DEPARTMENT OF
POLITICAL SCIENCE

Credit Weighting: 0.5

Pre-/Co-Requisites: 4.00 credits including POLS*1150

Restrictions: POLS*3180

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

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GENERAL DETAILS

Every day we hear statements about the political world from friends, family members, journalists, and politicians. More and more often, it can seem difficult to determine which of these statements are truthful and which ones are nonsense. Fortunately, political science offers a set of principles that can help us separate truth from fiction. These principles ensure that the claims of political scientists – unlike those your aunt might post on Facebook - observe rigid standards of research methods based on systematic and transparent investigation. This class offers an introduction to these research methods.

The class begins with a reflection on what we can and cannot achieve when conducting social science in general and political science in particular. In this component, we will discuss the philosophical underpinnings of the scientific method and the key arguments of those who are skeptical of its merit. The course then moves to the basic logic of social inquiry and reviews the most important concepts in and components of empirical political analysis: causation, theorization, operationalization, measurement, and research design. The final part of the class discusses how qualitative and quantitative researchers go about collecting their information, for example through field research, interview techniques, and unobtrusive methods of data collection.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- Understand the merits and criticisms of the scientific method as it applies to the social sciences
- Reason through the stages of a research project, in particular question formulation, theorization, operationalization, research design, case selection, and data collection
- Identify and evaluate the methodological choices in political science research
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different methodological approaches

METHOD OF ASSESSMENT

The final grade in this class consists of five components: participation in seminars (15 percent); reflection paper (10 percent); article analysis (20 percent); three online quizzes (5 percent each; 15 percent total); and final exam (35 percent).

REQUIRED READING

In addition to the lectures, the following textbook presents the key material for this course: Johnson, J.B.; Reynolds, H.T. & Mycoff, J.D. (2019). Political Science Research Methods (9th edition). Sage Publishing. (Chapters 1-10 & 15)

Please note that the University Bookstore offers the paperback at a comparatively low price because of a discount I was able to negotiate with the publisher. Make sure to compare prices if you consider purchasing this text from a different retailer.