

**Political Science Methods, POLS 2601**

**Fall 2009**

**MW 2:00 – 3:15, Pafford 112**

**Political Science and Planning**

**University of West Georgia**

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***Course Descriptions:***

This is an introductory course for those who need to learn research methods in social sciences, especially in political science. It covers the major topics: meaning & requirements of empirical research, developing research question and hypotheses, designing research, collecting data (survey, interview, & case study), analyzing data, reporting results, writing reports & papers, and ethical issues in conducting research. The course focuses on practical examples and skills by which students can develop, design, and conduct an empirical research.

***Learning outcomes (ΣY):***

- Y<sub>1</sub>. Student determines the nature and extent of the information needed to conduct research by developing a clear and appropriately narrow research focus that is in accordance with the requirements of the assignments.
- Y<sub>2</sub>. Student will identify, distinguish among, and locate a variety of types of sources relevant to political science research and will accurately identify the main ideas and arguments in the texts they have selected for use in their research projects, evaluating them for reliability, validity, accuracy, authority, timeliness, point of view or bias, and restate them in their own words.
- Y<sub>3</sub>. Student will create and carry out a formal research design, constituent with generally recognized standards in political science, choosing among different methodologies, and effectively integrate specific information from the materials they have located.
- Y<sub>4</sub>. Students will communicate their research findings clearly and coherently into their research projects in the form of quotations and paraphrases to support their main points.
- Y<sub>5</sub>. Student will cite sources correctly using the APSA format.

***Required Texts:***

**Jarol Manheim, Richard Rich, Lars Willnat, & Craig Briens (2007) *Empirical Political Analysis: Quantitative & Qualitative Research Methods*, 7<sup>th</sup> Ed. Longman.**

\*\*\* Although statistical software (e.g., SPSS, STATA, ...) are not required formally, students should be able to use EXCEL as a minimum requirement. In the later part of the course, statistical analyses will use EXCEL primarily, and SPSS secondarily.

***Recommended Texts:***

Levitt, Steven and Stephen Dubner (2005) *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything*. William Morrow

Babbie, Earl (2006) *The Practice of Social Research*, Wadsworth Publishing Company: Albany

Dillman, Don A. (1999). *Mail and Internet surveys: The tailored method, Second edition*. NY: John Wiley and Sons.

***Required Skills:***

Communication skill: Students should be actively engaged in discussions, exchanging their ideas with other students and the instructor. Analytical skill: This course does not use advanced mathematical skills but require students to review basic mathematical techniques to understand the statistical foundations. ***You need help for basic statistics and math?*** Stop by my office (136

Pafford) anytime. Throughout the semester, individual help is available for students who struggle to solve mathematical and statistical problems in this course. Please bring your problems to my office or send me email.

**Requirements:**

**1. Exams (“E”)**

There will be three exams. The exams evaluate your comprehensive understanding of class discussions and statistical skills. Utilize all the notes and materials that we discussed in the class. The exams will consist of straightforward and analytical questions (See the examples below). The mid-terms and final exams account for **15%** and **25%**, respectively, of your final grade.

*A straightforward question: “Describe the cycle (stages) of research process.”*

*An analytical question: “Evaluate operational validity (face, content, criterion, and construct validity) for the following research. In what ways does the measure have validity problem? “The study examines how individual driving ability affects safe driving. Driving ability is measured by individual performance on a driving test (driving test scores).””*

**2. Homework assignments (“H”)**

Almost every week you will have homework that help you review the class discussions. Please return the assignments in the beginning of the next class. Homework will require normally two or three long pages of answers. Late submission will not be accepted. All the homework assignments account for **15%** of your final grade.

**3. Research paper & presentation (“RP”)**

Each student develops a research question and conducts an empirical research during the semester. The topic should be approved by the instructor by September 2. At the end of the semester, each student should submit a completed paper and present it before the class. The paper (20%) and presentation (5%) account for **25%** of your final grade.

\* The major components of the research paper (Please read the chapter 22 of the text that provides more detailed guides for writing a research paper). Section titles in your paper may not be different from these components:

a. Introduction (1 or 2 pages)

The research question should be proposed clearly, with some background descriptions. It should be testable and relevant to current political and social issues.

b. Literature review (2 or 3 pages)

Major findings and data of the relevant prior studies should be identified and explained. Discuss implications for your study.

c. Research hypotheses (1 page)

Specific research hypotheses are presented based on the literature review and your own observations with logical reasons.

d. Methodology (2 or 3 pages)

1. Data collection strategy: How do you collect data? By what? Population? Sample?

2. Variables: Describe the definition and measurement of dependent and independent variables

3. Analysis strategy: How do you analyze the data? By what method?
- e. Findings (4 or 5 pages)  
Report the major findings and evaluate if the hypotheses are verified.
- f. Conclusion (1 page)  
A short summary and strengths & weakness of the research. Recommendations for the future or further research.
- g. Reference (1 page)  
The minimum requirement is ten references. Among them, at least five references should not be a direct website source (www.....) but an academic literature (books, journals, hard copy publications, etc..)

