POLITICAL SCIENCE 495: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS
M/W, 4-5:30PM SEIGLE HALL, ROOM 004

This course provides an introduction to qualitative and quantitative research methods in political science. Topics address issues related to theory building (e.g., case studies and formal models) as well as theory testing (e.g., observational studies and experiments). Technical issues related to these methods are not the focus of this course. Theoretical issues regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the different approaches are instead. Ultimately, the goal of this course is twofold: (1) to instruct students to critically analyze scholarly articles with particular attention to research design, and (2) to guide students in how to design an original research project, such as a senior thesis. Both the readings assignments, including methodological and applied readings, and the written assignments are directed toward these goals.

EXPECTATIONS/REQUIREMENTS:
Students are expected to come to each class having read the assignments for that day ahead of time and to participate in the class discussions. All students must submit their assignments on time. Late assignments will be graded down 1/3 point for every day late. Late assignments will not be accepted after 3 days. Late final exam essays will not be accepted at all. Extensions may be granted but only in the case of serious unforeseen illness and/or family emergencies. Powerpoint slides will not be made available to students.

READING ASSIGNMENTS:
Reading assignments include two types: (1) methodological readings, and (2) applied readings in American politics, comparative politics, or international relations. The methodological readings discuss theoretical issues related to each method while the applied readings are examples of original research using each method. Readings are available through e-reserves (password: methods). A list of optional readings will be made available electronically.

EXAMS:
The course will have a mid-term and a final exam. Each exam will have an in-class and take-home component. The in-class exam is comprised mainly of short-answers about various methodological issues. The take-home exam (methodical critique) will consist of one 8-12 page essay in which students offer a thoughtful, methodological critique of an academic article.

GRADES:
- Midterm (take-home): 30%
- Midterm (in-class): 15%
- Final (take-home): 30%
- Final (in-class): 15%
- Participation: 10%

I. RESEARCH METHODS: PURPOSE AND GOALS (WED., 01/16/13)

TOPICS/QUESTIONS: What is methodology? Why does it matter? How does the method we use shape the answers that we get? Is there a best method? What is the scientific method?
**METHOD READINGS:**


*** MARTIN LUTHER KING HOLIDAY*** MON., 01/21/13. NO CLASS. ****

II. RESEARCH TOPIC/QUESTION SELECTION (WED., 01/23/13)

**TOPICS/QUESTIONS:** What is the difference between a research question and a research puzzle? What makes a good topic? How to find a good topic? What are the differences between problem-driven versus method-driven approaches? Which is superior?

**Please come to class prepared to discuss your thesis interests.**

**METHOD READINGS:**


**APPLIED READINGS:** NONE

III. CONCEPTUALIZATION AND MEASUREMENT (MON., 01/28/13; WED., 01/30/13)

**TOPICS/QUESTIONS:** What is the difference between a concept and a measure? What is concept stretching? When is a measure valid and reliable?

**METHOD READINGS:**


**APPLIED READINGS:**


*Guest: Office of Undergraduate Research, Joy Keifer. Summer Research Grant Proposals.*
IV. CAUSALITY (Mon., 02/04/13 and Wed., 02/06/13)

**Topics/Questions:** What is causality? Can we demonstrate it in social science research and how? What are the following terms: tautology, spuriousness and endogeneity?

**Method Readings:**


V. FORMAL THEORY (Mon., 02/11/13, and Wed., 02/13/13)

**Topics/Questions:** What are the assumptions of rational choice theory? Are these assumptions realistic? Does it matter if they are not? When are formal models most/least effective?

**Method Readings:**


**Applied Readings:**


VI. CASE STUDY METHODS (Mon, 02/18/13)

**Topics/Questions:** How are qualitative methods and case studies useful? What are their limitations? What is the best case study method?

**Method Readings:**


**Applied Readings:**


VII. CASE SELECTION/SELECTION BIAS (Wed., 02/20/13)

**Topics/Questions:** What are the best principals to follow when choosing case studies to examine? What does the term selection bias mean and what problems arise from it?
**METHOD READINGS:**


**APPLIED READINGS:**


---

**VIII. COUNTERFACTUALS (MON., 02/25/13)**

**TOPICS/QUESTIONS:** What is a counterfactual? What purpose can counterfactuals serve in research? When are counterfactuals useful and what constitutes a good counterfactual?

**METHOD READINGS:**


---

**IX. RESEARCH ETHIC STANDARDS (WED., 02/27/13)**

**TOPICS/QUESTIONS:** Why do IRBs exist? What kind of research will they approve? What kind of research does not need IRB approval?


**Guest: Washington University in St. Louis IRB Representative**

---

********** MIDTERM EXAM **********

EXAM REVIEW AND LIBRARY SESSION, MON., 03/04/13. **Guest: Research Librarian, Barbara Rekhop**

IN-CLASS EXAM, WED. 03/06/13

TAKE-HOME DUE FRIDAY, 03/08/13 BY 5 PM

**********SPRING BREAK (MON. 03/11/13; WED. 03/13/13 **********

---

**X. INTERVIEWS (MON., 03/18/13 AND WED., 03/20/13)**

**TOPICS/QUESTIONS:** Why interview people? How should I structure and approach an interview so that it is most effective? How to obtain interviews?

**METHOD READINGS:**


**APPLIED READINGS:**


**XI. OBSERVATIONAL STUDIES (Mon., 03/25/13 and Wed., 03/27/13)**

**TOPICS/QUESTIONS:** What are the advantages of observational studies and when are they appropriate? To what does the term generalizability refer? What are the shortcomings of observational studies and how can they be overcome?

**METHOD READINGS:**


**APPLIED READINGS:**


**XII. CONTENT ANALYSIS (Mon., 04/01/13 and Wed. 04/03/13 [Lab Session])**

**TOPICS/QUESTIONS:** What is content analysis? When is it appropriate? What are its benefits and shortcomings? What are the advantages and disadvantages of computer-aided content analysis?

**METHOD READINGS:**


**APPLIED READINGS:**


**XIII. SURVEYS (Mon., 04/08/13 and Wed., 04/10/13)**

**TOPICS/QUESTIONS:** What kinds of things can you learn from surveys that you cannot learn from other methods? How to effectively design a survey from the instrument design to sampling and response rates?

**METHOD READINGS:**


**APPLIED READINGS:**


**XIV. LABORATORY/SURVEY EXPERIMENTS (Mon., 04/15/13 and Wed., 04/17/13 [Lab Session])**

**TOPICS/QUESTIONS:** How can lab experiments be applied to political science? How do experiments allow researchers to establish causality? What is external validity?

**METHOD READINGS:**


**APPLIED READINGS:**


**XV. NATURAL AND FIELD EXPERIMENTS (Mon., 04/22/13)**

**TOPICS/QUESTIONS:** How to natural/field experiments differ from lab experiments? What are their advantages and disadvantages compared to lab experiments? How can they natural/field experiments be applied to political science?

**METHOD READINGS:**


**APPLIED READINGS:**


**XVI. CONCLUSION: COMPARISON OF RESEARCH METHODS (Wed., 04/24/13)**

Exam Review. No Reading.

**** FINAL EXAM (IN-CLASS EXAM AND TAKE-HOME ESSAY), May 3, 2013 6:00PM - 8:00PM ****