

Introduction to Research Methods in Political Science

Political Science 3324f
University of Western Ontario
Fall 2011

Class Information:

Wednesday 10:30am-12:30pm (Kresge Building 106)

Instructor Information:

Dr. Laura Stephenson

Email: lstephe8@uwo.ca

Office: SSC 4228

Phone: ext. 85164

Office Hours: Tuesday 10am-12pm or by appointment

Prerequisites:

Enrollment in Honors Political Science, Honors Specialization in Political Science, or Major in Political Science.

Important Notice Re: Prerequisites/Antirequisites:

Please Note: You are responsible for ensuring that you have successfully completed all course prerequisites, and that you have not taken an antirequisite course. Lack of prerequisites may not be used as a basis for an appeal. If you are found to be ineligible for a course, you may be removed from it at any time and you will receive no adjustment to your fees. This decision cannot be appealed. If you find that you do not have the course prerequisites, it is in your best interest to drop the course well before the end of the add/drop period. Your prompt attention to this matter will not only help protect your academic record, but will ensure that spaces become available for students who require the course in question for graduation.

Office of the Dean, Faculty of Social Science

Course Description:

The objective of this course is to provide political science students with an understanding of research methods used in the discipline. In essence, this course is an overview of how political science research is done. In addition to principles of theory development and research design, students will learn about different sources of data and will be introduced to qualitative and quantitative analysis. Topics covered include designing a research project, identifying causal relationships, ethical considerations in research and various data gathering methods (such as interviews, focus groups, experiments, surveys, etc.). At the end of the course, students will understand the principles of empirical research, appreciate the differences and similarities between qualitative and quantitative methods, be able to critically evaluate how other people have conducted research, and be better prepared to conduct their own investigations.

Required Text (available in UWO bookstore):

Keith Archer and Loleen Berdahl. 2011. *Explorations: Conducting Empirical Research in Canadian Political Science*, 2nd edition. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.

Other readings are available online (library or WebCT).

Assignments:

Operationalization and Measurement Assignment – 15% **DUE: OCTOBER 12**

Students will choose a concept from a list that will be provided in class. The student will then write a report on how he/she would operationalize and measure the concept in a research setting. The challenges of operationalizing the specific concept must be outlined, as well as the decisions made by the student in order to proceed. The student must also present two (2) realistic and viable measurements, either by providing details of existing sources (bibliographic and actual variable details) or detailing how the data could be gathered reliably. More information will be provided during the first weeks of the term. The assignment should be 3-5 pages in length.

Poll Analysis – 20% **DUE: NOVEMBER 2**

Students must choose two (2) polls from two (2) different sources on the same topic (from IPSOS, Pollara, Leger, etc.). ODESI (<http://search1.odesi.ca/home/index.html>) is a good source for polls. Students must analyze the polls (their results and methodology, alone *and* in comparison) to determine whether the results are similar or different, and why. Students are expected to comment on whether the methodology used (timing, location, question wording, format) could explain the similarities/differences. The analysis should be 5 pages in length.

Critical Analysis – 25% **DUE: NOVEMBER 23**

Students must choose an article from a scholarly journal to analyze for this assignment. If there is any doubt, please ask if a journal is appropriate. The student is expected to analyze the article in two parts: a critical summary and an evaluation of the research design. The assignment should be 5-7 pages in length.

Part A: Critical Summary

Students must identify the research question, summarize the procedure that the researcher used, and outline the findings. The student must then critically analyze the conclusions that the author reaches, paying specific attention to any conclusions that are unfounded.

Part B: Evaluation of Research Design

Students are expected to address the particular research design used in the article. Students must evaluate the appropriateness of the research design for the topic under study, the contributions that researching the topic that way make to the overall study of the topic, and whether a different research angle might have been more appropriate. Students are also expected to identify the author's hypotheses and evaluate them with respect to their appropriateness given the research question and pre-existing literature. Do the author's hypotheses flow well from the theories that already exist? Are the hypotheses clear? Finally, students should evaluate the methodology used by the author to address the research question. Is it appropriate? Are there any realized or potential flaws as a result of the methodology?

Weekly Online Quizzes – 10%

Students must complete an online (WebCT) quiz about the textbook readings for class *prior* to class each week. The marks of the student's best 10 quizzes will be used to calculate the grade. If a student is absent and unable to complete the weekly quizzes for several weeks, he/she must seek

Academic Accommodation (see below).

Final Exam – 30%

During final exam period – TBA

IMPORTANT POLICIES

Late penalties: The late penalty for assignments is 5% per day. Papers more than 5 days late will not be accepted for grading.

