

**PLSC 408**  
**INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL RESEARCH**

Penn State University  
Department of Political Science  
Fall 2007

Professor Rickard  
srickard@psu.edu

Office hours: Mondays 3:45-4:15pm (Otto's Café in Kern Graduate Building)  
Wednesdays 1:15-2:15pm (Pond Lab 234)

**Purpose:** This course offers an introduction to empirical research methods in political science. It aims to help students understand the basic logic of research. By the end of the course, students will have a better acquaintance with the types of empirical work done by political scientists and the ability to understand and critique it. Although this course focuses largely on quantitative research methods, many of the principles taught apply to all types of systematic research.

**Texts:** Pollock, Phillip H. *The Essentials of Political Analysis* [Required]  
Johnson and Reynolds. *Political Science Research Methods* [Recommended]  
Moore, David. *Statistics: Concepts and Controversies* [Two-Hour Reserve]

**Grading:** Course grades will be assigned using the criteria outlined below. All requests for a re-grade must be made in writing. Such requests may result in either a higher or lower grade. No extra credit will be available at any point during this course.

15%	Assignments
25%	Midterm Exam #1 (In class on October 3)
25%	Midterm Exam #2 (In class on November 5)
30%	Midterm Exam #3 (In class on December 12)
5%	Class participation

**Exams:** Absolutely no makeup exams will be allowed unless written proof is provided of a hospitalization. In such cases, you must contact me as soon as possible prior to the exam; failure to do so will result in an F for the exam. Absolutely no exceptions will be made for any reason. Exams for this course consist primarily of short answer questions and short essay questions. Students will also be asked to do some mathematical calculations.

**Assignments:** Students will be required to complete three homework assignments in this class. Each assignment is worth 5% of the final course grade. Assignments must be turned in during class on the due date. Late assignments will not be accepted under any circumstances. Assignments turned in late will receive an F grade. Also, assignments will not be accepted by email under any circumstances. Written assignments must be typed and turned in during class in paper form, stapled in the upper left corner. Assignments that do not meet these specifications will be returned without a grade. Every student must do his or her own homework, subject to PSU's rules regarding academic dishonesty. Suspected plagiarism will result in an F grade for the assignment in question.

**Readings:** The required readings are shown below. Readings from sources other than the class texts are available from E-Reserves, ANGEL or the website designated in the syllabus. Students must complete the required readings *before* class and come prepared to discuss them. Thoughtful discussion of the readings will contribute to students' participation grade, which accounts for 5% of the final course grade. To obtain a participation grade of B, students must *consistently* demonstrate that they have done the required reading by answering questions and participating in discussions in class. To obtain an A grade, students must go above and beyond simply doing the reading. To obtain an A grade, students must *consistently* make thoughtful, intelligent comments on the readings which demonstrate that they have thought carefully and critically about the material. If students do not contribute to class discussion, they will receive a failing participation grade. Exact dates for the reading assignments are not shown on the syllabus; students will be responsible for attending class and being aware of when we move on to a new section. Reading assignments will be listed on ANGEL in the course lecture notes.

### **Part I: Studying Politics Scientifically (Weeks 1 and 2)**

1. Johnson and Reynolds, *Political Science Research Methods*, p.1-3
2. Johnson and Reynolds, *Political Science Research Methods*, 26-36.
3. Johnson and Reynolds, *Political Science Research Methods*, p.38-40.

[Homework assignment #1 due September 10]

### **Part II: Concepts and Measurement (Weeks 3 and 4)**

1. Pollock, *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, p.7-25
2. Moore, p. 127-140
3. Wooley, John T. 2000. Using Media-Based Data in Studies on Politics. *American Journal of Political Science*. 44(1):156-173.

[Homework assignment #2 due September 24]

### **Part III: Tools for Describing Data (Weeks 5 and 6)**

1. Moore, p. 216-233
2. Pollock, *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, p. 51-61, 109-112
3. Mackenzie, G. Calvin. "The Real Invisible Hand: Presidential Appointees in the Administration of George W. Bush" In *Quantitative Methods in Practice*, Ed. David Rochefort. CQ Press.

