

02-45-500 (01)

Scope and Approaches to Political Science

Dr. Jamey Essex / Fall 2015 / Tues 10:00 am - 12:50 pm / CHN 1147

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Course description

In this course, incoming graduate students in the Department of Political Science learn about and develop appropriate research and analytical tools to successfully complete their master's degrees and, more specifically, to begin conceptualizing, researching, and ultimately writing the major research paper, internship report, or master's thesis. The class introduces students to the wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches in the discipline of political science, and to basic issues in planning and completing a long-term individual research project. We will pay significant attention to linking different phases of a research project and how to appropriately frame research questions, devise research strategies, and collect and analyse data.

Course goals and learning outcomes

The goals of this course are:

- To introduce students to the diverse range of theoretical and methodological approaches in the discipline of political science.
- To provide students the ability to design and begin work on a major research paper or thesis appropriate to completion of the MA degree in Political Science.
- To help students develop and refine their skills in critical thinking, writing, and analysis through the study of research methodologies and theoretical traditions in political science.

At the conclusion of this course, successful students will be able to:

- Formulate research questions and appropriate data collection and analysis strategies in order to conduct independent original research.
- Read, understand, and explain diverse theoretical and methodological approaches in political science, and to understand and explain why and how this diversity contributes to the discipline.

By the end of the semester, students will produce an original research proposal, including a research question, a discussion of methods appropriate to answering this question, and an

extensive literature review. It is expected that this document will form the basis for your major research paper or thesis in completing the MA degree.

Required readings

There are **three** required books for this course, listed below and available for sale through the university bookstore and online retailers such as amazon.ca. While we have assigned readings from two of these books almost every week of the semester, the third is a reference-style book that will be helpful to you more generally in this and other courses, and in writing your MA paper or thesis. Other readings may be assigned as necessary and will be made available through Leddy Library and/or the course Blackboard site. **It is imperative that you complete the assigned readings before coming to class each week.** As this is a small graduate seminar, the success of the class depends on your willingness and ability to keep up with the readings *and* to discuss them in the seminar setting each week.

- Michael Billig. (2013) *Learn to Write Badly: How to Succeed in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- David Marsh and Gerry Stoker, eds. (2010) *Theory and Methods in Political Science (3rd ed)*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. (Please note that we are using the 3rd edition of this book - previous editions are **not appropriate** as chapters and pagination have changed.)
- Kate Turabian. (2013) *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (8th ed)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Assignments and grades

Your grade in this course will be based on several components, but all require your attendance in class each week and your active participation in all facets of the course.

- **In-class participation (10%):** Participation marks are based on the frequency and (especially) quality of your contribution to class discussion. Participation will be marked not simply on how much you talk, but also on how well you articulate your points and contribute to discussion, as well as your attention in and preparation for class. There may also be written assignments to complete in class in any given week that will constitute part of the participation grade. At least one week's advance notice will be given for these in-class exercises if and when they occur. Suffice to say, not coming to class at all, playing on facebook, twitter, and youtube throughout

class, and never saying a word or discussing with me and your colleagues the material in any way, is not the way to earn marks.