Extensions: I generally do not give extensions. However, when there are genuine and unavoidable circumstances, you may request an extension in writing. All relevant documentation must be provided to me or Academic Counselling. Requests must be made *at least one week* in advance of the assignment's due date (unless there are exceptional circumstances).

Academic Accommodation: If a situation should arise such that you require accommodation because of a medical or personal issue, Academic Counselling (in the Social Science Centre) is available to help you. You can talk to a counsellor, who can then pass along to me any recommendations for accommodation. This procedure means that you do not have to provide me with any details of your situation, but ensures that the proper documentation has been provided. IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO SPEAK WITH A COUNSELLOR AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER AN ISSUE ARISES. Academic accommodation will ONLY be provided if you speak with an Academic Counsellor and provide them with documentation of your issue, and if the issue is brought to their attention in a timely fashion.

Topics and Readings:

Wednesday, September 14 – **Introduction**

September 21 – **Social Science Research**

- Archer and Berdahl, ch. 1

September 28 – **Theory, Research and Causation**

- Archer and Berdahl, ch. 2

October 5 – **Designing a Research Project/Conceptualization, Operationalization and Measurement**

- Archer and Berdahl, chs. 3 and 4
- Strand and Weiss, ch. 3 (WebCT)

October 12 – **Ethics ***OPERATIONALIZATION AND MEASUREMENT ASSIGNMENT DUE*****

- Archer and Berdahl, ch. 5
- Tri-Council Policy Statement, "Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans," http://pre.ethics.gc.ca/english/pdf/TCPS%20June2003_E.pdf, pp. L1-L9 and sections 1-6.
- Wysocki, ch. 3, pp. 66-73 only (WebCT)

October 19 – **Comparative, Qualitative and Quantitative Methods**

- Archer and Berdahl, chs. 6 and 7
- Marsh and Stoker, ch. 12

October 26 – **Sampling and Survey Research**

- Archer and Berdahl, chs. 8 and 9
- Steve Ladurantaye, *Globe & Mail*, “When polls differ, pollsters worry”, April 27, 2011 (WebCT)

November 2 – **Experiments ***POLL ANALYSIS DUE*****

- Archer and Berdahl, ch. 11
- André Blais and Robert Young, 1999, “Why do people vote? An experiment in rationality.” *Public Choice* 99(1):39-55.
<http://www.springerlink.com/content/m23883h1g4707153/fulltext.pdf> (Also available online through the library – search for “Public Choice” as the journal title)

November 9 – **Content Analysis**

- Archer and Berdahl, ch. 12
- Jang Hyun Kim, Tuo-Yu Su and Junhao Hong, 2007, “The Influence of Geopolitics and Foreign Policy on the U.S. and Canadian Media: An Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of Sudan's Darfur Conflict.” *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 12(3): 87-95.
<http://hij.sagepub.com/content/12/3/87.full.pdf+html> (Also available online through the library – search for “Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics” as the journal title)

November 16 – **Quantitative Analysis (1)**

- Archer and Berdahl, chs. 15 and 16

November 23 – **Quantitative Analysis (2) ***CRITICAL ANALYSIS DUE*****

- Archer and Berdahl, chs. 17 and 18

November 30 – **Interviews, Observation and Focus Groups**

- Archer and Berdahl, chs. 13 and 14
- Hesse-Biber and Leavy, ch. 12 (WebCT)

December 7 – **Qualitative Analysis and Interpretation**

- Archer and Berdahl, ch. 19
- Hesse-Biber and Leavy, ch. 24 (WebCT)

**APPENDIX TO UNDERGRADUATE COURSE OUTLINES
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**

Prerequisite checking - the student's responsibility

"Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites."

Essay course requirements

With the exception of 1000-level courses, most courses in the Department of Political Science are essay courses. Total written assignments (excluding examinations) will be at least 3,000 words in Politics 1020E, at least 5,000 words in a full course numbered 2000 or above, and at least 2,500 words in a half course numbered 2000 or above.

Use of Personal Response Systems ("Clickers")

"Personal Response Systems ("clickers") may be used in some classes. If clickers are to be used in a class, it is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the device is activated and functional. Students must see their instructor if they have any concerns about whether the clicker is malfunctioning.

Students must use only their own clicker. If clicker records are used to compute a portion of the course grade:

- the use of somebody else's clicker in class constitutes a scholastic offence,
- the possession of a clicker belonging to another student will be interpreted as an attempt to commit a scholastic offence."

