
POLT 2600/INTL 2700
Methods of Political Inquiry
Dr. Kyle Haynes

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Office: HSPC 105
Office Hours: Tues. 10 - 12:30 & by appt.

Fall 1 2015
Classroom: HSPC 201
Wed: 5:30 - 9:30

Description

Catalog Description: This course explores the nature of political inquiry and the conceptual approaches to the study of politics and government. Students examine and compare some major modes of political inquiry: discursive, systematic, philosophical, and scientific.

Organization

Because this is an eight week course, we will necessarily cover a lot of ground each week. The first three weeks will cover core methodological concepts that we will be using throughout the course. Each subsequent class meeting covers distinct forms of political inquiry, rooted in the basic logic of inference covered at the outset.

Class Policies

- *Missing Class:* Because we are only meeting as a class eight times, students are not allowed *any* unexcused absences. Even a single unexcused absence will *significantly* affect your grade. If missing class due to illness or family emergency, please let me know as promptly as possible and be prepared to provide documentation attesting to the reason for your absence. Repeated lateness will be treated as absence.
- *Technology:* Mobile phones are strictly prohibited in this class. If I see a student on their phone, I will ask the student to put it away. If I see that student on their phone again, I will ask the student to leave class for the day. Laptop computers are allowed *only* for note taking purposes. We will meet as a class in the library computer lab on days where students will be using statistical software.

- *Cheating and Academic Dishonesty*: I take academic integrity *very* seriously. A student found cheating on an exam or assignment will be given a chance to explain the situation. In the event I find the explanation unsatisfactory, the student will be given absolutely no credit for the assignment. Depending on the magnitude of the assignment, this could be enough to guarantee an *F* in the course.
- *Grade Appeals*: I will accept grade appeals no sooner than 48 hours and no later than 5 days after students receive their graded assignments. I provide detailed comments on graded assignments. Take the time to read and consider these comments before lodging an appeal. Grade appeals must include a written statement that addresses my comments on the assignment and indicates specifically why the student feels the grade is inappropriate. If a grade appeal is made, I reserve the right to adjust the grade either upward or downward, so I strongly recommend that you not lodge grade appeals frivolously.
- *Special Needs*: I rely on the Academic Resource Center (Loretto Hall, Room 6, 314-246-7620) to document and coordinate the appropriate action for students requiring special accommodations as a result of a disability. If you have special needs, please come speak with me so we can determine the appropriate accommodations.

Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this course, students should be able to:

1. ... identify the fundamental components, approaches, methods, and common practices of social research.
2. ... evaluate the quality of scientific and non-scientific research, and distinguish between the two.
3. ... articulate the process of crafting an excellent research design and paper.
4. ... analyze published work in political science, identifying the components (including thesis, methodology, assumptions, and data) and evaluating its claims.

Assignments

Student grades will be determined according the following assignments and criteria:

- **Participation (10%)**: This course will be run primarily as a seminar, and will involve extensive discussion. Students are expected to come to class having completed the assigned reading, and prepared to discuss it in depth.

- **Weekly Assignments (30%):** Students will be required to turn in five “homework” assignments throughout the course. These will be due for weeks 3-7. Specific assignments are detailed in the syllabus below, and will be discussed in class the week before they are due.
- **Research Design Project (30%):** Through the term, students will work on producing a detailed research design that is due on the final day of class. We will discuss the requirements and expectations in detail throughout the course. Students will meet one-on-one with the instructor multiple times during the term to discuss these projects.
- **In-Class Presentation (10%):** Students will present their research design on the final day of class. Students will also field questions from the instructor and fellow classmates in order to justify their chosen research design.
- **Final Exam (20%):** A cumulative take-home final exam will be distributed at the final class meeting. It will be due, by email, at 11:59 pm on Monday, October 19.

Evaluation

“++” = Key Tool; “+” = Secondary Tool; “X” = Not Used

Outcome	Class Part.	Homework	Res. Design	Presentation	Final Exam
Outcome 1	+	++	++	++	++
Outcome 2	+	++	X	X	++
Outcome 3	X	X	++	++	+
Outcome 4	++	++	X	X	+

Required Reading

The majority of the readings for this course will come from Janet Johnson and H.T. Reynolds’ *Political Science Research Methods*, 7th ed. This book is available for purchase at the University bookstore, and on Amazon. Additional readings will be distributed to the class through Canvas. Students are expected to complete all assigned readings before coming to class. The section below details weekly reading requirements and additional assignments.

Weekly Material

Week 1/Aug 26: Introductory Material

- **Reading:** Johnson & Reynolds, chs 1-2
- **Assignment:** None

Week 2/Sep 2: The Scientific Method and Logic of Inference

- **Readings:**
 - Johnson & Reynolds, chs 3-4
 - King, Keohane & Verba, pp 3-12 (available on WorldClassRoom).
- **Assignment:** None

Week 3/Sep 9: Measurement and Descriptive Inference

- **Readings:**
 - Johnson & Reynolds, ch 5
 - King, Keohane & Verba, pp 55-69, 151-166 (available on WorldClassRoom)
- **Assignment:** Using what you learned last week, develop a research question that will guide your research design project. Be sure to specify the dependent variable you want to explain, the independent variable(s) you will examine, and the hypotheses (including the null) you will test. These assignments must be submitted, by email, at the start of class.

Week 4/Sep 16: Causal Inference 1 - Qualitative Research

- **Readings:**
 - Johnson & Reynolds, ch 9
 - King, Keohane & Verba, pp 128-139, 168-182 (available on WorldClassRoom)
- **Assignment:** Read pp 13-18 of the “Polity IV” dataset’s codebook. Using what we learned last week, write a 1-2 page, double spaced summary and critique of the Polity project’s measure of regime type. Is this a valid measure? Is it biased? In what ways? How could it be improved?
- Students will schedule individual meetings with the instructor this week to go over their research design projects. We will discuss progress made on selecting a research question, choosing variables and hypotheses, and developing a valid research design.

Week 5/Sep 23: Survey and Experimental Research

- **Reading:** Johnson & Reynolds, ch 10
- **Assignment:** Read the article distributed at the end of class last week, and write a 1-2 page, double spaced summary and critique of its research design. What is the research question? What are the independent and dependent variables? What are the hypotheses, and how does the author test them? And is this research design a valid and effective way to test these hypotheses?

Week 6/Sep 30: Causal Inference 2a: Quantitative Research and Basic Statistics

- **Reading:** Johnson & Reynolds, chs 11-12
- **Assignment:** Using the material from last week, design a ten question survey examining attitudes toward race on the Webster University campus. Also submit a 1-2 page, double spaced description of your survey explaining why you chose these questions, and how you would choose a sample of the student population to gain a valid measure of racial attitudes.

Week 7/Oct 7: Causal Inference 2b: Quantitative Research – Correlation and Regression

- **Reading:** Johnson & Reynolds, ch 13
- **Assignment:** Complete the problem set distributed after class last week.

Week 8/Oct 14: Final Projects and Class Presentations

- **Reading:** None
- **Assignment:** Complete your research design project and submit it to the instructor, via email, by the start of class. You will also need to have a 10 minute presentation prepared outlining your project. Each student will meet individually with the instructor in the week prior to this class to go over your projects and address any issues students are having.

Take Home Final Exam – A cumulative final exam will be distributed at the end of class on October 14. Students will have five days to complete the exam, which is due to me by email at 11:59 pm on October 19.