

Political Science 2NN3 Politics by Design

Fall 2019

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Course Description

Political Science is a field of study with many obvious uses: It can educate and enlighten us about the world in which we live. It can transform us into knowledgeable citizens that can act on the world in an intelligent and effective way.

Note, though, that our discipline is called Political **Science**, which raises questions of its own. What is it that makes a political analysis scientific? Is a science of politics even possible? Can political science discover laws, or at least guidelines that will enable us to understand why certain outcomes occur? Why development? Why democracy? Why political stability? Why war and peace? And if so, how?

This course will explore some of the techniques that you can use to design a “scientific” study of politics. You will learn how to construct good research questions, how to operationalize variables, how to gather primary data, and how to test cause-effect hypotheses about the political world.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Develop and test a viable research hypothesis
- Gather primary data using a variety of different methods
- Recognize the advantages and limitations of different types of research methods

Required Materials and Texts

- Halperin, Sandra, and Heath, Oliver, *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills*, Second Edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017
- I have included several articles (see the weekly schedule below) that are accessible on-line through google scholar or the library catalogue.
- Several book chapters have been posted on Avenue to Learn

Class Format

The key to doing well in this course is to attend all lectures and tutorials. *Please note that many of the concepts covered in lecture will not be covered in the required readings and vice versa.*

Course Evaluation – Overview

1. Tutorial Participation – 25%
2. Research Proposal Part I: Literature Review and Research Question– 20%, due in tutorial the week of October 7-11, 2019
3. Research Proposal Part II: Proposed Method – 20%, due in tutorial the week of November 25-29, 2019

4. Exam – 35%, to be held in the official examination period in December

Course Evaluation – Details

Tutorial Participation – 25%

Learning research methods in the abstract is important. However, one of the overarching objectives of this course is to make you comfortable **using** these methods in your own research. Accordingly, tutorials will emphasize the hands-on application of the methods taught in class. **Please note: A detailed week-by-week overview of your tutorial assignments is contained in the Tutorial guide posted on Avenue.**

Participation in tutorial groups accounts for 25% of your grade. Remember, participation is not synonymous with attendance. A successful grade is dependent upon your ability to actively, regularly and intelligently contribute to discussion. Please consult the Tutorial guide for additional details on how you will be assessed.

Research Proposal Part I: Literature Review and Research Question - 20%, due in tutorial the week of October 7-11, 2019

Each student is responsible for writing a multi-part research proposal this term. The goal of the assignment is to design an original primary-source research study.

To set the context: To this point in your academic career, many of your assignments in the social sciences have likely been synthetic and derivative – writing essays based upon an assessment of other people’s research. This assignment, by contrast, requires you to occupy the role of a **primary** researcher.

First and foremost, you will need a research topic – a topic that has space for doing an original research study! One useful starting point is to select an event that is so recent that there are not yet any (or many) academic studies – consider, for example, the passing of Bill 21 in Quebec (a Bill that bans the use of religious symbols by public sector workers). Who supports the Bill and why? Does support for Bill 21 intersect with class, gender, education, religious affiliation, province of residence? How has the Bill been framed by the mainstream media? Is there an Islamophobic undercurrent to pronouncements by the Coalition Avenir Quebec? Alternatively, your research might involve filling in a gap in our understanding of a long-existent phenomenon. Perhaps there are not yet many studies on the relationship between social media use and levels of political participation?

In either case, the topic that you select will be one of your own choosing (provided that it fits within the general parameters of political science). In addition, the research question must be one that can be answered with **empirical evidence** (i.e. stay away from overtly normative questions).

The term research proposal will be constructed in several stages:

Part I of the research proposal is an 8 page academic **literature review** related to your research topic (due in tutorial the week of October 7-11). Your literature review should draw upon a **minimum** of 8 peer-reviewed sources.

Please note that a literature review is not the same as an annotated bibliography – it requires much more than a simple summary of a few articles. A literature review is itself a research paper. **The Tutorial Guide (posted on Avenue) contains a discussion on literature reviews: Please read that discussion (as well as Chapters 4 and 5 in the Halperin and Heath textbook) before you begin this assignment.** In addition, you might want to read some actual literature reviews. For example: “Pitfalls and Prospects in the Peacekeeping Literature,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11, 2008, pp283–301, or Snow, Dave, and Harding, Mark S., “From Normative Debates to Comparative Methodology: The Three Waves of Post Charter Supreme Court Scholarship in Canada,” *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 45, 4, 2015, pp451-466.

By the time you have finished your literature review you should have a well-developed **research question** – A question about an area of the political or social world where you can make a unique contribution to human knowledge. It is this research question that will guide the rest of the research proposal.

Research Proposal Part II: Proposed Method – 20%, due in tutorial the week of November 25-29, 2019

Now that you have a research question (see Part I), how will you gather the data that will allow you to construct an answer? In the second part of the term assignment you will select and explore one of the data gathering methods that could be used to start your research study (e.g. survey, ethnography, interview, content analysis, etc.).

You will not actually be conducting an interview, survey, or ethnographic study in this class, but how would you do so if time permitted? Consider the strengths of the method; the limitations of the method; any ethical challenges associated with the method; the pitfalls that you might face – and how you would overcome them.

To be able to do this assignment successfully, you **must** do some research on the method itself. For example, let’s assume that you have selected interviewing as your data collection method. Why is an interview the best placed method for your specific research question? What type of interview is most appropriate for your research question and why? What type of sampling strategy will you use and why? Start with the textbook and its recommended end-of-chapter readings - and do some independent research yourself (your bibliography should contain a **minimum** of 5 academic sources).

