



Course Name: Research Methods

Course Number: PS 300

Credits: 4

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Course Description

Qualitative and quantitative approaches to the study of political phenomena. The role of values, theory, hypothesis, data collection, and analysis in evaluating and conducting political science research. (Writing Intensive Course)

Communication

Please post all course-related questions in the Q&A Discussion Forum so that the whole class may benefit from our conversation. Please contact me privately for matters of a personal nature. I will reply to course-related questions within 24-48 hours. I will strive to return your assignments and grades for course activities to you within five days of the due date.

Course Credits

This course combines approximately 120 hours of instruction, online activities, and assignments for 4 credits.

Technical Assistance

If you experience any errors or problems while in your online course, contact 24-7 Canvas Support through the Help link within Canvas. If you experience computer difficulties, need help downloading a browser or plug-in, or need assistance logging into a course, contact the IS Service Desk for assistance. You can call (541) 737-8787 or visit the [IS Service Desk](#) online.

Learning Resources

Please check with the OSU Bookstore for up-to-date information for the term you enroll ([OSU Bookstore Website](#) or 800-595-0357). If you purchase course materials from other sources, be very careful to obtain the correct ISBN.

Canvas

This course is delivered via Canvas, where you will interact with your classmates and your instructor. You will access the learning materials within the course site,

such as the syllabus, class discussions, assignments, projects, and quizzes. To preview how an online course works, visit the [Ecampus Course Demo](#). For technical assistance, please visit [Ecampus Technical Help](#).

COURSE INTRODUCTION:

This course is designed to introduce students to the fundamental aspects of doing social science and public policy research. We will begin with a discussion of **methodology** (the philosophy behind research) and then move on to discussions about **methods** (techniques) of research. The primary focus of the course will be on research design, but considerable attention will be paid to elementary data analysis. All students are expected to use their ONID email account and the Canvas course website for this course.

COURSE OVERVIEW: The Scientific Method (see "Eight Steps" handout in Module 1).

Scientific inquiry involves both theory (logic) and observation--we are interested in an understanding of why things occur (theory) and some evidence that they indeed occur this way (observation). In the process of doing social science research, we are constantly moving between the theoretical and empirical (observational) levels. The traditional model in social science starts at the theoretical level. Hypotheses (which are statements about the relationships between events) are derived from a theory, then subjected to empirical testing. This process is called deduction.

An alternative starting point is the level of observation. Researchers make observations, look for patterns in the data, then from these patterns come to some tentative findings. These findings are called empirical generalizations and are used to construct theoretical statements. This process is known as induction. The important point to remember is that in our search for knowledge, we will continue this process of observation and theorizing. Social scientific inquiry involves both deduction and induction and critically thinking about causal processes.

The Classical Approach or the Traditional Model: The traditional model of science starts as a deductive process, i.e., at the theoretical level. Theories are statements of invariant relationships between or among concepts. They are explanations of some aspect of our world, e.g., juvenile delinquency, socialization, or social movements. In order to assess the adequacy of our theories, we need to derive specific hypotheses from them to subject to empirical testing. Hypotheses are propositions in testable form. They are statements of relationship between two or more variables. Before we can test our theoretical hypotheses (statements about concepts), we must specify the meaning of the concepts to be studied. Concepts can have different dimensions just as words can have different meanings. Say for example, that we are interested in studying political participation. What do we

mean by "political participation?" I can think of several dimensions. One dimension entails conventional participation such as voting in an election. Another entails unconventional participation such as street demonstrations, boycotts, etc. The importance of critically thinking about the dimensions of concepts comes when you place these dimensions individually in your original hypothesis. You may find that what you think will cause participation in "conventional participation" will not have an impact upon "unconventional participation." The process of conceptualization, then, involves: (1) defining what your concepts mean (are there several dimensions?), and (2) determining how your theory would work for these dimensions. After stating your hypotheses and going through the process of conceptualization, you next need to decide how you will measure your variables. This is the process known as operationalization.

Inductive Approach (Grounded Theory): Whereas the deductive model starts at the theoretical level, an inductive approach begins with observations. Maybe a theory does not exist to adequately explain a particular phenomenon. Say for example that there was a dramatic increase in teenage drug abuse. To try and understand why drug abuse may vary over time, you could engage in a research project studying teens over a particular period. You would look for patterns, which affect drug use, e.g., unemployment, family circumstances, etc. When patterns are found, you make tentative conclusions about the factors affecting drug use and abuse. In this approach, we are trying to construct theories and develop concepts to explain something. Again, remember the circular process of the scientific method. After you construct a theoretical statement, it should then be stated in a hypothesis and tested empirically. After the empirical test you may need to think critically and make new generalizations and modify your theory. This process continues until you have found a theory, which indeed is made-up of statements that are invariant, i.e., laws.

