



Scope and Methods in Political Science

PS 9501a

University of Western Ontario

Fall 2018

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

Email: laura.stephenson@uwo.ca
Phone: ext. 85164

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]
- 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, either on the course OWL site or through one of the library’s databases. 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:

Participation – 20%

Short Assignments – 40%

1/ Approach Defense Paper - 20%

2/ Article Theory and Causal Design Paper – 20%

Article Comparison – 40%

1/ Proposal – 5%

2/ Comparison Report – 35%

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 posted on OWL by 5pm Wednesday before each class)**, and engaging in discussion.

Short Assignments (20% each)

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Approach Defense Paper:

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 for addressing their research interests. This is intended to be a thoughtful reflection on what the student believes are the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches discussed through the lens of the student’s own research interests, 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 27.

Article Theory and Causal Design Paper:

This assignment has two parts.

First, 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 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.

Second, students must design a comparative study or experiment to identify causality in the theory put forth in the article. If the article already does this, the student is expected to design a different study. (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 expected to be at least 3 and no more than 5 pages in length, and to include a diagram that clarifies the theory. Papers are due on November 1.

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Article Comparison:

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 8**. The full assignment is due on **December 6** (minimum 15 - maximum 17 pages, double-spaced). 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 and Readings

September 6 Introduction

- A Wuffle, 2015, "Uncle Wuffle's Reflections on Political Science Methodology," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 48(1): 176-182.
- 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 13 Is Political Science a science?

- KKV, ch. 1.
- Ruth Grant, 2002, "Political Theory, Political Science, and Politics," *Political Theory* 30(4): 577-595.
- Gerring, ch. 1.

September 20

NO CLASS.
USE THE TIME TO CAREFULLY PREPARE THE READINGS FOR SEPTEMBER 27TH AND WRITE YOUR APPROACH DEFENSE PAPER.

September 27 Approaches

Approach Defense Paper Due

- Egon G. Guba and Yvonne S. Lincoln, 2004, "Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues," in *Approaches to Qualitative Research*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy (New York: Oxford University Press), ch. 1 (pp. 17-38).
- Bo Rothstein, 1996, "Political Institutions: An Overview," in *A New Handbook of Political Science*, ed. Robert E. Goodin and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (Oxford: Oxford University Press), ch. 4 (pp. 133-166).
- Craig Parsons, 2010, "Constructivism and Interpretive Theory," in *Theory and Methods in Political Science* 3rd ed., ed. David Marsh and Gerry Stoker (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), ch. 4 (pp. 80-98).
- 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).
- Keith Dowding, 2016, "Analytic Political Philosophy," *The Philosophy and Methods of Political Science* (London: Palgrave), ch. 9 (pp. 213-242).

October 4 Research Questions and Theories

- Gerring, chs. 2-4
- Jeffrey W. Knopf, 2006, "Doing a Literature Review," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 39(1): 127-132.

October 11

FALL BREAK

October 18 Description, Conceptualization and Measurement

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

October 25 Causality

- Gerring, chs. 8, 9, 12
- KKV, ch. 3
- Tulia G. Falleti and Julia F. Lynch, 2009, "Context and Causal Mechanisms in Political Analysis." *Comparative Political Studies* 42(9): 1143-66.

November 1 Comparative Method and

- KKV, ch. 6.
- Arend Lijphart, 1975, "The Comparable-Cases Strategy in Comparative

<p>Experiments</p> <p><i>Article Theory and Causal Design Paper Due</i></p>	<p>Research,” <i>Comparative Political Studies</i> 8(2): 158-177.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charles Ragin, 1987, <i>The Comparative Method</i> (Berkeley: University of California Press), ch. 6 • Rebecca B. Morton and Kenneth C. Williams, 2008, “Experimentation in Political Science.” In <i>The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology</i>, ed. Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady and David Collier. New York: Oxford University Press.
<p>November 8</p> <p>Case Studies and Process Tracing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Gerring, 2004, “What is a Case Study and What is it Good for?” <i>American Political Science Review</i> 98(2): 341-354. • Jason Seawright and John Gerring, 2008, “Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options.” <i>Political Research Quarterly</i> 61(2): 294-308.
<p>Silver Blaze activity</p> <p><i>Article Comparison Proposal Due</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Andrew Bennett, 2010, “Process Tracing and Causal Inference,” in <i>Rethinking Social Inquiry</i>, 2nd ed., ed. Henry E. Brady and David Collier (Landham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield), ch. 10 (pp. 702-21). • Arthur Conan Doyle. “The Adventure of Silver Blaze.” Originally published in <i>Strand Magazine</i> Vol. 4 (December 24, 1892): 645–60.
<p>November 15</p> <p>Fieldwork, Focus Groups and Interviews</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Katherine J. Cramer, 2016, <i>The Politics of Resentment</i> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), ch. 2. • Elisabeth Jean Wood, 2007, “Field Research,” in <i>The Handbook of Comparative Politics</i>, ed. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (New York: Oxford University Press), ch. 5 (pp. 123-146). • Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, 1995, “Choosing Interviewees and Judging What They Say,” in <i>Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data</i> (Sage 1995), ch. 5. • Various authors, 2002, "Symposium: Interview Methods in Political Science," <i>PS: Political Science and Politics</i> 35(4):663-688. • Layna Mosley, 2013, “‘Just Talk to People’? Interviews in Contemporary Political Science.” In Layna Mosley, ed., <i>Interview Research</i> (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), pp. 1-28.
<p>November 22</p> <p>Sampling, Surveys and Questionnaires</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chava Frankfort-Nachmias and David Nachmias, 2008, <i>Research Methods in the Social Sciences</i> (Worth Publishers), ch. 8. • Nora Cate Schaeffer and Stanley Presser, 2003, “The Science of Asking Questions.” <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i> 29: 65-88. • Richard Johnston, 2008, “Survey Methodology,” in <i>The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology</i>, ed. Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady and David Collier (Oxford: Oxford University Press). • Henry E. Brady, “Contributions of Survey Research to Political Science,” <i>PS: Political Science and Politics</i> 33(1): 47-57.
<p>November 29</p> <p>Ethics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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/ • Tony Porter, 2008, “Research Ethics Governance and Political Science in Canada,” <i>PS: Political Science & Politics</i> 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.

December 6

Proposal Workshop

Article Comparison Due

- Students will act as audience while PhD students present their research proposals and receive prepared feedback from their discussant. Time for open discussion and questions from students will be set aside for each paper.
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