

Political Science Methods

PSC 202-001 | Spring 2018 | 3 Credit Hours

Lecture

Ms. Erin Little

Contact Information

UA Campus Directory:

- Ms. Erin Little (<https://www.ua.edu/directory/?i=eklittle#listing>)

Office Hours: MW 10-11:30am in ten Hoor, Rm 308

Email: eklittle@crimson.ua.edu

Prerequisites

UA Course Catalog Prerequisites:

No prereqs found

Course Description

Course Description and Credit Hours

Introduction to the conduct of political inquiry and methods of political research.

This class will have two primary goals: 1) to expose students to methods for developing a research design in political science, and 2) to give practical insight into communication skills among academic peers in the pursuit of political science research. Methods learning will emphasize designing a research question and theory, critically analyzing academic literature, and introducing basic quantitative and qualitative approaches social science research. Practical communication skills will include small-group engagement, critically evaluating one another's work with respect, and oral presentation of student-led research.

Required Texts

Required Texts from UA Supply Store:

- NONE / NO TEXT REQUIRED (Required)

There is no required book for this course. Readings will be academic journal articles or book excerpts posted to Blackboard with advance notice.

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to...

- write a focused research question
- discern and critically analyze relevant academic literature
- develop a theory
- develop a basic quantitative or qualitative research design
- identify potential biases in a research design
- communicate research effectively and concisely
- evaluate other peers' work constructively

Other Course Materials

Some supplemental texts, which I will use to inform lectures in this course:

- *Intelligent Research Design: a guide for beginning researchers in the social sciences* (Hancke'), ISBN: 9780199570782
- *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (King, Keohane, and Verba), DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-90400-9_58 (https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-90400-9_58)
- *A Model Discipline: Political Science and the Logic of Representations* (Clarke and Primo), DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195382198.001.0001> (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195382198.001.0001>)
- *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines* (Beach and Pedersen), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.2556282> (<https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.2556282>)
- *How Not to Be Wrong: The Power of Mathematical Thinking* (Ellenberg), ISBN: 9780143127536

Academic journal articles will be available on JSTOR or posted to Blackboard with notice.

Outline of Topics

PART I: ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTION

Week 1 (1.10-1.12): Introduction to political inquiry

Week 2 (1.15-1.19): Writing a research question

- NO CLASS on Monday, 1.15 (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)
- **General research interests must be posted to Blackboard by 9am on Wednesday, 1.17**

Week 3 (1.22-1.26): Reading academic literature and refining a research question

- **General research question due Wednesday, 1.24**

Week 4 (1.29-2.2): Putting together a literature review

- **Specific research question due Wednesday, 1.31**

PART II: DEVELOPING A THEORY

Week 5 (2.5-2.9): Descriptive Inference

- **Bibliography due Wednesday, 2.7**

Week 6 (2.12-2.16): Causality and Linearity

Week 7 (2.19-2.23): Process-Tracing and Endogeneity

Week 8 (2.26-3.2): Making Assumptions and Logical Fallacy

- **Critique #1 due Friday, 3.2**

Week 9 (3.5-3.9): Writing a research proposal

- **Theoretical abstracts due Wednesday, 3.7**

Week 10 (3.12-3.16): *NO CLASS (Spring Break)*

PART II: RESOLVING POTENTIAL ISSUES

Week 11 (3.19-3.23): Selection Bias

- **Research Proposal due Wednesday, 3.21**

Week 12 (3.26-3.30): Omitted Variable Bias

Week 13 (4.2-4.6): Film (*Titanic's Final Mystery*)

- *NO CLASS on Friday, 4.6 (Honors Day)*

Week 14 (4.9-4.13): Measurement Error

- **Write-up of methods, including at least 1 potential bias or issue with your project due Wednesday, 4.11**

Week 15 (4.16-4.20): Putting it all together

- **Critique #2 due Friday, 4.20**

Week 17 (4.23-4.27): Poster Presentations

- **Electronic .pdf copy of your poster due Monday, 4.23**

Exams and Assignments

There are no exams in this course. Your final project (oral presentation + poster) will be graded in lieu of a final exam. All assignments will have separate instructions posted to Blackboard at least 2 weeks prior to its due date.