Security and Confidentiality of Student Work (refer to current *Western Academic Calendar* (<http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/>))

"**Submitting or Returning Student Assignments, Tests and Exams** - All student assignments, tests and exams will be handled in a secure and confidential manner. Particularly in this respect, leaving student work unattended in public areas for pickup is not permitted."

Duplication of work

Undergraduate students who submit similar assignments on closely related topics in two different courses must obtain the consent of both instructors prior to the submission of the assignment. If prior approval is not obtained, each instructor reserves the right not to accept the assignment.

Grade adjustments

In order to ensure that comparable standards are applied in political science courses, the Department may require instructors to adjust final marks to conform to Departmental guidelines.

Academic Offences

"Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholoff.pdf>."

Submission of Course Requirements

ESSAYS, ASSIGNMENTS, TAKE-HOME EXAMS **MUST** BE SUBMITTED ACCORDING TO PROCEDURES SPECIFIED BY YOUR INSTRUCTOR (I.E., IN CLASS, DURING OFFICE HOURS, TA'S OFFICE HOURS) OR UNDER THE INSTRUCTOR'S OFFICE DOOR.

THE MAIN OFFICE DOES NOT DATE-STAMP OR ACCEPT ANY OF THE ABOVE.

Note: Information excerpted and quoted above are Senate regulations from the Handbook of Scholarship and Academic Policy. <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/>

Students registered in Social Science should refer to <http://counselling.ssc.uwo.ca/> <http://counselling.ssc.uwo.ca/procedures/havingproblems.asp> for information on Medical Policy, Term Tests, Final Examinations, Late Assignments, Short Absences, Extended Absences, Documentation and other Academic Concerns. Non-Social Science students should refer to their home faculty's academic counselling office.

Plagiarism

"Plagiarism: Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence." (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

Plagiarism Checking: "All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>)."

Multiple-choice tests/exams: "Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating."

Note: Information excerpted and quoted above are Senate regulations from the Handbook of Scholarship and Academic Policy. <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/>

PLAGIARISM*

In writing scholarly papers, you must keep firmly in mind the need to avoid plagiarism. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged borrowing of another writer's words or ideas. Different forms of writing require different types of acknowledgement. The following rules pertain to the acknowledgements necessary in academic papers.

A. In using another writer's words, you must both place the words in quotation marks and acknowledge that the words are those of another writer.

You are plagiarizing if you use a sequence of words, a sentence or a paragraph taken from other writers without acknowledging them to be theirs. Acknowledgement is indicated either by (1) mentioning the author and work from which the words are borrowed in the text of your paper; or by (2) placing a footnote number at the end of the quotation in your text, and including a correspondingly numbered footnote at the bottom of the page (or in a separate reference section at the end of your essay). This footnote should indicate author, title of the work, place and date of publication, and page number.

Method (2) given above is usually preferable for academic essays because it provides the reader with more information about your sources and leaves your text uncluttered with parenthetical and tangential references. In either case words taken from another author must be enclosed in quotation marks or set off from your text by single spacing and indentation in such a way that they cannot be mistaken for your own words. Note that you cannot avoid indicating quotation simply by changing a word or phrase in a sentence or paragraph which is not your own.

B. In adopting other writers' ideas, you must acknowledge that they are theirs.

You are plagiarizing if you adopt, summarize, or paraphrase other writers' trains of argument, ideas or sequences of ideas without acknowledging their authorship according to the method of acknowledgement given in 'A' above. Since the words are your own, they need not be enclosed in quotation marks. Be certain, however, that the words you use are entirely your own; where you must use words or phrases from your source, these should be enclosed in quotation marks, as in 'A' above.

Clearly, it is possible for you to formulate arguments or ideas independently of another writer who has expounded the same ideas, and whom you have not read. Where you got your ideas is the important consideration here. Do not be afraid to present an argument or idea without acknowledgement to another writer, if you have arrived at it entirely independently. Acknowledge it if you have derived it from a source outside your own thinking on the subject.

In short, use of acknowledgements and, when necessary, quotation marks is necessary to distinguish clearly between what is yours and what is not. Since the rules have been explained to you, if you fail to make this distinction your instructor very likely will do so for you, and they will be forced to regard your omission as intentional literary theft. Plagiarism is a serious offence which may result in a student's receiving an 'F' in a course or, in extreme cases in their suspension from the University.

*Reprinted by permission of the Department of History

Adopted by the council of the Faculty of Social Science, October, 1970; approved by the Dept. of History August 13, 1991

Accessibility at Western

Please contact poliscie@uwo.ca if you require any information in plain text format, or if any other accommodation can make the course material and/or physical space accessible to you.