we live in.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

Students are expected to come to class, keep up with the readings, and participate in discussions. Coming to class prepared, asking questions, and listening to others will benefit you and help make the classroom environment enjoyable and rewarding. While class discussion about the complex topics we will discuss is encouraged, it does not give anyone the right to make intolerant or disparaging remarks regarding race, gender, sexual orientation or political ideologies. Please remember that any topic can be addressed, as long as it is done in a respectful and civil manner. That said, our classroom will be a forum for open debate and I will guarantee full freedom of expression.

Class lectures and readings are meant to compliment each other, yet some material will be presented only in class. It is also highly recommended that students read the newspaper and keep up with current world events, for this will enrich our discussions. Please feel free to bring newspaper clippings to class and bring up relevant topics related to the issues we are studying.

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Two exams, a paper, and daily attendance and participation will be considered as part of the overall grade in this class:

Attendance and participation:	10%
Exam 1	30%
Paper	30%
Exam 2	30%

100-93 = A	92-90 = A-	
89-88 = B+	87-83 = B,	82-80 = B-
79-78 = C+	77-73 = C,	72-70 = C-
69-68 = D+	67-63 = D,	62-60 = D-
59-0 = F		

You are expected to turn in your paper on the assigned date. Late papers will be penalized one-half grade for each day late. Make-ups will be given only in the case of documented illness, accident, or emergency. Please let me know if you are sick or will miss class; also let me know if you are an athlete and will miss class because of sporting events, and I will make every reasonable effort to help you. If you have any type of learning or physical disability or special needs that you think I should know about, please let me know. I am perfectly willing to accommodate anyone who needs help.

College regulations prohibit acts of cheating and deceit (such as the use of ghost-written papers, plagiarism, and copying during examinations). Committing an act of academic dishonesty may result in failing the assignment, test, or course, and will be reported to the Dean and the Provost. If you are in doubt about what academic honesty and plagiarism mean, please talk with me.

Also, please remember to turn off your cell phones before class.

Textbook and Readings

The textbook for this course is an Open Education Resource (OER), which means that it is in the public domain and can be used for free. It is meant to save students money and provide a high-quality, professional research methods textbook.

The PDF version can be downloaded at https://ipsrm.com/home/:

> Franco, Josh, et al. 2023. *Introduction to Political Science Research Methods*. 1st Edition. Academic Senate for California Community Colleges: Open Textbook Library. ISBN-13: 978-1-7351980-0-2.

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Course Schedule and Reading Assignments
The schedule and procedures in this course are subject to change in case of extenuating circumstances. Please bear this in mind and listen for announcements in class.

Week 1. Read Chapter 1: Introduction
- The Social Network of Political Science
- Analyzing Journal Articles
- Research Paper Project Management

Week 2. Read Chapter 2: History and Development of the Empirical Study of Politics
- Brief History of the Empirical Study of Politics
- The Institutional Wave
- The Behavioral Wave

Exercise: Go to the website of the American Political Science Association, at: http://apsanet.org. Find a fact, issue or aspect of the site that you find interesting and be prepared to explain and discuss it with the class.

Week 3. Read Chapter 2: History and Development of the Empirical Study of Politics
- Currents: Qualitative versus Quantitative
- Currents: Politics: Normative and Positive Views
- Emerging Wave: Experimental Political Science
- Emerging Wave: Big Data and Machine Learning

Exam 1

Week 4. Read Chapter 3: The Scientific Method
- Philosophy of Science
- What is the Scientific Method?
- Applying the Scientific Method to Political Phenomena

Week 5. Chapter 4: Theories, Hypotheses, Variables, and Units
- Correlation and Causation
- Theory Construction
- Generating Hypotheses from Theories
- Exploring Variables
- Units of Observation and Units of Analysis
- Causal Modeling

Week 6. Read Chapter 5: Conceptualization, Operationalization, Measurement
- Conceptualization in political science
- What is conceptualization?
- Dimensions and indicators

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Concept mapping
Operationalization
Operationalize a concept
Collecting data
Measurement
Types of measurement
Quality of measures
Applying measures and concepts

Paper Due

Week 7. Read Chapter 5: Conceptualization, Operationalization, Measurement
Collecting data
Measurement
Types of measurement
Quality of measures
Applying measures and concepts

Week 8. Chapter 6: Elements of Research Design
Introduction: Building with a Blueprint
Types of Design: Experimental and Nonexperimental Designs
Components of Design: Sampling
Components of Design: Observations

Week 9. Read Chapter 7: Qualitative Methods
What are qualitative methods?
Interviews
Documentary sources
Ethnographic research
Case studies

Week 10. Read Chapter 8: Quantitative Research Methods and Means of Analysis
What are Quantitative Methods?
Making Sense of Data
Introduction to Statistical Inference
Interpreting Statistical Tables in Political Science Articles

Week 11. **Exam 2**

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