



Scope and Methods in Political Science

PS 9502a

University of Western Ontario

Fall 2019

Class Information:

Tuesday 9:30am-11:30am

SSC 4103

Instructor Information:

Dr. Laura Stephenson

Office: SSC 4228

Office Hours: Thursday 1-3pm or by appointment

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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. They will also have an appreciation for the wide variety of political science research that exists and the many ways to approach a research question. By the end of the course each student will be a better reader of research and will also have a better understanding of how to conduct an original research project for their dissertation.

Learning Objectives:

- This course will help you to understand how the scientific method can be applied to political 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.
- You will be able to navigate major issues of research design with your own research questions.

Course Materials:

Required Books (*PDFs may be available online*)

- John Gerring, 2012, *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*, (New York: Cambridge University Press). [referred to as Gerring below] ISBN: 9780521132770
- Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, 1994, *Designing Social Inquiry*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press). [referred to as KKV below] ISBN: 9780691034713

Note: Readings not included in these books will be available electronically, either on the course OWL site or through one of the library's database. A search for the journal title on the main library site will usually turn up the electronic site.

Assignments:

Participation – 10%

Class Preparation – 15%

Methodology Comment Papers – 15%

Book Review – 20%

1/ Overview – 10%

2/ Critique of Methodology – 10%

Research Proposal – 40%

1/ Outline – 5%

2/ Peer Critique – 5%

3/ Proposal – 30%

Participation (10%)

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 brought to class)**, and engaging in discussion.

Class Preparation (15%)

This course has been designed to engage students directly in the material that will be covered. Most weeks a PhD student will be responsible for choosing readings (to be provided one week in advance and different from those included in the PS9501a syllabus) and leading the class discussion. Students will be evaluated on their selection of readings (including diversity and sources) as well as how they conduct the discussion.

Methodology Comment Papers (15% - 5% each)

Due Dates: October 8, 15 and 22

For each week we discuss specific aspects of methodology (October 1, 8 and 15), students are required to hand in a comment paper that addresses how the issues raised in the readings apply to their own research project *the following week*. 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.

Book Review:

Students will choose a book from the list below (or one agreed upon by the instructor) and prepare a book review in two parts. The first part, due **October 1**, should provide an overview of the book in which the author's approach, research design, methodology and major findings/conclusions are identified. It should be at least 3 and no more than 5 pages (double-spaced) in length. The second part is due **October 29** and will be a critique of the author's methodology. Students should consider the appropriateness of the methodology for the research question, how the methodology and evidence used did or did not influence the conclusions

reached, and whether an alternative approach may be used with reason. This part of the assignment should also be at least 3 and no more than 5 pages (double-spaced). EACH STUDENT MUST CHOOSE A UNIQUE BOOK, so that these book reviews can be shared with other members of the class to help build a personal “library” of information about different research projects.

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.

Research Design Paper (40%)

Outline – 5% - Due November 12

Peer critique – 5% - Due December 5

Final submission – 30% - Due 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. Students are expected to reference readings from class to justify their choices. 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.

An outline of the research design is due on **November 12** (to be submitted through OWL). This will be an opportunity for feedback and a check against any major issues that would make the proposal less successful. The first draft of this research design is due on **November 26** (please bring a hard copy to class). Drafts will be distributed to designated discussants (other students) so that peer critiques can be prepared for the Proposal Workshop on **December 5**. The peer critiques should be submitted to the instructor through OWL 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 and comments from the MA students. Students will have the opportunity to revise their papers in light of the comments and discussion at the Proposal Workshop. The final paper is due to the instructor on **December 10** (to be submitted through OWL).

Topics and Readings

September 10 **Introduction**

- G. King, forthcoming, "So You're a Grad Student Now? Maybe You Should Do This." In *Sage Handbook of Research Methods*, ed. Robert J. Franzese, Jr. and Luigi Curini. Sage Publications.
https://gking.harvard.edu/files/gking/files/so_youre_a_grad_student_now.pdf
- Christopher H. Achen, 2014, "Why do we need Diversity in the Political Methodology Society?" *The Political Methodologist* 22(2): 25-28.
<https://thepoliticalmethodologist.com/2014/04/30/we-dont-just-teach-statistics-we-teach-students/>

September 17 **Is Political Science a science?**

Choose a reading that demonstrates an approach that is appealing for reading next week.

- A. F. Chalmers, 1999, *What is this thing called science?* 3rd edition, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company) Only chapters 1, 5-9 are required.
[https://fenix.ciencias.ulisboa.pt/downloadFile/563087392374786/\[Alan_Chalmers\]_What_Is_This_Thing_Called_Science.pdf](https://fenix.ciencias.ulisboa.pt/downloadFile/563087392374786/[Alan_Chalmers]_What_Is_This_Thing_Called_Science.pdf)
- Gerring, ch. 2.
- 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.

September 24 **Approaches**

- David Marsh and Paul Furlong, 2002, "A Skin not a Sweater: Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science," in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, 2nd edition, ed. David Marsh and Gerry Stoker. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).
- TBD

October 1 **Research Questions and Theories**

Book Review Part 1 Due

- Gerring, chs. 3-4
- TBD

October 8 **Description, Conceptualization and Measurement**

*Methodology Comment
Paper #1 Due*

- Gerring, chs. 5-7
- TBD

October 15 **Causality**

*Methodology Comment
Paper #2 Due*

- Gerring, ch. 8
- KKV, ch. 3
- TBD

October 22 **Comparative Method and Experiments**

*Methodology Comment
Paper #3 Due*

- Gerring, ch. 9
- TBD

October 29 **Case Studies and Process Tracing**

- Gerring, ch. 10
- TBD

November 5

Fall Break – No class

November 12

Fieldwork, Focus

Groups and Interviews

Research Design Outline

- Gerring, ch. 12
- KKV, ch. 6

November 19

Sampling, Surveys and

Questionnaires

- Gerring, ch. 11

November 26

Mixing Methods

Research Design Draft

Due for Peer Comment

- KKV, chs. 4-5

December 3

Ethics

- 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
- Tony Porter, 2008, "Research Ethics Governance and Political Science in Canada," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 4(3): 495-499.
- Christie Aschwanden and Maggie Koerth-Baker, 2016, "How Two Grad Students Uncovered An Apparent Fraud - And A Way To Change Opinions On Transgender Rights." <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-two-grad-students-uncovered-michael-lacour-fraud-and-a-way-to-change-opinions-on-transgender-rights/>
- Arthur Lupia and Colin Elman, 2014, "Openness in Political Science: Data Access and Research Transparency." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 47(1): 19-42.
- Laura R. Woliver, 2002, "Ethical Dilemmas in Personal Interviewing," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35(4): 677-678.

December 5 *NOTE

SPECIAL DAY

Proposal Workshop

Research Design Critique

Due

- PhD students will present their research proposals and receive prepared feedback from their discussant. MA students will be the audience. Time for open discussion will be set aside for each paper. **RESEARCH DESIGN PAPERS ARE DUE DECEMBER 10**