**The University of Western Ontario**

**Department of Political Science**

**POLITICAL SCIENCE 9501a, Fall Term 2021**

**“Research Design”**

**Course Outline**

**Instructor**

Dr. Cristine de Clercy

SSC 4185

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**Location and Time**

Classroom: SSC 4255 (4th floor of Social Science)

Class time: Thursdays, 10:30-12:30 am

Office hours: tba, probably via Zoom this fall.

**About this Course**

This is a one-term course required of all MA students in Political Science at Western. It is assumed all people entering this course have accumulated prior knowledge concerning social science research generally, and political science research specifically, in previous courses. So, this course is designed for students with prior undergraduate training in the field of political science. Building on this prior knowledge, the objective of this course is to provide students with a deeper, more sophisticated understanding of some of the fundamental principles that underlie research in political science. This course serves as a foundation for other, more focused graduate-level courses concerning qualitative and quantitative analysis. By the end of the course students should be able to recognize the value of different methodological approaches, distinguish critical elements in research design, understand the fundamental steps necessary for undertaking a research plan, and critically evaluate key aspects including measurement strategies, causal claims and validity. The course will not cover every method and approach within political science – there simply is not time. However, a key goal is that by late December each student will have a deeper, more advanced 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, and several exercises are specifically designed to challenge one’s methodological biases. 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 about new approaches towards securing a better understanding of how political science research is conducted.

**Course Expectations**

The course material is communicated through seminar discussion, by undertaking the required readings and via tutorial work. Students are expected to read the required material fully and deeply before each class or tutorial, to attend class consistently and on time, and to take careful notes. Because this is a seminar course, each student is required to contribute their views during class discussions, to listen attentively to others, and to treat all class members with courtesy and respect. Attendance is mandatory.

**COVID-19**

At the time of writing (late August of 2021) the expectation is that we will be able to meet and resume in-person classes this fall at Western. At the same time, there is much uncertainty about how the fall term will unfold. As with your other classes, in this class we will follow all the university and provincial rules to maximize people’s health and safety. If we have to alter our plans or the lesson schedule, I will aim to do so while minimizing disruption to people’s learning and ensuring maximum safety. Do feel free to consult me if you have any concerns or questions going forward.

I will communicate any pandemic-related news to you as soon as I receive it, probably in the first case via the class OWL site.

**Mandatory Readings**

As per the “Pol 9501a Reading Schedule” handed out in the first class, each week a set of mandatory readings are to be completed by each graduate student. These must be read before the class starts. It is expected you arrive to class ready to discuss these materials. The readings generally are available via the class OWL tab, or by accessing the UWO Library catalogue.

**If you encounter problems accessing course material, contact Professor de Clercy as soon as possible.**

**Suggested and Supplementary Readings**

Because there are many approaches to research design and different methodological views, there are a number of well-regarded works that interested students may wish to consult for further information about methodology. These include the following texts:

Alvesson, Mats and Kaj Sköldberg. *Reflexive methodology: new vistas for qualitative research, 3rd edition.* Sage 2018.

Babbie, Earl. *The Practice of Social Research, 15th edition*. Wadsworth 2020.

Bueno de Mesquita, Ethan and Anthony Fowler. *Thinking Clearly with Data: A Guide to Quantitative Reasoning*. Princeton University Press, 2021

Box-Steffenmeier, J. et al. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology.* OUP, 2010.

Cresswell, John W. and J. David Cresswell*. Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th edition. SAGE, 2018.

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

Lowndes, Vivien, Marsh. D. and G. Stoker. *Theory and Methods in Political Science, 4th edition.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

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

**Summary of the grading structure**

Article introductions

and critical reviews 10%

Class participation: 25%

Tutorial participation\* 5%

Short assignments (3) 15%

In-class formal methodological debate 10%

Essay 35%

\*note the tutorial participation mark depends on the assignment of a tutor to this class.

**Main Details of the Grading Structure**

**Article Introductions and Critical Reviews**

Worth: 10% in total

Due: In class, as scheduled.

Verbal length: Ten minutes of oral communication.

Written length Four double spaced, typed pages MAXIMUM, submitted to

the OWL TurnItIn portal, before the class begins.

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 documented extenuating circumstances where

the penalty may be waived at the Professor’s discretion.

As assigned in class, on two or three 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, 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 critical essay not more than four pages summarizing their points before the class begins, to the OWL portal. Late papers are not accepted for grading without formal academic accommodation or SRA’s as applicable. 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**

Worth: 25%

Due: Every class.

Miss penalty: Students who are not in class (and who do not

submit formal requests for academic accommodation or

SRAs) will not accumulate credit for participation on such

days.

The instructor will take note of attendance, and 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 in the form of verbal communication is expected and required. Zero class participation will result in a grade of “0” for each such session. Undocumented absences will negatively affect grades.

**Tutorial participation**

Worth: 5%

Due: every tutorial meeting

Miss penalty: Students who are not in class (and who do not

submit formal requests for academic accommodation or

SRAs) will not accumulate credit for participation.

The tutor will take note of attendance, and 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/completed before each class begins. Because this is a seminar course, class tutorial participation in the form of verbal communication is expected and required. Zero class tutorial participation will result in a grade of “0” for each such session. Undocumented absences will negatively affect grades.

**Short assignments (3)**

Worth: 15% in total

Due: At the beginning of class on September 30th;

October 28th; November 18th.

Miss and late penalties: Assignments that are not submitted will be graded at “0”. Late assignments lose 10% per day, to a maximum of three days, after which they will not be accepted for grading (except of course if they have bee approved for formal academic accommodation or an SRA. ) Late assignments will be time stamped as submitted when they arrive in electronic form to the class OWL assignment portal.

Once per month a short assignment will be distributed. Students will be given some tutorial time to work on the assignment and receive help. These short assignments are designed to practice specific skills germane to research design such as fashioning a research question. More specific information will be communicated in the “Pol 9501a Short Assignment” instruction sheets as handed out and reviewed in class.

**In-class formal methodological debate**

Worth: 10%

Due: As scheduled in class time in November/early December.

Length: Twenty minutes of presentation and verbal argumentation.

This term we will accomplish some work in groups. Student teams will refine their understanding and appreciation of key aspects of research design by formulating and communicating convincing arguments about the validity/invalidity of competing research approaches. More information about this assignment will be communicated in the “Pol 9501a Methodological Debate” instruction sheet distributed in class.

**Essay**

Worth: 35%

Due: Thursday December 16, 2021

Length: Fourteen pages of text (minimum) to twenty pages maximum, (in

12 pt Times Roman font, 250 words per page 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 without formal academic accommodation. Late

assignments will be time stamped as submitted when they

arrive in electronic form to the class OWL portal.

More specific details about this essay assignment will be communicated in a separate handout distributed 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 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.