Scope and Methods in Political Science
PS 9502a
University of Western Ontario
Fall 2016

Class Information:
Thursday 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 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]


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 6

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:


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

*Due Dates: November 3, 10 and 17*

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: December 1*

*Final submission – 30%*

*Due date: December 8*

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 24**. Drafts will be distributed to designated discussants (other students) so that peer critiques can be prepared for the Proposal Workshop on December 1. 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 8.
Topics and Readings *(indented readings are optional but recommended)*

### September 8

**Introduction**

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### September 15

**Is Political Science a science?**
- Chalmers, ch. 1, 5-9.
- KKV, ch. 1.

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*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 22

**Rational Choice and Behaviouralism**
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<th>Date</th>
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| October 20 | Plurality, Unity and the Canadian Way | - Gerring, ch. 1.  


**October 27**

**FALL BREAK**

**November 3**

Choosing Topics and Building Arguments

- Gerring, chs. 2-4, 8
- KKV, chs. 2-3.

**November 10**

Getting Specific: Conceptualization, Description and Measurement

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

**November 17**

Understanding and Testing Arguments

- Gerring, chs. 9-12.
- KKV, chs. 6.
- Barbara Geddes, 1990, “How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You
**DUE**

Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics,” *Political Analysis* 2(1): 131-150.

*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.*

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<th>November 24</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>HAND IN RESEARCH</strong></td>
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<td><strong>DESIGN PAPER DRAFT FOR DISCUSSANT</strong></td>
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<th>December 1</th>
<th>Proposal Workshop</th>
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<td>• Students will present their research proposals and receive prepared feedback from their discussant. Time for open discussion will be set aside for each paper.</td>
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| December 8 | • RESEARCH DESIGN PAPERS DUE |