

December 5, 2012

POLITICAL SCIENCE 9502b 001, Winter 2013

“Scope and Methods in Political Science for PhD Students.”

Instructor

Professor C. de Clercy
SSC 4185
Tel: (519) 661-2111 Ext. 85163
Email: c.declercy@uwo.ca

Location and Time

Classroom: SSC 4105

Class time: Thursdays, 9:30am-11:20 am

About this Course

This is a one term course required for all PhD students in Political Science. It is assumed all students entering this course have accumulated prior knowledge concerning social science research generally, and political science research specifically, in their earlier courses. So this course is designed for students with prior training in the field of political science. Building on this prior knowledge, the objective of this course is to provide PhD students with a deeper, more sophisticated understanding of some of the fundamental principles that underlie research in political science beyond what they have encountered at the undergraduate and master’s levels. By the end of the course students should be able to recognize the value of different methodological approaches, distinguish critical steps in research design, and critically evaluate measurement strategies, causal claims and validity.

The course will not cover every method – there simply is not time. However, it is expected that 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.

Note one’s choice of approach, method and analysis can be a controversial decision. Many supporters of specific methods are unsympathetic to others. This course endeavors to present an overview of some of the more widely used approaches in political science. Thoughtful critiques of all methods will be encouraged throughout the course. No one method is perfect; in fact, not all methods are equally appropriate, depending on the research question at hand. Students are expected to enter the course with an open mind and be prepared to learn towards securing a better understanding of how research is conducted by political scientists.

Course Expectations

The course material is communicated through seminar discussion and the required readings. Students are expected to read the required material fully and deeply before each class, to attend class consistently and on time, and to take careful notes. Because this is a seminar course, each student is required to contribute her/his views during class discussions, to listen attentively to others, and to treat all class members with courtesy and respect. Attendance is mandatory. Students must attend a minimum of ten classes to receive credit for the course.

Mandatory Readings

As per the “Meeting Schedule” handed out in the first class, each week a set of mandatory readings are to be completed by each student. These must be read before each class starts. Most of the readings will be made available via the class OWL tab, or via DB Weldon library reserve lists. **If you encounter problems accessing course material, contact Professor de Clercy as soon as possible.**

Suggested and Supplementary Readings

There are a number of works that interested students may wish to consult for further information about methodology generally or a specific topic. These include the following texts:

Alvesson, Mats and Kaj Sköldböck. *Reflexive methodology: new vistas for qualitative research*. Sage 2009.

Babbie, Earl. *The Practice of Social Research, 12th edition*. Wadsworth 2010.

Box-Steffenmeier, J. et al. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*. OUP, 2008.

Goodin, Robert and Charles Tilly. *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*. OUP 2008.

Marsh, D. and G. Stoker. *Theory and Methods in Political Science, 2nd edition*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

Steinmetz, George (ed), *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences*. Duke, 2005.

A summary of the grading structure

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|-----------------------------------|-----|
| Article introductions and reviews | 25% |
| Class participation: | 25% |
| Methodology essay | 25% |
| Collegial critique | 15% |
| Essay resubmission | 10% |

Main Details of Grading Structure

Article Introductions and Reviews

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| Worth: | 25% in total |
| Due: | In class, as scheduled. |
| Verbal length: | Ten minutes of oral communication. |
| Written length | Five double spaced, typed pages MAXIMUM. One hard copy plus an identical electronic version submitted to TurnItIn, before the class begins, are required. |
| Miss penalty: | Students who are not in class on the day they are to present receive a grade of zero, except in the case of <u>documented</u> extenuating circumstances where the penalty may be waived at the Professor's discretion. |

As assigned in class, on a minimum of seven occasions (more in the case of smaller classes), each student will be responsible for introducing an article to the class. Each time, within a ten minute span of time, you will give a brief verbal summary of the article, highlight its main points, discuss it with reference to other articles under discussion that day and in prior classes, evaluate its overall argumentation, and identify key weaknesses and omissions. Marks are awarded based on overall understanding of the article's arguments, merits and weaknesses, context and value for research design and political study. In the case of books and longer readings, students may be asked to introduce parts of the work.

Along with a verbal summary, students are to submit a short essay summarizing their points. One hard copy plus an identical electronic version submitted to TurnItIn, before the class begins, are required.

These are not group-authored projects. All acts of plagiarism are serious academic offences and will be dealt with as per UWO's articulated sanctions. All material that is borrowed from other sources must be appropriately acknowledged through using quotations and/or proper reference citations.

