
POLS 200
Methods of Political Science
<http://www.uic.edu/classes/pols/pols200mm/>
T/TH 9:30-10:45
BSB 187

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Course Description and Objectives

This course will introduce students to the methods of social science inquiry, focusing on questions, issues and practices within the discipline of political science. Unlike most college courses, in this course we will focus on learning *how* to know (inquiry), rather than *what* to know. The course will be divided into three parts, coinciding with each of the three main components of social science inquiry: theory, data collection or observation, and data analysis. By the end of the semester, students should have a more sophisticated understanding of the logic of inquiry and also be proficient in reading, interpreting, and evaluating research reports and studies found in academic journals and books, magazines, newspapers, and other news media.

Course Materials

There are two required texts for this course:

- ❖ Babbie, Earl. 2001. *The Basics of Social Research, 2nd Edition*. Cincinnati: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- ❖ Kirkpatrick, Lee A. and Brooke C. Feeney. 2001. *A Simple Guide to SPSS for Windows*. Cincinnati: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Both texts are available at the University Book Store (750 South Halsted Street, 413-5500). If you have any trouble obtaining the books, please notify me as soon as possible. In addition to the two required texts, we will also be reading several articles from academic journals. These will be available from JSTOR, the reserve desk at the main library, or the course website. Articles are denoted by the  symbol in the course schedule section of the syllabus (note: the full citation and location of each article is also given here).

Course Requirements¹

This course emphasizes both active learning and the application of reading materials to the study of real world problems and political issues. Students will learn the steps of the research enterprise by actually applying them in their own (group) study of some political phenomenon. Assignments will be given periodically throughout the semester. Some of

¹ If you have any conditions or challenges that may make it difficult for you to meet the requirements of this course, or that may cause you to require extra time on assignments, please let me know within the first two weeks of class so that we can make appropriate and equitable alternative arrangements.

these assignments will involve a group effort. In such cases, students will be given class time to meet with their groups to discuss their course project and to work on the assignment.

To be successful in this course, students need to do all of the assigned readings carefully before coming to class. Students should be aware that attendance and participation are not only required, but also constitute a sizable portion of their final grade. Anyone who will have difficulty attending this class regularly should consider dropping the course now rather than later. Experience has shown that those who fail to attend my classes regularly receive grades of C and lower.

Grades will be determined as follows:

Assignments (40%)

Because the material in this course is best learned by application, you will have the opportunity to do exactly this via regular homework assignments (most likely, there will be approximately 8 assignments). Some of these assignments will be completed individually, while others will be done with members of your group. The group assignments will be stepping stones for the course project that you will eventually turn in at the end of the semester. Because you will be working with several other students as one research team, for these assignments you will always have class time to meet with your group. The purpose of all of the homework assignments is not simply to reinforce the material discussed in the text and in class, but also to provide you and your research team with feedback and direction for the larger course project.

You will always have at least one class period between the time the assignment is given and the time it is due. All assignments must be turned in the day on which they are due. I will accept assignments via email or in person only. If you submit the assignment via email, I will reply to let you know that I received it. If you do not get a reply from me, this means that I did not receive the assignment. If for some reason you are unable to turn in the assignment before or during class, I will accept assignments up until midnight on the due date. Any paper received after midnight will be considered late. Late papers will be returned to students with comments and feedback, but will not be given a grade. In other words, ***students will not get credit for late assignments or assignments that have been lost in cyberspace. There are no exceptions to this policy.***

Course Project: Group Research Proposal (25%)

Students will work in groups throughout the semester to produce a final research proposal. This proposal will be presented to the class and submitted to me on the final exam day, Tuesday, April 30 (10:30-12:30). The grade for this proposal will be based solely on the finished product that is handed in and presented. This means that even if the group did poorly on the assignments leading up to the final proposal, it can still receive a good grade on the project depending on the quality of the proposal ultimately submitted (and vice versa).

Students will be assigned to groups based on their interests. As a team, each group will work through the steps of the scientific method in order to produce a research proposal that addresses the research question they specified. It is expected that if undertaken, the study outlined in the proposal would shed new scientific knowledge on the particular issue or problem, thus contributing to our collective understanding of this phenomenon. A detailed

handout describing the components, expectations, and grading of this project will be given once the teams have been assigned.

Exams (35%)

There will be two in-class exams in this course. The first exam will cover the material presented in chapters 1-5 of Babbie, assigned articles, and lecture notes. The second exam will cover chapters 6-12 of Babbie, subsequent articles, and related lecture notes. The tentative dates for these exams are Tuesday, February 12 and Thursday, April 4. Note that there will be no examination on the material covered in Babbie chapters 13-14, Kirkpatrick & Feeney or any of the data analysis material we cover in the computer lab. Instead, you will be given assignments over this material to work on individually and/or in your groups. The two exams constitute 35% of the final grade. The exam on which you score higher will be weighted more (20%) and the exam on which you do poorer will be weighted less (15%). The TA will conduct review sessions prior to each exam.













Attendance: Students will be allowed three “free” absences from class (this includes class meetings set aside for group work, review sessions, and exams). You needn’t (and shouldn’t) provide any excuse or explanation for your absences; but remember you only get three freebies. After three absences, each additional absence will cost you 3 percentage points on your final grade (i.e., if your grade is 80% but you’ve missed 4 classes, your final grade will drop to 77%; 5 absences will drop you to 74%, and so on). Excuses for missing additional classes will not be accepted. It doesn’t matter whether you were sick, had to attend a funeral, missed your train or were simply hung-over; once you’ve gone beyond three absences, your grade will be affected—no excuses, no exceptions. If you foresee illness or any sort of difficulties arising at any point in the semester, you should be careful not to squander your three free absences.

Grading Scale in Operation

A	B	C	D	F
100-92%	91-80%	79-67%	66-57%	56-0%

Students are encouraged to keep track of their progress in this course and consult with me should they have any questions or concerns about their performance. Please note that any query about grades should be done in person, either during my regular office hours, or at some other scheduled meeting time. I will not discuss grades via email or telephone.

Course Topics and Readings

- Jan 8 & 10**  **Course Overview & Introduction to the Logic of Inquiry**
Babbie: Prologue, Chapter 1
- Jan 15-24**   **Theory, Models and Hypotheses**
Babbie: Chapter 2, Appendix A
Putnam, Robert D. 1995. "Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 28 (December, no.4): 664-883. [**Location: Course Website**]
- Jan 29 & 31**   **Overview of Research Design**
Babbie: Chapter 4, Appendix B
Schneider, Mark, Paul Teske & Melissa Marschall. 2000. *Choosing Schools: Consumer Choice and the Quality of American Schools*. Princeton, Princeton University Press. Chpt 3, "Studying Choice: The Research Design." [**Location: Library Reserve Desk**]
- Feb 5 & 7**   **Concepts, Variables and Measurement**
Babbie: Chapter 5
Segal, Jeffrey A. & Albert D. Cover. 1989. "Ideological Values and the Votes of Supreme Court Justices." *American Political Science Review* 83 (June): 558-65. [**Location: JSTOR & Course Website**]
- Feb 12** **Exam I**
- Feb 14 -21**  **Variables, Operationalization, Library Resources**
Babbie: Chapter 6
- Feb 26 & 28**  **Sampling**
Babbie, Chapter 7
- Mar 5- Apr 2**   **Research Design, Modes of Observation & Ethics in Research**
Babbie: Chapters 8-12, 3
Campbell, Donald T. and H. Laurence Ross. 1968. "The Connecticut Crackdown on Speeding: Time Series Data in Quasi-Experimental Analysis." *Law and Society Review* 3 (August): 33-53. [**Location: Library Reserve Desk**]; other articles TBA
- April 4** **Exam II**
- April 9-25**  **Data Analysis & Group Work**
Babbie: Chapters 13-14; Kirkpatrick & Feeney: Chapters 1-8, 14, 17
- April 30** **Presentations of Research Proposals**
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Note, class meets from 10:30-12:30