Critical Thinking and the Scientific Method: According to the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking (1987), critical thinking involves:

"...the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness" (Source: <https://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/766>; accessed May 25, 2015).

The informal and formal writing assignments in PS 300 described below will directly involve critical thinking, as it is the core of scientific inquiry (also see the Eight Steps of the Scientific Process below). For example, a required Quantitative Research Term Paper will have students identify a political or policy problem that needs scientific research. This process involves identifying what the “problem” is and what possible policies may be used to address the problem. Often there is typically little societal consensus on what a problem is and how it should be addressed through policy. Therefore, students will need to think critically on how different political interests and constituencies define policy issues. Next, students will need to think critically about how to conceptualize the policy issue (e.g., how to define key concepts such as “prejudice” or “hate” for affirmative action or crime policy). The next step involves students “operationalizing” concepts (i.e., how to measure concepts), which will involve critical thinking about what data and variables are needed to “measure” these concepts (e.g., verbal statements, behaviors, etc.). Students also will need to identify, understand and apply existing research and theories on the topic through a review of the existing literature. There are no dominant perspectives or theories on most political science topics, just conflicting causal explanations and methodological differences. Students will need to review these different perspectives and critically think about the most robust/representative explanations for their topics, even if they challenge their own preconceived notions of society and politics they have been taught. Finally students will need to collect and analyze data (i.e., observations) that will either support or contradict their hypotheses and theories. This final step involves “empirical generalizations,” which means critical thinking about how the theory used fits the data gathered. This involves critically thinking about what has been observed, what the limitations of the observations may be, and what relevant policy and political implications for the findings might be.

COURSE/PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

Course Outcomes (all to be accomplished through in-class writing assignments and discussion, lab assignments, and a final quantitative term paper of at least 2,000 words):

At the completion of this course students will be able to:

- *Political Science Program:* Apply methods appropriate for accumulating and interpreting data applicable to the discipline of political science (evaluation rubric is attached). This will be accomplished through weekly computer labs where political science data will be analyzed and through the writing of a 2,000+ word quantitative term paper.
- *Course:* Assess the usefulness of research methods for answering a variety of empirical questions. This will be accomplished through informal

Canvas discussion blogs and class group discussions, and formally through the writing of a quantitative research paper that is theoretically based.

- *Course:* Construct and empirically test hypotheses. This will be accomplished through informal class exercises and formally through laboratory computer assignments and three lecture assignments.
- *Course:* Write up the results of empirical analysis in a manner that mirrors current writing in the field of political science. This will be done through informal in class exercises and formally through three lecture assignments, laboratory computer assignments, and a quantitative research paper.
- *Course:* The ability to think critically through the application of political science theory in informal and formal written assignments. This will be done through weekly informal Canvas discussion topics and formally through laboratory computer assignments and a quantitative research paper.

BACC CORE LEARNING OUTCOMES:

This course satisfies the Writing Intensive Curriculum (WIC) requirement of the Bacc Core. WIC Outcomes (all to be accomplished through in-class writing assignments and discussion, lab assignments, and a final quantitative term paper of at least 2,000 words (evaluation rubric attached); a total of 5,000 words of writing in total is required for this course):

At the completion of this course students will be able to:

- Develop and articulate content knowledge and critical thinking in the discipline through frequent practice of informal and formal writing. This will be done through weekly informal Canvas discussion blogs and formally through laboratory computer assignments and a quantitative research paper.
- Demonstrate knowledge/understanding of audience expectations, genres, and conventions appropriate to communicating in the discipline. This will be accomplished through weekly informal Canvas discussion blogs and formally through laboratory computer assignments, three lecture assignments, and a quantitative research paper.
- Demonstrate the ability to compose a document of at least 2000 words through multiple aspects of writing, including brainstorming, drafting, using sources appropriately, and revising comprehensively after receiving

feedback on a draft. This will be accomplished through the writing of a quantitative research paper.

