

17.869
Political Science Scope and Methods
Fall 2005

W 11:30-1:00, E51-057
F 12-1:30, E51-095 (occasional recitations in E25-117)

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This course introduces political science majors and minors to the scope and methods of the discipline. It is the first in a sequence of courses designed to prepare students to conduct their own original research that will culminate in a senior thesis. The course is not a thematic overview of the many sub-fields and research questions in political science, but rather a systematic examination of the research process—the selection of a research question, the development of hypotheses, and the selection of appropriate measures and evaluation methods.

Most of the readings, lectures, and discussions on Wednesdays will address practical issues of research design and hypothesis testing, along with some examples from recent research. This part of the course also involves short written assignments and a group project.

But a better way to learn about the research process in political science is to see it in action. On Fridays we will attend presentations of MIT faculty, advanced graduate students, and occasional outside visitors. Students will read these works in progress and be prepared to discuss and critique their arguments and methods afterwards.

Finally, students will begin to design their own research projects. First, students will submit a short statement describing their research question and explaining why it was selected. Next, students will turn this into a critical literature review (15 pages). This will serve as the basis for a presentation to the class. 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 section that proposes an original research project.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

Class participation:	15%
Research Design project:	15%
Group Measurement project:	10%
Explanation/defense of research topic:	05%
Literature review:	20%
Presentation:	10%
Final research proposal:	25%

Most of the readings will be available on the course web page. The only exceptions are the following books, which you should either purchase or borrow from the reserve desk at Dewey:

- King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press (1994).
- Van Evera, Stephen. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press (1997).
- Campbell, Donald, and Julian Stanley. *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research* (read pages 1-64; play close attention to pages 6-34). [This one is expensive. You might want to make do with the reserve copy.]

I. The Scientific Method

Sept. 7: Introduction to the course

Sept 9: *Scope: What is politics?*

- W. Phillips Shively, *Power and Choice: An Introduction to Political Science* (McGraw Hill, 2001), chapter 1.
- William Riker and Peter Ordeshook, *An Introduction to Positive Political Theory* (Prentice Hall, 1973), chapter 1.

Method: What is (social) science?

- Manheim, Jarol, Richard Rich, and Lars Willnat, *Empirical Political Analysis: Research Methods in Political Science*. New York: Longman, Chapter 1.
- King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapter 1.
- Riker, William. "The Two-Party System and Duverger's Law: An Essay on the History of Political Science." *American Political Science Review* 74, 4 (1982).
- Gabriel Almond and Stephen Genco, "Clocks, Clouds, and the Study of Politics," *World Politics* 29, 4 (July 1977), 489-522.

Assignment: Come to class with (tentative) answers to the following questions:

- What is politics?
- Is political science primarily about government? Is so, why not call the field “government?” Or what about “public administration” or “public policy”?
- Come to class with your own definition of science.
- Can there be a science of politics?
- What are the most important questions addressed (or that should be addressed) by political scientists? Write down a list of five. Can they all be addressed through scientific methods?

Sept. 14: *Theory-Building*

- Manheim, Jarol, Richard Rich, and Lars Willnat, *Empirical Political Analysis: Research Methods in Political Science*. New York: Longman (2002), Chapter 2.
- Thomas Frank, “Lie Down for America,” *Harpers* April 2004.
- David Broder, “One Nation, Divisible; Despite Peace, Prosperity, Voters Agree to Disagree,” *Washington Post*, November 8, 2000.
- Jill Lawrence, “Behind its united front, nation divided as ever,” *USA Today* Feb. 18, 2002.

Assignment: Behind the political rhetoric, these journalistic portrayals contain the seeds of hypotheses that might be tested in more rigorous ways. Come to class with a list of hypotheses extracted from these articles, and some ideas about how they might be tested.

Sept. 16: *Research Presentation*

Stephen Ansolabehere, Jonathan Rodden, and James Snyder.

II. Research Design

Sept. 21 *Introduction to Research Design: The Experimental Method*

- Evera, Stephen Van. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Chapter 1.
- King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry*. Chapter 1 (read again).
- Campbell, Donald, and Julian Stanley. *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research* (read pages 1-64; play close attention to pages 6-34).

- Chattopadhyay, Raghavendra and Esther Duflo, “The Impact of Reservation in the Panchayati Raj: Evidence from a Nationwide Randomized Experiment.” Available at: http://econ-www.mit.edu/faculty/download_pdf.php?id=933

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- What are the differences between Van Evera and King, Keohane, and Verba?
- Returning to the most important political science questions you identified last week, which can be addressed with the experimental method and which cannot? For those which cannot, what quasi-experimental methods might be good alternatives?

Sept. 23 *Research Presentation*

Michiko Ueda

Sept. 28 *Causality and Causal Inference*

- King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry*. Chapters 2-3.
- Weingast, Barry, “The Economic Role of Political Institutions: Market-Preserving Federalism and Economic Development,” *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 11: 1, (1995).
- Friedrich Hayek, “The Economic Conditions of Interstate Federalism,” in Friedrich Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (U. of Chicago, 1948).
- Buchanan, James. 1995. “Federalism as an Ideal Political Order and an Objective for Constitutional Reform,” *Publius* 25, 2.
- Jonathan Rodden, “Decentralization and Federalism: On Meaning and Measurement,” *Comparative Politics* 36,4 (2004): 481-500.