Class Participation

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|---------------|--|
| Worth: | 25% |
| Due: | Every class. |
| Miss penalty: | Students who are not in class and who do not submit documentary evidence of extenuating circumstances will not accumulate credit for participation on such days. |

Every seminar day, students will sign a register of attendance. The instructor will take note of the quality and quantity of verbal contributions, and will award marks based on the intellectual content and evidence of learning contained within such remarks. The total grade will be calculated as the sum of marks obtained in all the sessions beyond the first introductory class. Note that all assigned material is to be read and contemplated before each class begins. Because this is a seminar course, class participation is mandatory. Zero class participation will result in a grade of "0" for each such session, and so undocumented absences negatively will affect grades.

Methodology essay

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| Worth: | 25% |
| Due: | Thursday March 21, 2013 |
| Length: | 25 typed pages, (12 point Times Roman font with no more than 1" margins, double-spaced). |

Late and miss penalties:

Late assignments lose 10% per day, to a maximum of three days, after which they will not be accepted for grading. Late assignments pending during weekends or holidays will be counted as submitted when they arrive in electronic form (followed by a hard copy the next regular working day). Missed assignments receive a grade of zero, except in the case of **documented** extenuating circumstances where the penalty may be waived at the Professor's discretion.

One hard copy, and one identical electronic copy submitted to the class WEBCT TurnItIn site, are due at the start of class.

More specific details about this assignment will be communicated in a separate handout and in class. Students will author an original essay concerning the appropriate design and methodological strategy/ies to be followed to answer a specific research question (RQ) they have identified. The essay will include discussion of the extant literature, standard practices and new methodological approaches being employed vis-à-vis the RQ.

The essays are to be original works that communicate your individual thoughts and insights in your own words. **These are not group-authored projects. All acts of plagiarism are serious academic offences and will be dealt with as per UWO's articulated sanctions. All material that is borrowed from other sources must be appropriately acknowledged through using quotations and/or proper reference citations. Be aware that The University of Western Ontario uses software for plagiarism checking. Your essays may be reviewed via such software for the purpose of plagiarism checking.**

Collegial critique

Worth: 15%
Due: March 28 2013.
Length: 5 to 8 typed pages.

Late and miss penalties:

Late assignments lose 10% per day, to a maximum of three days, after which they will not be accepted for grading. Late assignments pending during weekends or holidays will be counted as submitted when they arrive in electronic form (followed by a hard copy the next

regular working day). Missed assignments receive a grade of zero, except in the case of **documented** extenuating circumstances where the penalty may be waived at the Professor's discretion.

For this assignment, each student will be assigned to critique another student's methodology essay. The purpose here is to probe each author's argumentation, and explore other ways of studying the RQ. More specific instructions will be distributed in class.

Methodology essay resubmission

Worth: 10%
Due: Thursday April 11, 2013 by 4 pm.
Length: A maximum of 30 typed pages, (12 point Times Roman font with no more than 1" margins, double-spaced)

Late and miss penalties: Late assignments lose 10% per day, to a maximum of three days, after which they will not be accepted for grading. Late assignments pending during weekends or holidays will be counted as submitted when they arrive in electronic form (followed by a hard copy the next regular working day). Missed assignments receive a grade of zero, except in the case of **documented** extenuating circumstances where the penalty may be waived at the Professor's discretion.

One hard copy, and one identical electronic copy submitted to the class WEBCT TurnItIn site, are due by 4 pm on Thursday April 11, 2013.

For this assignment, student will revise their original Methodology essay in view of the comments and feedback received from class colleagues and the professor. More specific instructions will be handed out and reviewed in the class.

Additional note: All of the written assignments described above are mandatory: each student must complete all written assignments to receive credit for the course. Note these are individual assignments, and are to be authored by each student alone. There are no group-authored projects in the content of this course. In the case group-authored written work is submitted for grading, it will not be accepted, and late penalties will be enforced as described for each assignment as above.

Also, please be aware that all acts of plagiarism are serious academic offences and will be dealt with as per UWO's articulated sanctions. All material that is borrowed from other sources must be appropriately acknowledged through using quotations and/or proper reference citations. Be aware that The University of Western Ontario uses software for plagiarism checking. Your assignments may be reviewed via such software for the purpose of plagiarism checking.

All assignment deadlines remain in force as per the specifications above, as well as articulated within the specific instruction sheets. The acceptance of late work submitted for grading is at each instructor's discretion, and in accordance with departmental policies and practice concerning justifiable extenuating circumstances.

End.

(Graduate) Statement of Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf