

## Scope and Methods in Political Science

PS 9502a

University of Western Ontario

Fall 2015

### Class Information:

Thursday 9:30am-11:30am  
SSC 4103

### Instructor Information:

Dr. Laura Stephenson  
Office: SSC 4228  
Office Hours: Wednesday 2-4pm or by appointment

Email: lstephe8@uwo.ca  
Phone: ext. 85164

### Course Description:

The objective of this course is to provide PhD students with an understanding of the fundamental principles that underlie research in political science. By the end of the course students will be able to recognize the value of different approaches, and will be able to critically evaluate the theories, empirical strategies, causal claims and validity of other research. The course will not cover *every* method or *every* approach – there simply is not time. However, it is expected that by the end of the course each student will be better readers of research, and will also have a better understanding of how to conduct an original research project.

### Note:

One's choice of approach, method and analysis can be controversial. Many supporters of specific methods are unsympathetic to others. This course endeavours to present an overview of the various approaches in political science. Thoughtful critiques of *all* methods will be encouraged. No one method is perfect; in fact, not all methods are equally appropriate, depending on the research question at hand. Students are expected to come into the course with an open mind and be prepared to learn, think, analyze, challenge, and come out with a much greater understanding of how research is conducted by political scientists.

### Learning Objectives:

- This course will help you to understand the scientific method, why political science is a “science”, and also why many political scientists object to that characterization.
- By the end of this course, you should be able to identify and assess the positive and negative qualities of major approaches to the study of political problems.
- Through the topics covered, you will gain an appreciation of major issues related to research design and you will be able to demonstrate your ability to navigate them with your own research questions.

## Course Materials:

Required Books [also on reserve or available electronically from Weldon Library]

- A.F. Chalmers, 1999, *What is this thing called science?* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Buckingham: Open University Press). (also available at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/12834586/Chalmers-AF-1999-What-is-This-Thing-Called-Science-3e-0872204537>)
- Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, 1994, *Designing Social Inquiry*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press). [referred to as KKV below]
- John Gerring, 2012, *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*, (New York: Cambridge University Press).

Note: Readings not included in these books will be available electronically.

## Assignments:

### Participation – 20%

All students are expected to be active participants in the class. This means being prepared by finishing the assigned readings, preparing at least three discussion questions for the week (to be presented in class), and engaging in discussion.

### Book Review – 10%

*Due date:* October 8

Students will choose a book from the list below (or one agreed upon by the instructor) and prepare a book review, in which the author's approach, research design, methodological choices and major findings/conclusions are identified and critiqued. The student is expected to comment on how the author's approach to the research shaped and/or influenced the conclusions reached.

EACH STUDENT MUST CHOOSE A UNIQUE BOOK. These book reviews will be shared with other members of the class to help build a personal "library" of information. They will also help with the weeks we cover approaches and methodologies, as students will be able to draw upon their knowledge of the monographs in discussion.

Books:

Marshall Sahlins, *How "Natives" Think*, University of Chicago Press, 1995.  
Valerie Bunce, *Subversive Institutions*, Cambridge University Press, 1999.  
Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, Princeton University Press, 1993.  
Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, Cambridge University Press, 1979.  
André Blais, *To Vote or Not To Vote*, Pittsburgh University Press, 2000.  
Neil Nevitte, *The Decline of Deference*, Broadview Press, 1996.

Michael Lewis-Beck, *Economics and Elections*, University of Michigan Press, 1988.  
Paul Pierson, *Dismantling the Welfare State*, Cambridge University Press, 1994.  
Peter Hall, *Governing the Economy*, Oxford University Press, 1986.  
Ronald Rogowski, *Commerce and Coalitions*, Princeton University Press, 1989.  
Gosta Esping-Andersen, *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Princeton University Press, 1990.  
Miriam Golden, *Heroic Defeats*, Cambridge University Press, 1997.  
James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, Yale University Press, 1985.  
Jared M. Diamond, *Collapse*, Viking Press, 2005.  
Thomas Scheffer, *Adversarial Case-Making: An Ethnography of English Crown Court Procedure*, Brill, 2010.

### **Methodology Comment Papers – 30% (3x10%)**

*Due Dates:* November 5, 12 and 19

For each week we discuss specific aspects of methodology, students are required to hand in a comment paper that addresses how the issues raised in the readings apply to their own research project. These comment papers will help students to work through aspects of methodology as they relate to their own projects, and will form the basis of their research design paper. Papers should be minimum 3 – maximum 5 pages in length, double-spaced.

### **Research Design Paper – 40%**

Peer critique – 10%

*Due date:* At Proposal Workshop

Final submission – 30%

*Due date:* December 10

This is the major assignment of the course. Students are expected to prepare a research proposal (minimum 15 - maximum 17 pages, double-spaced), applying the knowledge they gained throughout the course to a research topic (hopefully, a tentative dissertation idea). The proposal should identify the topic, provide a review of existing literature on the topic, state the hypotheses to be examined, develop the concepts, and outline the procedure (operationalization, measurement, data) to be used. Specific data gathering techniques (i.e., details of experiments or surveys) are not expected, but a clear discussion of the type of data that is required to address the research question should be provided. Papers should use Chicago style for referencing (reference list style), footnotes instead of endnotes, 12-pt font and one-inch margins, and include a reference list.

The first draft of this research design is due on **November 26**. Drafts will be distributed to designated discussants (other students) so that peer critiques can be prepared for the Proposal

Workshop. The peer critiques will also be handed in to the instructor for grading at the Proposal Workshop.

At the Proposal Workshop, each student will present his/her research proposal. Discussants will then present their critiques. Time will also be set aside for general discussion.

Students will have the opportunity to revise their papers in light of the comments and discussion at the Proposal Workshop. A hard copy of the paper is due to the instructor on **December 10**.

## Topics and Readings (indented readings are optional but recommended)

### September 10

#### Introduction

---

### September 17

#### Is Political Science a science?

- Chalmers, *What is this thing called science?* (chapters 1, 5-9)
- KKV, ch. 1.
- William H. Riker, 1982, "The Two-Party System and Duverger's Law: An Essay on the History of Political Science," *American Political Science Review* 76(4): 753-766.
- Ruth Grant, 2002, "Political Theory, Political Science, and Politics." *Political Theory* 30(4): 577-595.
  - Carl G. Hempel, 1942, "The Function of General Laws in History," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 39(2): 35-48.
  - David D. Laitin, 1995, "Disciplining Political Science," *American Political Science Review* 89(2): 454-81.

---

*In the next four sessions we cover major methodological approaches used in political science research. As an overview of how the approaches fit (or don't fit) together, please read Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating, 2008, "How many approaches in the social sciences? An epistemological introduction." In Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences, ed. Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating. New York: Cambridge University Press. We conclude this part of the course with a session about the diversity of the discipline.*

---

### September 24

#### Rational Choice and Behaviouralism

#### **BOOK REVIEW DUE**

- Jon Elster, 1989, *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), ch.3.
- Anthony Downs, 1957, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (Boston: Addison-Wesley), ch. 1.
- Robert A. Dahl, 1961, "The Behavioral Approach in Political Science: Epitaph for a Monument to a Successful Protest," *American Political Science Review* 55(4): 763-772.
- Mancur Olson, 1965, *The Logic of Collective Action*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), ch. 1.
- Donald P. Green and Ian Shapiro, 1994, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), chs. 2 and 3.

---

### October 1

#### Institutionalism and Path Dependence

- James G. March and John P. Olsen, 1984, "The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life." *The American Political Science Review* 78(3): 734-749.
- Douglass C. North, 1987, "Institutions, Transaction Costs and Economic Growth." *Economic Inquiry* 25(3): 419-428.
- Fritz W. Scharpf, 1997, *Games Real Actors Play*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, ch. 2.
- B. Guy Peters, 1999, *Institutional Theory in Political Science*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York: Continuum, ch. 1.
- Paul Pierson, 2000, "Increasing Returns, Path Dependence and the Study of

Politics," *American Political Science Review* 94(2): 251-67.

---

**October 8**  
**Critical Approaches**

- Egon G. Guba and Yvonne S. Lincoln, 2004, "Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues," in *Approaches to Qualitative Research*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Lee Harvey, 1990, *Critical Social Research*, (London: Unwin Hyman), ch. 1.
- Susan J. Carroll and Linda G. Zerilli, 1993, "Feminist Challenges to Political Science," in *Political Science: The State of the Discipline II*, ed. Ada W. Finifter (Washington, D.C.: American Political Science Association).
- James Scott, 1985, *Weapons of the Weak*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), ch. 8.

---

**October 15**  
**Interpretivism**

- Mark Bevir and R. A. W. Rhodes, 2002, "Interpretive Theory," in *Theory and Methods in Political Science 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.*, ed. David Marsh and Gerry Stoker (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).
- Charles Taylor, 1971, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," *Review of Metaphysics* 25: 3-51.
- Clifford Geertz, 1973, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*, ed. Michael Martin and Lee C. McIntyre (Cambridge: MIT Press).
- Joel D. Schwartz, 1984, "Participation and Multisubjective Understanding: An Interpretivist Approach to the Study of Political Participation," *The Journal of Politics* 46(4): 1117-1141.
- Murray Edelman, 1985, "Political Language and Political Reality," *PS* 18(1): 10-19.