The proposed method assignment should be at least 8 pages in length.

Further details of this assignment are contained in the Tutorial guide (posted on Avenue). We will also be discussing the term assignment in class.

Exam – 35%, to be held in the official examination period in December

The December exam will cover material from lectures, tutorials, and the required readings.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Topic 1 (September 3, 2019)

Introduction

Why a class in methods may be the most important class of your degree

Topic 2 (September 4-10, 2019)

Can we make political science scientific?

Issues of Ontology, Epistemology, and Methodology

Readings:

H&H Ch. 1-3

Topic 3 (September 11-17, 2019)

Where to start? Techniques for finding a good research question. Starting your research journey with a literature review.

Readings:

H&H Ch. 4-5

Topic 4 (September 18, 2019)

Ethics in Research

Can political science be unethical? How do we conduct ethical political science? What role does the researcher play in constructing truth?

Readings:

Fujii, Lee Ann, "Research Ethics 101: Dilemmas and Responsibilities," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 45, 4, 2012, pp717-723 – available on-line

Carrick-Hagenbarth, and Epstein, Gerald A., "Dangerous interconnectedness: economists' conflicts of interest, ideology and financial crisis," *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 36, 2012, pp43-63 – available on-line

Topic 5 (September 24, 2019)

Conceptualizing and operationalizing your variables

How will you see your variables (democracy, development, fake news) in the real world?

Readings:
H&H Ch. 7

Coppedge, Michael, et al. "Conceptualizing and measuring democracy: A new approach," *Perspectives on Politics*, 9, 2, 2011, pp247-267 – available on-line

Schwartz, Jason, "[Study: Americans view media negatively, can't agree on meaning of 'fake news'](#)," *Politico*, January 16, 2018

Tandoc Jr., Edson C., et. al., "Defining 'fake news': A typology of scholarly definitions," *Digital Journalism*, 6, 2, 2018 – available on-line

Topic 6 (September 25, 2019)

Research Designs: How will you structure your study? Which cases will you select and why?

Readings:
H&H Ch. 6, 9

Bouma, Gary D., et al., *The Research Process*, Second Canadian Edition, Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2012, Ch. 7, pp103-134 – Available on Avenue

Topic 7 (October 1-2, 2019)

Experiments

Readings:
H&H Ch. 8

Niven, David, "A Field Experiment on the Effects of Negative Campaign Mail on Voter Turnout in a Municipal Election," *Political Research Quarterly*, 59, 2, 2006, pp203-210 – available on-line

Topic 8 (October 8-9, 2019)

Sampling

Readings:

H&H pp273-278

Neuman, W. Lawrence, and Robson, Karen, *Basics of Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Fourth Canadian Edition, Don Mills: Pearson, 2016, Ch. 7, pp131-159 – Available on Avenue

Reading Week (October 15-16, 2019)

No Class: Mid-term recess

Topic 9 (October 22-23, 2019)

Surveys

Readings:

H&H Ch. 11

Coyne, Andrew, "[Biggest problem with MyDemocracy survey is the questions](#)," *National Post*, December 9, 2016

Topic 10 (October 29-30, 2019)

Interviews and Focus Groups

Readings:

H&H Ch. 12

Mosley, Layna, "Just Talk to People? Interviews in Contemporary Political Science," in Layna Mosley, ed., *Interview research in political science*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013, pp 1-28 – posted on Avenue

Topic 11 (November 5-6, 2019)

Fieldwork/ethnography and Participant Observation

Readings:

H&H Ch. 13

Cohn, Carol, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12, 4, 1987, pp867–718 – available on-line

Topic 12 (November 12-13, 2019)

Unobtrusive methods: Discourse analysis/content analysis

Readings:
H&H Ch. 14

Corrigall-Brown, Catherine, and Wilkes, Rima, "Picturing Protest: The Visual Framing of Collective Action by First Nations in Canada," *American Behavioural Scientist*, 20, 10, 2011, pp1-21 – available on-line

Tedesco, John C., and Dunn, Scott W., "Political Advertising in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election: Ad Hominem Ad Nauseam," *American Behavioral Scientist*, 63, 7, 2019 – available on-line

Topic 13 (November 19-20, 2019)

**Quantitative and Qualitative data
To what extent are numbers political?**

Readings:
Saunders, Caroline, and Dalziel, Paul, "Twenty-Five Years of Counting for Nothing: Waring's Critique of National Accounts," *Feminist Economics*, 2016, pp1-19 – available on-line

Topic 14 (November 26-27, 2019)

Introduction to Quantitative analysis

Readings:
H&H Ch. 15

Topic 15 (December 3-4, 2019)

Review of term

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

Please submit a paper copy of your assignment in tutorial to your Teaching Assistant on the scheduled due date.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Late Assignments

Please note: late papers may be subject to a 2% per day grade deduction. For example, an 80% essay will be reduced to 78% if it is received one day late, 76% if two days late, etc.

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

Requests for extensions should be submitted through the [MSAF process](#).

The expectation for this course is that all components (including tutorial participation) will be completed.

In the event of an approved extension for the Literature Review or the Methods Paper, the assignment will be due one week from the original due date.

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be

deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students requiring a RISO accommodation should submit their request to their Faculty Office normally within 10 working days of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests

University Policies

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University's Policy for [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#).

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.