\* Citation style: The **Chicago Manual of Style** (15<sup>th</sup> Edition) is required. For detailed information, please look up the website:

[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)

\* **Total number of pages: 13 ~ 16 pages** (double-spaced, Times New Roman 12 font with 1 inch margin – top, bottom, left, and right)

\* **Important due dates**

**(1) Topic and background description: 9/2 in class**

**(2) Final paper: 11/18 in class**

\* Presentation of the paper

Each student should present its paper. About 10 minutes will be given for each student. The presentation should be made by Power Point (However, depending on the class size, poster presentation can be considered).

\* Some examples from the previous classes:

- (1) *Is sex education an effective measure to decrease the teen pregnancy?*
- (2) *The success factors of newly elected representatives and senators*
- (3) *Political culture of UWG students: Who are more likely to vote?*
- (4) *Do non-traditional college students experience greater academic success than their traditional counterparts?*
- (5) *The impact of education on environmental involvement*
- (6) *What influence does community type have on political party preference?*
- (7) *The mentoring programs for African American male students: Do the programs increase the retention rate?*
- (8) *Does status of minority make a difference in community-around campus/campus events?*
- (9) *How do UWG students perceive safety on campus?*
- (10) *How does gender of presidential ticket affect the voting outcome?: What impact does Sarah Palin bring to McCain's election?*
- (11) *Drinking age impact*
- (12) *Does academic disciplinary difference make a significant difference in voting behavior?*
- (13) *Do gun control regulations actually reduce gun-related crime?*

#### 4. Participation and attendance (“PA”)

Class attendance is mandatory. Participation and attendance will take a portion of **5%** of the final grade. Each absence will deduct your total grade point by two percent. Any student missing more than four times will be dropped from the course for excessive absence. Make-up exam is NOT allowed. **Any expected or unexpected absence should be approved by the instructor with a written evidence (e.g., doctor’s note, departmental letter, etc..).** In this course, attendance is defined “presence in the classroom from the beginning of class until the end of class.” Late coming or early leaving without prior permission will be considered absence.

\* An extra credit will be given to only those who have a perfect attendance record.

#### *Final Grade:*

Final grade is made by summing up all the requirements above.

Requirements	Percentage
Exam 1 (Mid-term)	15
Exam 2 (Mid-term)	15
Exam (Final)	25
Homework	15
Research paper and presentation	25
Participation	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

**Your final grade =  $f$  (Es, H, RP, P)**

$A \geq 90\%$ ,  $80\% \leq B \leq 89\%$ ,  $70\% \leq C \leq 79\%$ ,  $60\% \leq D \leq 69\%$ ,  $F \leq 59\%$

*Suggestions (No and Yes) for behavioral issues in class:*

*No chatting with others*

*No texting*

*No sleeping*

*No reading another class material*

*No working on a laptop computer*

*Yes - Active participation*

### STEP-BY-STEP COURSE SCHEDULE

	Date	Step	Topics	Readings (Chapter)	Recommended time-plan for Paper
<b>Foundation</b>	8/17,19	What is research and research method?	Course introduction. How to do research: Building a house and research process Empirical research and scientific methods	1, 2	Find a topic and research question (talk to others, read books, library search)
	8/24, 26	Developing research questions and hypotheses	Specifying research questions Formulating hypotheses	2	
	8/31,9/2	Conducting a literature review	How to do a literature review?	3,4	<b>Paper topic due on 9/2 (Topic and about 150 words background description)</b>
<b>Methodology</b>	9/9,14	Developing framework and design	Causal inference Control Experimental design Non-experimental design	5,6	Write the introduction
	9/16, 21	Developing measurement	Reliability Validity		Write the literature review
	<b>9/23</b>	<b>EXAM 1</b>			
	9/28	Collecting Data	Sampling Population	7	Write the hypotheses
	9/30, 10/5, 7		Survey Questionnaire, scale	8, 9	Start the data collection, survey questions
	10/12		Content analysis	10	Collecting data
	10/14		Secondary data	11, 12	Collecting data
	10/19		Case study		Collecting data
	10/21, 26		Interview, direct observation, Focus group	19,20,21	Write the methodology
<b>10/28</b>	<b>EXAM 2</b>				
<b>Analysis</b>	11/2	Analyzing Data	Describing data	14,15	Analyze your data and discuss major findings
	11/4		Univariate analysis Essential indicators Distribution	16	Write the findings
	11/9, 11		Bivariate analysis Strength of relationship Testing for statistical significance Small sample inference T-test	17	Write the introduction again, and the conclusion. Write the references.
	11/16, 18		Measure of association, One-way ANOVA Correlations	17	<b>Paper Due (11/18) in class, prepare presentation</b>
<b>Wrapping-up</b>	11/23	Wrapping-up a research project		23	Prepare presentation
	11/30,12/2	Paper Presentation			
	<b>12/7, 2-4 PM</b>	<b>FINAL EXAM</b>	<b>Comprehensive Test</b>		

**Note: The schedule is provisional.**