- **Peer review #1 - abstract and outline (10%):** This assignment requires you to create a brief abstract of no more than 250 words, outlining a potential and/or planned MA research topic and likely theoretical and methodological approaches, and a rough outline of the paper that would follow from this abstract. The abstract and outline will be due at the beginning of class on **October 6**, when we will carry out a peer review. This in-class peer review exercise will count for 5% of your course grade, and then I will mark the abstract and outline myself after class, which will account for another 5% of the course grade.
- **Theory presentation (5%):** On **October 20**, students (working in groups of three) will make in-class presentations of 15-20 minutes in length outlining major ideas, arguments, and examples of theories discussed in chapters 2 through 8 of the Marsh and Stoker text *Theory and Methods in Political Science*. Details on the presentation assignment will be handed out in class no later than September 29.
- **Theory paper (20%):** A short paper (4 to 6 pages) based on the content presented in the class presentation will be due in class and electronically on **October 27**. The papers will address the theoretical content covered in the presentation, but will focus on a specific question regarding the use of theory in political science research. Details will be handed out in class no later than September 29.
- **Peer review #2 - the first five pages (5%):** The second peer review assignment, scheduled for **November 24**, requires you to bring at least the first five pages of your final research proposal paper to class and exchange them in class. This peer review accounts for 5% of the course grade, and is designed to get you started early on the actual writing of the proposal, and to give you some initial low-stakes feedback.
- **Final research proposal (50%):** The final research proposal papers (20-25 pages) are due no later than **4:00 pm on Friday, December 11**. This is the major assignment for the course and accounts for 50 percent of your course grade. In many departments, the first formal step MA students complete in moving beyond coursework and toward their major research paper or thesis is the submission and defense of a research proposal, in which they lay out their research project, including discussion of the question, methods, limitations, and context for the proposed research. This is typically done near or following the completion of a student's coursework, and in conjunction with the faculty supervisor and the paper or thesis committee. Our own department does this slightly differently, in that students are assigned an MA supervisor after completing the first semester of coursework, and proceed with their research

and writing in consultation with the supervisor without going through a formal proposal submission and defense process. For students pursuing their MA degree through the internship stream, this process is again slightly different, as students complete a six-month internship position following an application and interview process in the winter semester, and ultimately complete an internship report paper. In any event, none of you currently knows at the beginning of the fall semester what awaits you in terms of internships or paper and thesis options. For this reason, it is important that you conceptualize and begin working on a research project to fulfill the basic non-course requirement of the MA degree program. The research proposal assignment in 45-500 provides a basis for this, and gives you the opportunity to develop a research project as well as hone your research, analysis, and writing skills, all of which transfer to any and every other career and educational setting in which you may find yourself. Specific details on the requirements for this paper and how it will be marked will be provided in class on October 6.

Classroom etiquette and academic misconduct

Consistent with University of Windsor policy, cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty and misconduct are not tolerated. **Relevant official university and faculty policies regarding plagiarism and academic misconduct** at <http://www1.uwindsor.ca/aio/relevant-policies> and at <http://www1.uwindsor.ca/fahss/faculty-staff-procedure-manual>. Those suspected of violating these policies will be referred to the Associate Dean for potential disciplinary action, and students found guilty of academic misconduct endanger their status in the graduate program.

In class, you are expected to respect others' right to learn and discuss course themes and content in a safe and respectful environment. You should rely on facts, reason, and evidence to back arguments, and overtly racist, sexist, or otherwise inflammatory remarks will not be tolerated. I am very open about my own political views, and I encourage open debate and exchange of ideas.

Course expectations

Below I outline very clearly what I expect of you as a student in this course, and what you should expect of me as the instructor. For more information on the rules and regulations that govern student rights and responsibilities, please consult the University Senate bylaws (see Bylaws 31, 32, 33, and 51) at <http://web4.uwindsor.ca/senate> and the Academic Integrity Office at www.uwindsor.ca/aio.

In this course and in this classroom, I expect that you will:

- Attend class regularly (i.e., every week), arrive on time, and do all required reading;
- Pay attention, turn off your phone, refrain from distracting yourself and your classmates, and use your laptop for class-related activities only;
- Approach the course materials with an open mind and a serious attitude;
- Strictly adhere to the student code of conduct and observe the University's policies regarding academic honesty;
- Respect your fellow students' right to learn in a safe and hospitable classroom;
- Respect and take advantage of office hours, particularly if you are falling behind or having difficulty with the material;
- Understand that grades refer to the quality and precision of the work being graded, not to your need for a particular grade or to an open-ended negotiation between you and me.

