



PS 9502a
University of Western Ontario
Fall 2017

Class Information:

Thursday 9:30am-11:30am
SSC 4255

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 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]

- John Gerring, 2012, *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*, (New York: Cambridge University Press). [referred to as Gerring below]
- Barbara Geddes, 2003, *Paradigms and Sand Castles*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press). [referred to as Geddes below]
- Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, 1994, *Designing Social Inquiry*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press). [referred to as KKV below]

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

Assignments:

MA Level

Participation – 20%

Short Assignments – 40%

- 1/ Approach Defense Paper - 10%
- 2/ Article Theory Outline – 10%
- 3/ Causal Design Paper – 10%
- 4/ Method Defense Paper – 10%

Article Comparison – 40%

- 1/ Proposal – 5%
- 2/ Comparison Report – 35%

PhD Level

Participation – 20%

Short Assignments – 20%

- 1/ Approach Presentation – 10%
- 2/ Article Theory Outline – 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 (MA and PhD):

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 posted on OWL by 3pm Wednesday before each class)**, and engaging in discussion.

Book Review (PhD only):

Students will choose a book from the list below (or one approved by the instructor) and prepare a book review in two parts. The first part, due October 19, 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 November 2 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 influenced the conclusions reached, and whether an alternative approach could be used, with reasons. 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 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.

Short Assignments (10% each)

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Presentation of Approach (PhD only):

Each PhD student is responsible for "teaching" the class about one of the approaches covered by the readings: 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 do all of the readings for the week and to find two different examples of work that uses the approach that they can present to the class.

Approach Defense Paper (MA only):

Students are expected to choose an approach covered in Week 3 and argue why they believe it is superior to the other approaches discussed that week. This is intended to be a thoughtful reflection on what the student believes are the strengths and weaknesses of the approach, taking into account the student's own research interests, and drawing upon the course readings. The assignment should be at least 3 and no more than 5 pages in length (double-spaced) and is due on September 28.

Article Theory Design:

Students are expected to find an article in a peer-reviewed, 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 put forward 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 5.

Causal Design Paper (MA Only):

Students are expected to take the research problem addressed in their article theory design assignment and design a comparative study or experiment to identify causality in the research question. (If the article theory design topic is not appropriate, the student should consult with the instructor about an appropriate research question.) The paper should identify the cases or subjects to be studied, the variables that will be isolated and how that will be done, and how causality will be evaluated. Papers are due on November 2.

Method Defense Paper (MA Only):

This assignment is similar to the approach defense paper. Students are expected to choose a method discussed in one of the weeks of the course and argue why they believe it is superior to the other methods for investigating their own research interest. This is intended to be a thoughtful reflection on what the student believes are the strengths and weaknesses of the method, drawing upon the course readings. The assignment should be at least 3 and no more than 5 pages in length (double-spaced) and is due on November 23.

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Research Design Paper (PhD only):

- Outline – 5% - Due November 9
- Peer critique – 5% - Due December 7
- Final submission – 30% - Due December 14

This is the major assignment of the course for PhD students. 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 to the instructor on **November 9**. 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 the research design is due on **November 23**. Drafts will be distributed to designated discussants (other students) so that peer critiques can be prepared for the Proposal Workshop on **December 7**. 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 14**.

Article Comparison (MA only):

This is the major assignment of the course for MA students. The purpose of this assignment is to consider how approaches and methodology can affect research findings. Students are required to choose two academic articles from peer-reviewed publications that address the same research topic. Students must submit a proposal for approval that identifies the research topic and the two articles on **November 9**. The full assignment is due on **December 7**. The assignment will have two parts. In the first part, students are expected to outline the methodological approach used by both authors and compare and contrast their findings. In the second part, students are expected to use information learned in the course to consider how the methodology contributed to the similarities or differences in findings.

Topics:

September 7	Introduction
September 14	Is Political Science a Science?
September 21	Approaches
September 28	Research Questions and Theories
October 5	Description, Conceptualization and Measurement
October 12	Fall Break (No Class)
October 19	Causality
October 26	Comparative Method and Experiments
November 2	Case Studies and Process Tracing
November 9	Fieldwork, Focus Groups and Interviews
November 16	Sampling, Surveys and Questionnaires
November 23	Mixing Methods
November 30	Ethics
December 7	Proposal Workshop

A full schedule of readings will be made available for the first day of class.