### **Part IV: Testing Hypotheses (Weeks 7-9)**

#### **A. Research Question**

1. Johnson and Reynolds, *Political Science Research Methods*, p.103-107, 49-50.

## B. Existing Explanations & Literature Reviews

1. Johnson and Reynolds, *Political Science Research Methods*, p. 130-137.
2. Knopf, Jeffrey. 2006. Doing a Literature Review. *PS: Political Science and Politics* p. 127-132

## C. Hypotheses

1. Pollock, *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, p. 28-37
2. Johnson and Reynolds, *Political Science Research Methods*, p.113-123
3. Landsburg, Steven. 2000. *Attack of the Giant Shopping Carts!*  
<http://slate.msn.com/id/81179>

## D. Designing tests (Weeks 10-16)

1. Pollock, *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, p. 37-47
2. Experiments
  - a. Johnson and Reynolds, *Political Science Research Methods*, p.53-59.
  - b. Wantchekon. 2003. Clientelism and Voting Behavior: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Benin. *World Politics* 55(3): 399.
3. Natural experiments
  - a. Pollock, *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, p. 41-42
  - b. Hyde, Susan. 2005. Observing Norms: Explaining the Causes and Consequences of Internationally Monitored Elections. Unpublished manuscript, University of California, San Diego.

[Homework assignment #3 due October 31]

4. Observational studies
  - a. Cross tabs and mean comparison tables: Pollock, 61-66, 87-99, 102-109
  - b. Russett, Hartley and Murray. "The End of the Cold War, Attitude Change and the Politics of Defense Spending" In *Quantitative Methods in Practice* Ed. David Rochefort. CQ Press.
5. Sample surveys
  - a. Pollock, *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, p. 102-190
  - b. Imai, Kosuke. 2005. Do Get Out the Vote Calls Reduce Turnout? The Importance of Statistical Methods for Field Experiments. *American Political Science Review* 99(2): 283-300.
  - c. Gerber and Green. 2005. Correction to Gerber and Green (2000), Replication of Disputed Findings and Reply to Imai (2005). *American Political Science Review* 99(2): 301-312.

## **Academic Dishonesty**<sup>1</sup>

The Department of Political Science, along with the College of the Liberal Arts and the University, takes violations of academic dishonesty seriously. Observing basic honesty in one's work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all members of the community are required to subscribe.

All course work by students is to be done on an individual basis unless an instructor clearly states that an alternative is acceptable. Any reference materials used in the preparation of any assignment must be explicitly cited. In an examination setting, unless the instructor gives explicit prior instructions to the contrary, whether the examination is in-class or take-home, violations of academic integrity shall consist of any attempt to receive assistance from written or printed aids, or from any person or papers or electronic devices, or of any attempt to give assistance, whether the one so doing has completed his or her own work or not.

Other violations include, but are not limited to, any attempt to gain an unfair advantage in regard to an examination, such as tampering with a graded exam or claiming another's work to be one's own. Violations shall also consist of obtaining or attempting to obtain, previous to any examinations, copies of the examination papers or the questions to appear thereon, or to obtain any illegal knowledge of these questions. Lying to the instructor or purposely misleading any Penn State administrator shall also constitute a violation of academic integrity.

In cases of a violation of academic integrity it is the policy of the Department of Political Science to impose appropriate penalties that are consistent with University guidelines.

---

<sup>1</sup>Much of the text above has been directly obtained from the sections of the Princeton University website <http://www.princeton.edu/pr/pub/rrr/99/pages/Ol.htm> concerning academic integrity (Rights, Rules, Responsibilities introductory text as well as pages 55-69) as well as from the website of the Department of Economics at The Pennsylvania State University.

## **Disabilities**

The Pennsylvania State University encourages qualified people with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities and is committed to the policy that all people shall have equal access to programs, facilities, and admissions without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by University policy or by state or federal authorities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell the instructor as soon as possible. Reasonable accommodations will be made for all students with disabilities, but it is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor early in the term. Do not wait until just before an exam to decide you want to inform the instructor of a learning disability; any accommodations for disabilities must be arranged well in advance.

## **Visit our web site**

The Political Science Department is in the process of upgrading its web site and will continue to do so during this and future academic years. In the undergraduate section you will find a wealth of information including course schedules, faculty office hours, faculty home pages describing their areas of teaching and research activities, answers to questions about advising, internship opportunities, announcements, and much, much, more. Check back often: we will continuously update our information about internships and career opportunities: <http://polisci.la.psu.edu/>