**POLS 2650: Research Methods**

**Department of Political Science**

University of Guelph

Fall 2019

**Instructor:** Dr. Janine Clark

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**Class:**  Thursday 11:30 – 12:50, ROZH 103

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays 1:00pm to 2:00pm andThursdays 10:30 am to 11:20 am

MacKinnon Building, Room 540

**Course Description**

Every day we hear statements about the political world from friends, family members, journalists, and politicians. All these comments are relevant to political science but are not *part of* the discipline of political science. To qualify as such, they need to be based on a systematic and transparent investigation. In other words, it is in its reliance on rigid standards of research methods that the claims of political scientists differ from those we hear in everyday political debate.

This course is an introduction to the various steps in the research process with a particular focus on writing research proposals and on research methods. The class consists of three components. It starts with an overview of different philosophical perspectives on the conduct of social science in general and political science in particular. In this component, we will discuss whether it is possible to acquire ‘true knowledge’ about the world around us, and if so, how we can best go about doing so. The course then moves to the basics of writing a research proposal, including the formulation of a research question and the writing of a literature review. This section of the course also reviews the most important concepts in and components of empirical political analysis, such as causation, theorization, operationalization, and measurement. The final part of the class introduces some of the methods of data collection, such as sampling, interview techniques, and unobtrusive methods of data collection.

Course Objectives:

Students in this course will:

* Explain the difference between contrasting perspectives on truth, knowledge, and the conduct of social science
* Learn the elements of how to write a good research proposal, including, formulating a researchable research question
* Reason through the stages of a research project and, in particular, question formulation, theorization, operationalization, research design, case selection, and data collection
* Evaluate and critique research projects, including published articles based on research
* Identify and evaluate the methodological choices in political science research

**Skills-Based Learning**

Through the classroom lectures, tutorial discussion, your readings and assignments, you will also learn skills applicable outside the classroom. You will:

* advance your critical thinking
* advance your ability to understand abstract concepts
* improve your writing skills
* improve your research skills
* learn how to write a proposal applicable to any field, institution or job
* learn how to judge good research

**Methods of Instruction**

This course relies on two methods of instruction. First, a series of 12 lectures discusses the most important course material. Students are strongly encouraged to attend all lectures and to read the relevant material beforehand. Missing a lecture can make it difficult to understand the remainder of the class as each lecture builds directly on the material discussed in previous lectures. All lecture slides will be posted on Courselink before the lecture, however, reading through these slides cannot be seen as a substitute for class attendance. Materials will be introduced in class that are not on power point.

Second, students will attend 10 tutorials. In tutorial sessions students have the opportunity to discuss some of the material in detail and prepare themselves for the assignments in this class.

**Course Readings**

The course is based on a Top Hat textbook entitled *Research Methods in Education and Social Sciences* which must be purchased from Top Hat (see below) and on additional readings all of which can be accessed through the on-line library course reserve. These can be accessed by going through the “Libraries” link on the University of Guelph webpage (under “find resources” click “course reserves" and select POLS 2650).

Course Requirements & Distribution of Marks

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| **Class Participation – Worth 10% of the final grade**  **Tutorial Participation – Worth 15% of the final grade**  **Completion of Top Hat readings-based questions – Worth 5% of final grade**  **Top Hat Quiz questions – Worth 10% of final grade**  **Movie Assignment – Due OCTOBER 3RD – Worth 10% of the final grade**  **Literature Review Assignment – Due NOVEMBER 7TH – 25% of final grade**  **Final Exam -- UNIVERSITY SCHEDULED -- 25% of final grade** |