Class Information:
Tuesday 9:30am-11:30am
SSC 4103

Instructor Information:
Dr. Laura Stephenson  Email: laura.stephenson@uwo.ca
Office: SSC 4228  Phone: ext. 85164
Office Hours: Thursday 1-3pm or by appointment

Course Description:
The objective of this course is to provide graduate 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.
- PhD Students: You will be able to navigate major issues of research design with your own research questions.

**Course Materials:**

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


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. If not, try JStor (a database also available through the library).

**Assignments:**

*PhD Level*

Participation – 20%

Short Assignments – 20%
- 1/ Approach Presentation – 10%
- 2/ Article Theory Design – 10%

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:**

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.

**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 16, 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 30 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:

*Short Assignments (10% each)*

*Presentation of Approach:*
Each PhD student is responsible for “teaching” the class about one of the approaches covered by the readings assigned for September 25: rational choice, grounded theory, interpretative theory, positivism or institutionalism. Students should confer with the instructor about their preference to ensure there is no overlap. Students are expected to find two different examples of work that uses the approach that they can present to the class.

*Article Theory Design:*
Students are expected to find an article in a peer-review, scholarly Political Science journal (for example, Canadian Journal of Political Science; American Political Science Review; American Journal of Political Science; Electoral Studies; International Organization; Journal of Politics; if you are unsure please ask the instructor) and analyze the theory design put forth by the author. As will be discussed in class, theories are made up of hypothesized relationships between components that lead to specific outcomes. Part of critically reading research is being able to understand the underlying theoretical structure. Papers are expected to be at least 1 and no more than 3 pages in length, and to include a diagram that clarifies the theory. Papers are due on October 2.

*Research Design Paper:*
Outline – 5% - Due November 6
Peer critique – 5% - Due December 4
Final submission – 30% - Due December 11
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.

An outline of the research design is due on November 6 (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 27 (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 6. 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 comment 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 11 (to be submitted through OWL).
# Topics and Readings

## September 11
### Introduction


## September 18
### Is Political Science a science?

- KKV, ch. 1.
- Geddes, ch. 1.

## September 25
### Approaches

#### Approach Presentation

*(The first two readings are for everyone and the others will be distributed amongst students for presentation. Feel free to read everything of course!)*

- Kathy Charmaz, “Grounded Theory,” in *Approaches to Qualitative Research*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy (New York: Oxford University Press), ch. 23 (pp. 496-521).

## October 2
### Research Questions and Theories

- Geddes, ch. 2
- Gerring, chs. 2-4
October 9

FALL BREAK

October 16

Description, Conceptualization and Measurement

- Gerring, chs. 5-7.
- KKV, chs. 2, 4-5


Book Review Part 1 Due

October 23

Causality

- Gerring, chs. 8, 9-12
- KKV, ch. 3

October 30

Comparative Method and Experiments

- Geddes, ch. 3
- KKV, ch. 6.

Book Review Part 2 Due

November 6

Case Studies and Process Tracing

- Geddes, ch. 4
November 13
Fieldwork, Focus Groups and Interviews


November 20
Sampling, Surveys and Questionnaires


November 27
Mixing Methods

of Nested Analysis in Comparative Research.” *Comparative Political Studies* 41(11): 1492-1514.

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<td>Review NMREB process at Western: <a href="http://www.uwo.ca/research/services/ethics/nonmedical_reb/submission.htm">http://www.uwo.ca/research/services/ethics/nonmedical_reb/submission.htm</a></td>
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<th>December 6 <em>NOTE SPECIAL DAY</em> Proposal Workshop Research Design Critique Due</th>
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<td>PhD students will present their research proposals and receive prepared feedback from their discussant. Time for open discussion will be set aside for each paper. <strong>RESEARCH DESIGN PAPERS ARE DUE DECEMBER 11</strong></td>
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