For my part, you can expect that I will:

- Arrive to class on time and well-prepared to lecture and facilitate discussion;
- Complete the grading of exams and assignments in a timely fashion;
- Reply to emails in a timely fashion, normally within two working days;
- Be available during my scheduled office hours, and will re-schedule them if necessary (i.e., I won't cancel them without making them up at some other time);
- Take your questions and ideas seriously, so long as they are relevant to the material;
- Maintain a relaxed and professional classroom space for learning and discussion;
- Treat all students equitably with regard to grading and class discussion.

Course schedule

September 8: Introductions

- "Introduction" (pp 1-12), "Introduction to Part 1" (pp 15-22), and "Introduction to Part 2" (pp 181-183) in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*

Sept 15: Getting started – big questions in political science research

- Chapter 9, "A Skin Not a Sweater: Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science" (pp 184-211) and Chapter 10, "Meta-Theoretical Issues" (pp 212-231), in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*

Sept 22: Research design and methods I

- Chapter 11, “The Challenge of Research Design” (pp 232-248); Chapter 12, “Debating Methods: Rediscovering Qualitative Approaches” (pp 249-266); and Chapter 13, “Quantitative Methods” (pp 267-284) in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*

Sept 29: Research design and methods II

- Ongoing discussion of last week’s readings plus Chapter 14, “The Comparative Method” (pp 285-307) and Chapter 15, “The Experimental Method: Prospects for Laboratory and Field Studies” (pp 308-324) in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*

Oct 6: Getting it together: starting your research proposal

- No specific reading assigned, but we can catch up on lingering questions from weeks 1 to 4
- Discussion of final proposal requirements
- In-class peer review of abstracts

Oct 13: Reading week, no class**Oct 20: Presentations on theoretical approaches**

- Student presentations on theoretical approaches and traditions, based on chapters 2 through 8 in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*

Oct 27: Research ethics

- Guest lecture, University of Windsor Research Ethics Board
- Bhattacharjee, Yudhijit. (2013) “The Mind of a Con Man.” *The New York Times Magazine* online edition, April 26. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/28/magazine/diederik-stapels-audacious-academic-fraud.html>
- Singal, Jesse. (2015) “The Case of the Amazing Gay-Marriage Data: How a Graduate Student Reluctantly Uncovered a Huge Scientific Fraud.” *The New York Times Magazine* online edition, May 29. <http://nymag.com/scienceofus/2015/05/how-a-grad-student-uncovered-a-huge-fraud.html>
- Short theory papers due

Nov 3: The craft of writing I: why academic writing is both terrible and important

- Chapter 1, “Introduction” (pp 1-11); Chapter 2, “Mass publication and academic life” (pp 12-39); and Chapter 3, “Learning to write badly” (pp 40-66) in *Learn to Write Badly*

Nov 10: The craft of writing II: using and abusing language

- Chapter 4, “Jargon, nouns and acronyms” (pp 67-94); Chapter 5, “Turning people into things” (pp 95-114); and Chapter 6, “How to avoid saying who did it” (pp 115-142) in *Learn to Write Badly*

Nov 17: The craft of writing III: reading, critiquing, and using academic work

- Chapter 7, “Some sociological things” (pp 143-175); Chapter 8, “Experimental social psychology” (pp 176-205); and Chapter 9, “Conclusion and recommendations” (pp 206-215) in *Learn to Write Badly*

Nov 24: The craft of writing IV: peer review #2

- In-class peer review of first 5+ pages of final proposal paper draft
- No specific reading assigned, but we can catch up on lingering questions from weeks 7 to 11
- Further discussion of final proposal requirements as needed

Dec 1: Research and relevance

- Chapter 16, “The Relevance of Political Science” (pp 325-342) in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*
- Mervis, Jeffrey. (2014) “US political scientists relieved that Coburn language is gone.” *Science* online edition, January 23. <http://news.sciencemag.org/funding/2014/01/u.s.-political-scientists-relieved-coburn-language-gone>
- Mole, Beth. (2013) “NSF cancels political-science grant cycle.” *Nature* online edition, August 2. <http://www.nature.com/news/nsf-cancels-political-science-grant-cycle-1.13501>