

17.869
Political Science Scope and Methods

Fall 2004
Tuesday 9:00-11:00
Room E51-376

Professor:

Adam J. Berinsky
E53-459
253-8190
e-mail: berinsky@mit.edu

TA

Zak Taylor
e-mail: mzak123@yahoo.com

This course is designed to provide an introduction to a variety of empirical research methods used by political scientists. The primary aims of the course are to make you a more sophisticated consumer of diverse empirical research and to allow you to conduct sophisticated independent work in your junior and senior years. This is *not* a course in data analysis. Rather, it is a course on how to approach political science research.

The course will consist of three parts. The first part of the course will involve readings, research assignments, and in-class exercises. Our readings will be roughly evenly divided between methodological works and notable applications of various research methods. Because, I study American politics, many of the examples I will use will be drawn from that field. But this is not a course in American politics. I hope that you will emerge from this course better equipped to undertake research of your own and better able to evaluate the work of others. The second section of the course involves visits from guest professors. Students will be responsible for preparing questions about the professor's research design and approach. The third part of the course will be taken up with presentations of work that students will be preparing throughout the semester.

This research project is a critical element of the course and should be taken very seriously. First, students will submit a two-page statement describing their research question and explaining why it was selected. Next, students will submit a list of at least 10 articles or three books on the topic and a brief abstract for each that presents the basic argument, findings, and relevance for the student's question. Next, students will submit a critical literature review (15 pages). This will serve as the basis for a 15-minute in-class presentation, which will be followed by a 15-minute group discussion of research strategies. Finally, building on this discussion, students will submit a 20-page research proposal that includes a revised version of the literature review and a new five-page section that proposes an original research

This course has been designated Communication Intensive (CIM). A CIM course is designed to help you develop your writing and speaking skills in the major. As a result, Writing Program faculty have been assigned to help with this course. The Writing Program faculty will provide you written comments on your Literature Review. In addition to the written comments that you will receive on the Literature Review, the Writing Program staff will be available to assist you with your two-page statement and your final proposal.

Grading

Grades will be calculated as follows:

- Class participation: 30%
- Class assignments project: 10%
- Explanation/defense of research topic: 5%
- Literature review: 15%
- Presentation: 10%
- Final research proposal: 30%

Please note that course participation is a critical part of your grade for this course. I expect that you will come to class prepared to discuss the week's readings.

Required Reading

A coursepack is available at Copytech. I will also be making great use of the following books and I suggest you purchase them:

1. Donald Campbell and Julian Stanley, *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research* (though due to the high cost of this book, you might not want to buy it).
2. Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*.
3. W. Phillips Shively, *The Craft of Political Research*.

Course Outline

I: The Scientific Method

1. Introduction and Course Overview (September 14)

2. Models and Theories in Political Science (September 21)

W. Phillips Shively, *The Craft of Political Research*, Chapters 1-2.

William Riker . "The Two-Party System and Duverger's Law: An Essay on the History of Political Science." *American Political Science Review*. 1982 (J)

David Mayhew. "Electoral Realignment." *Annual Review of Political Science*. Available at:

<http://arjournals.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev.polisci.3.1.449>

II: Methods of Research

3. Introduction to Research Design and The Experimental Method (September 28)

Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, Chapter 1.

Donald Campbell and Julian Stanley, *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research* (read pages 1-64; play close attention to pages 6-34).

4. Case Studies, Comparing Cases, and Statistical Analysis (October 5)

Note: Statement of Research Due

Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, Chapter 2 (to page 77).

Achen, Christopher H. and Duncan Snidal. 1989. "Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies." *World Politics*, Vol. 41: 143-169. (J)

Adam Berinsky, "Silent Voices: Social Welfare Policy Opinions and Political Equality in America," *American Journal of Political Science*. (J)

McDonald, Michael P., and Samuel Popkin. 2001. "The Myth of the Vanishing Voter."

American Political Science Review 95:963-74. Available at

[http://elections.gmu.edu/APSR%20McDonald%20and Popkin 2001.pdf](http://elections.gmu.edu/APSR%20McDonald%20and%20Popkin%202001.pdf)

*If you are interested in reviewing the basics of statistical analysis (not covered in class) read W. Phillips Shively, *The Craft of Political Research*, Chapters 7-9.*

III: Gathering Data

5. Selecting and Sampling Cases (October 12)

Note: Exercise 1 due (Questions of Validity)

Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, Chapter 2 (77-88)

Geddes, Barbara. 1991. "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics." *Political Analysis* 2:131-50.

Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, Appendix 1.

6. Observation, Measurement, and Political Implications I (October 19)

W. Phillips Shively, *The Craft of Political Research*, Chapters 4-5.

Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, chap. 3.

7. Observation, Measurement, and Political Implications II (October 26)

Gladwell, Malcolm, "Examined Life: What Stanley Kaplan Taught us about the SAT," *The New Yorker*, December 17, 2001.

Available at http://www.gladwell.com/2001/2001_12_17_a_kaplan.htm

Brady, Henry et al. "Law and Data: The Butterfly Ballot Episode." *PS: Political Science and Politics*. 34 (March 2001): 59-69.

Available at <http://www.apsanet.org/PS/march01/brady.cfm>

Richard Nisbett and Timothy Wilson, "Telling More Than We Can Know: Verbal Reports on Mental Processes," *Psychological Review*, 1977.

Richard F. Fenno, Jr. "The House Appropriations Committee as a Political System: The Problem of Integration." *American Political Science Review*. 1962 (J)

→ Fenno's interview notes are available on line. Visit, explore, and read interview notes at <http://nara.gov/nara/legislative/fenno1.html>

IV: Guest Lectures

8. Lily Tsai (November 2)

Note: Exercise 2 Due (Measurement)

Readings TBA.

9. Roger Peterson (November 9)

Note: Literature Review Due

IV: Student Presentations

10. Group 1 (November 16)

11. Group 2 (November 23)

12. Group 3 (November 30)

V: Conclusions

13. Final Thoughts: Ethics and Political Research (December 7)

Note: Final Paper Due

Stanley Milgram, "Some Conditions of Obedience and Disobedience to Authority," *Human Relations* 18 (1965):57-76

Phillip Zimbardo, "A Pirandellian Prison," *New York Times Magazine*, April 8, 1973.

(See also Zimbardo's description of this Prison experiment at <http://www.prisonexp.org>)