IMPORTANT DUE DATES:

- 1.17 - General interests posted to Blackboard
- 1.24 - General research question
- 1.31 - Specific research question
- 2.7 - Bibliography
- 3.2 - Critique #1
- 3.7 - Theoretical abstract
- 3.21 - Research proposal
- 4.11 - Write-up of methods
- 4.20 - Critique #2
- 4.23 - Electronic .pdf copy of your poster

Grading Policy

Class attendance and participation is vital to this course. Material discussed in class will appear on both the midterm exam and the final, regardless of whether it appears in the assigned readings.

Participating in class by asking questions, making thoughtful comments, and adding new information is important for everyone's continuing education. Discussions are intended for the mutual benefit of all

students; disrespectfulness will not be tolerated. Removal from the classroom for any reason will be treated as an absence. Students are expected to come to class prepared to answer questions, make comments and enter into the discussions.

The grading policy for this course is outlined below:

15% - CLASS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

15% - WRITTEN RESEARCH PROPOSAL

20% - FINAL PROJECT

- 10% - Electronic .pdf copy of your poster
- 10% - Oral presentation

50% - CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

- 5% - General interests posted to Blackboard
- 5% - General research question
- 5% - Specific research question
- 10% - Bibliography
- 5% - Critique #1
- 5% - Theoretical abstract
- 10% - Write-up of methods
- 5% - Critique #2

The University of Alabama grading scheme will be followed: 99-100 = A+, 92-98 = A; 90-91 = A-; 88-89 = B+; 82-87 = B; 80-81 = B-; 78-79 = C+; 72-77 = C; 70-71 = C-; 68-69 = D+; 62-67 = D; 60-61 = D-; less than 60 = F.

Policy on Missed Exams and Coursework

Students who miss coursework due to observance of religious practice, documented (by a doctor or health clinic/hospital) health-related issue, or death of a relative or close friend should contact me by email or during my office hours *as soon as possible*. I reserve the right to reject the option to make up work due to any reason not listed above.

Attendance Policy

Attendance will be taken at the start of each class. Absences will be excused for the following, discussed with me in advance: observance of a religious practice, documented (by a doctor or health clinic/hospital) health-related issue, or death of a relative or close friend. More than three cumulative absences without an above listed excuse will affect students' attendance and participation grades. Three unexcused absences are permitted without penalty. However, the fast-paced nature of this course and the use of supplemental materials in class, will make it more difficult for students to do well in this course without being present.

Notification of Changes

The instructor will make every effort to follow the guidelines of this syllabus as listed; however, the instructor reserves the right to amend this document as the need arises. In such instances, the instructor will notify students in class and/or via email and will endeavor to provide reasonable time for students to adjust to any changes.

Statement on Academic Misconduct

Students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the official Code of Academic Conduct (<http://catalog.ua.edu/undergraduate/about/academic-regulations/student-expectations/code-academic-conduct/>) provided in the Online Catalog.

Statement On Disability Accommodations

Contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) (<http://catalog.ua.edu/undergraduate/about/support-programs/disability-services/>) as detailed in the Online Catalog.

Severe Weather Protocol

Please see the latest Severe Weather Guidelines (<http://catalog.ua.edu/undergraduate/about/support-programs/severe-weather-guidelines/>) in the Online Catalog.

Pregnant Student Accommodations

Title IX protects against discrimination related to pregnancy or parental status. If you are pregnant and will need accommodations for this class, please review the University's FAQs on the UAct website (<https://www.ua.edu/campuslife/uact/information/pregnancy>).

Religious Observances

Under the Guidelines for Religious Holiday Observances, students should notify the instructor in writing or via email during the first two weeks of the semester of their intention to be absent from class for religious observance. The instructor will work to provide reasonable opportunity to complete academic responsibilities as long as that does not interfere with the academic integrity of the course. See full guidelines at Religious Holiday Observances Guidelines (http://provost.ua.edu/uploads/3/9/7/6/39760652/0aa_guidelines_for_religious_holiday_observance.pdf).

UAct Statement

The UAct website (<https://www.ua.edu/campuslife/uact/>) provides an overview of The University's expectations regarding respect and civility.