---

**October 22**  
**Plurality, Unity and the Canadian Way**

- Gerring, ch. 1.
- Kristen Renwick Monroe, 2007, "The Perestroika Movement, its Methodological Concerns, and the Professional Implications of These Methodological Issues." *Qualitative Methods: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section on Qualitative Methods* 5(1): 2-6.  
(<http://www1.maxwell.syr.edu/uploadedFiles/moynihan/cqrm/Newsletter5.1.pdf>)
- James Mahoney and Gary Goertz, 2006, "A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research," *Political Analysis* 14: 227-249.
- Henry E. Brady and David Collier, 2004, *Rethinking Social Inquiry*, (Landham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield), ch. 13.
- Alan C. Cairns, 1975, "Political Science in Canada and the Americanization Issue," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 8(2): 191-234.
- John E. Trent, 1987, "Factors Influencing the Development of Political Science in Canada: A Case and a Model." *International Political Science Review* 8(1): 9-24.

---

**October 29**

FALL BREAK

**November 5**  
**Choosing Topics and**  
**Building Arguments**

**COMMENT PAPER #1**  
**DUE**

- Gerring, chs. 2-4, 8
- KKV, chs. 2-3.
- Roger M. Smith, 2007, "Systematizing the Ineffable: A Perestroika's Method for Finding a Good Research Topic," *Qualitative & Multi-Method Research: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 5(1): 6-8.
  - James Mahoney, 2008, "Toward a Unified Theory of Causality," *Comparative Political Studies* 41(4/5): 412-36.

---

**November 12**  
**Getting Specific:**  
**Conceptualization,**  
**Description and**  
**Measurement**

**COMMENT PAPER #2**  
**DUE**

- Gerring, chs. 5-7.
- KKV, chs. 4-5.
- Zachary Elkins, 2000, "Gradations of Democracy: Empirical Tests of Alternative Conceptualizations," *American Journal of Political Science* 44(2): 287-94.
- Robert Adcock and David Collier, 2001, "Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research," *American Political Science Review* 95(3): 529-46.
  - Giovanni Sartori, 1970, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics," *American Political Science Review* 64(4): 1003-53.
  - Yvonna Lincoln, 1995, "Emerging Criteria for Quality in Qualitative and Interpretive Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 1(3): 275-289.
  - Mark Bevir and Asaf Kedar, 2008, "Concept Formation in Political Science: An Anti-Naturalist Critique of Qualitative Methodology." *Perspectives on Politics* 6(3): 503-517.
  - Michael Coppedge and John Gerring. 2011. "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: A New Approach." *Perspectives of Politics*, 9, 2 (June): 247-267.

---

**November 19**  
**Understanding and**  
**Testing Arguments**

**COMMENT PAPER #3**  
**DUE**

- Gerring, chs. 9-12.
- KKV, chs. 6.
- Arend Lijphart, 1971, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method," *American Political Science Review* 65(3): 682-693.
- Barbara Geddes, 1990, "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics," *Political Analysis* 2(1): 131-150.
  - John Gerring, 2004, "What is a Case Study and What is it Good for?" *American Political Science Review* 98(2): 341-354.
  - Rebecca B. Morton and Kenneth C. Williams, 2008, "Experimentation in Political Science." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, ed. Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady and David Collier. New York: Oxford University Press.
  - James Mahoney and Gary Goertz, 2004, "The Possibility Principle: Choosing Negative Cases in Comparative Research," *American Political Science Review* 98(4): 653-70.
  - David Collier and James Mahoney, 1996, "Insights and Pitfalls: Selection Bias in Qualitative Research," *World Politics* 49(1): 56-91.
  - Charles Ragin, 1987, *The Comparative Method*. Berkeley: University of California Press, ch. 6.

---

*Ethics are extremely important when conducting research. We will discuss what policies are in place and what kinds of issues arise, especially in the course of fieldwork. We will also review the Ethics process at Western.*

---

**November 26**  
**Ethics**

**HAND IN RESEARCH**  
**DESIGN PAPER DRAFT**  
**FOR DISCUSSANT**

- Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, ch. 1 (Ethics Framework). <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/Default/>
- Review NMREB process at Western: [http://www.uwo.ca/research/services/ethics/nonmedical\\_reb/submission.html](http://www.uwo.ca/research/services/ethics/nonmedical_reb/submission.html)
- Tony Porter, 2008, "Research Ethics Governance and Political Science in Canada," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 4(3): 495-499.
- Christopher Shea, "Fraud Scandal Fuels Debate Over Practices of Social Psychology." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Nov. 13, 2011. <http://chronicle.com/article/As-Dutch-Research-Scandal/129746/>
- CAUT Bulletin, "uOttawa criminologists go to court to protect research confidentiality." Vol 60 No 1, January 2013. [http://www.cautbulletin.ca/en\\_article.asp?articleid=3574](http://www.cautbulletin.ca/en_article.asp?articleid=3574)
- Various authors, 2014, "Symposium: Fieldwork in Political Science: Encountering Challenges and Crafting Solutions," *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 47(2): 391-417.

---

**December 3**  
**Proposal Workshop**

**DISCUSSANTS HAND IN**  
**PREPARED COMMENTS**

- Students will present their research proposals and receive prepared feedback from their discussant. Time for open discussion will also be set aside for each paper.

---

**December 10**

- **RESEARCH DESIGN PAPERS DUE**
-