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- What are some of the key hypotheses that emerge from the literature on decentralization and federalism?
- What are the underlying causal mechanisms?
- How can these be tested?

[RESEARCH DESIGN ASSIGNMENT WILL BE DISTRIBUTED IN CLASS]

Sept 30

Recitation (Meet in E52- 117)

Oct. 5

Case Studies, Comparing Cases, and Statistical Analysis

- Evera, Stephen Van. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Chapter 2 (to page 77).
- Collier, David. "The Comparative Method: Two Decades of Change." In *Comparative Political Dynamics: Global Research Perspectives*. Edited by Rustow, and Erickson.
- Mahoney, James. "Strategies of Causal Inference in Small-N Analysis." In *Sociological Methods and Research*.
- Manheim, Jarol, Richard Rich, and Lars Willnat, *Empirical Political Analysis*. Chapters 14-16.
- Alesina, Alberto, Edward Glaeser, and Bruce Sacerdote, "Why Doesn't the United States Have a European-Style Welfare State?," *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* (2001) and responses: http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/brookings_papers_on_economic_activity/v2001/2001.2alesina.pdf

Oct. 7

Recitation (Meet in E52- 117)

[RESEARCH DESIGN ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS]

III. Gathering Data

Oct. 12

Selecting and Sampling Cases (Discussion led by Zak Taylor)

- Evera, Stephen Van. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Chapter 2 (77-88).
- King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry*. Chapter 4.
- Lustick, Ian. "History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias." *American Political Science Review* (1997).
- Goldhagen, Daniel. *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. Appendix 1.

Oct. 14 *Research Presentation*

Roberto Puglisi

- Additional reading: Tim Groseclose and Jeff Milyo. TBA.

Oct. 19 *Observation, Measurement, and Political Implications I*

- King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry*. Chapter 5.
- "Measuring the economy may not be as easy as 1, 2, 3" *Washington Post* August 29, 2005, A02:
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/08/28/AR2005082800730.html>
- Putnam, Robert. *Making Democracy Work*. Chapter 3.

Oct. 21 *Research Presentation*

Sarah Sled

Oct. 26 *Visit to Dewey Library for overview of social science research resources*

Oct. 28 *Research Presentation*

Richard Locke

[INITIAL WRITE-UP OF RESEARCH QUESTION DUE]

Nov. 2 *Observation, Measurement, and Political Implications II*

- Gladwell, Malcolm. "Examined Life: What Stanley Kaplan Taught us about the SAT." In *The New Yorker*. (Dec 17, 2001).
- Henry Brady, et al. "Law and Data: The Butterfly Ballot Episode." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 34 (March 2001): 59-69.
- Nisbett, Richard, and Timothy Wilson. "Telling more than we can know: Verbal Reports on Mental Processes." *Psychological Review* (1977).
- Fenno, Richard F. Jr. "The House Appropriations Committee as a Political System: The Problem of Integration." *American Political Science Review* (1962).

[FIRST MEASUREMENT ASSIGNMENT DUE]

Nov. 4 *Research Presentation*

Lily Tsai

Nov. 9 *Applied Measurement Project I*

Both groups read:

- Manheim, Jarol, Richard Rich, and Lars Willnat, *Empirical Political Analysis*, chapter 9.

GROUP 1:

- Transparency International, *Global Corruption Report 2005*, chapters 9, 10, 12-19, 23-26, 29, 31. Download from:
<http://www.globalcorruptionreport.org/download.html>
- Daniel Treisman, "Decentralization and the Quality of Government" available at:
<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/seminar/2000/fiscal/treisman.pdf>

Using Nexis-Lexis or some other search engine, design a content analysis scheme to measure perceptions of governmental corruption across a sample of at least 20 countries. Make a table displaying the results. Explain how you designed your search and selected your sample. . How well is your index correlated with some of the indices presented in the *Transparency International* Report? What accounts for the differences? What are the advantages and disadvantages of your approach?

Come to class prepared to discuss the results of your measurement project, along with the following questions:

- What is corruption?
- Is it a good idea to devise quantitative cross-national indicators?
- How reliable are they?

GROUP 2:

- Tim Groseclose, Steve Levitt, and James Snyder, "Comparing Interest Group Scores Across Time and Chambers: Adjusted ADA Scores for the U.S. Congress," *American Political Science Review* 93, 33-50 (1999).

Groseclose, Levitt, and Snyder present measures of the ideology of house and Senate members. The most recent ADA scores will be made available on the course web page.

Develop a strategy for content analysis of state party platforms for Republicans and Democrats. Find a way to arrange these platforms on a left-right scale. Some hints: Perhaps you will find it necessary to break this down by issue dimension, and perhaps you will find it necessary to find a way of dealing with platforms that are vague.

How well are your scores correlated with the average ADA scores of the state's representatives?

Nov. 11 Holiday

Nov. 16 *Applied Measurement Project II*

[PRESENT RESULTS IN CLASS]

Nov. 18 *Recitation to discuss student research projects*

Nov. 23 No meeting: Literature review due

[LITERATURE REVIEW DUE NOV. 23]

Nov. 25 Thanksgiving holiday

Nov. 30 Presentations

Dec. 2 Presentations

Dec. 7 Presentations

Dec. 9 Presentations

Dec. 14 Presentations

[FINAL RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE DEC. 16]