EVALUATION OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Task:	Points Possible:	Due Date:
Final quantitative research paper	200 points total (10, 20, 40, 50, 80 points respectively)	>Paper topic identified due April 14 [10 pts] >Outline and abstract due April 21 [20 pts] >Literature review due May 5 [40 pts] >First complete rough draft due May 26 [50 pts] >Final revised paper Due June 9 [80 pts]
Weekly class writing assignments	90 points total (10 points each)	Weekly assignments summarizing course readings each week, beginning Week 2
Computer lab assignments	80 points (10 points each) week)	Weekly assignments
CITI Training	20 points	Week 1 due
TOTAL =	390 POINTS	

FINAL GRADE DISTRIBUTION

Letter Grade	Percent of points possible
A	[95-100%]
A-	[90-94%]
B+	[87-89%]
B	[83-86%]
B-	[80-82%]
C+	[77-79%]
C	[73-76%]
C-	[70-72%]
D+	[67-69%]
D	[63-66%]
D-	[60-62%]
F	[0-59%]

SCHEDULE

The first weeks of class will discuss epistemology, theories, the scientific approach, social science versus natural science, philosophy, etc. I consider this the most difficult portion of the course because there are no "right" answers--just "shades of gray." The remaining weeks we will discuss and use computers, some easy statistics, and various methods of research.

Please note, this syllabus follows the content and organization of E. Babbie, *The Basics of Social Research* textbook (6th edition).

Note: Canvas materials are under the "Course Documents" link.

Topics and Readings:

Week 1 - Human Inquiry and Science; what is science?

- PS 400 Introduction (Canvas)
- "8 Steps" (Canvas)
- Thomas Kuhn and Scientific Revolutions (Canvas)
- Babbie Chapter 1

Week 2 - Ethics and Politics of Research

- Babbie Chapter 3
- "Revenge of the Nerds" (Canvas)
- Zimbardo Prison Experiment video

Week 3 - Paradigms, Theory and Research Design

- Babbie Chapters 2 and 4
- Steel's Ideological Framework (Canvas)
- "Are Public Choice Theorists Different" (Canvas)
- "Models of the State" (Canvas)

Week 4 - Conceptualization and Operationalization

- Babbie Chapter 5

Week 5 - Indexes and Scales, Research Design; Sampling; Survey Research

- Babbie Chapters 6, 7 and 9

Week 6 - Experiments and Qualitative Field Research

- Babbie Chapters 8 and 10
- Milgram Obedience video

Week 7 - Unobtrusive research

- Babbie Chapter 11

Week 8 - Evaluation Research

- Babbie Chapter 12

Week 9 - Data Analysis

- Babbie Chapters 13 and 14

Week 10 – Writing Results

- Babbie Chapters 15

COURSE POLICIES**Late Work Policy**

Late work will be penalized 5 points a day if there is no agreement with the instructor.

Incompletes

Incomplete (I) grades will be granted only in emergency cases (usually only for a death in the family, major illness or injury, or birth of your child), and if the student has turned in 80% of the points possible (in other words, usually everything but the final paper). If you are having any difficulty that might prevent you completing the coursework, please don't wait until the end of the term; let me know right away.

Guidelines for a Productive and Effective Online Classroom

Students are expected to conduct themselves in the course (e.g., on discussion boards, email) in compliance with the university's regulations regarding civility. Civility is an essential ingredient for academic discourse. All communications for this course should be conducted constructively, civilly, and respectfully. Differences in beliefs, opinions, and approaches are to be expected. In all you say and do for this course, be professional. Please bring any communications you believe to be in violation of this class policy to the attention of your instructor.

Active interaction with peers and your instructor is essential to success in this online course, paying particular attention to the following:

- Unless indicated otherwise, please complete the readings and view other instructional materials for each week before participating in the discussion board.
- Read your posts carefully before submitting them.
- Be respectful of others and their opinions, valuing diversity in backgrounds, abilities, and experiences.

- Challenging the ideas held by others is an integral aspect of critical thinking and the academic process. Please word your responses carefully, and recognize that others are expected to challenge your ideas. A positive atmosphere of healthy debate is encouraged.

Statement Regarding Students with Disabilities

Accommodations for students with disabilities are determined and approved by Disability Access Services (DAS). If you, as a student, believe you are eligible for accommodations but have not obtained approval, please contact DAS immediately at 541-737-4098 or at <http://ds.oregonstate.edu>. DAS notifies students and faculty members of approved academic accommodations and coordinates implementation of those accommodations. While not required, students and faculty members are encouraged to discuss details of the implementation of individual accommodations.

Accessibility of Course Materials

All materials used in this course are accessible. If you require accommodations please contact [Disability Access Services \(DAS\)](#).

Additionally, Canvas, the learning management system through which this course is offered, provides a [vendor statement](#) certifying how the platform is accessible to students with disabilities.

Expectations for Student Conduct

Student conduct is governed by the university's policies, as explained in the [Student Conduct Code](#). Students are expected to conduct themselves in the course (e.g., on discussion boards, email postings) in compliance with the [university's regulations regarding civility](#).

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to comply with all regulations pertaining to academic honesty. For further information, visit [Student Conduct and Community Standards](#), or contact the office of Student Conduct and Mediation at 541-737-3656.

OAR 576-015-0020 (2) Academic or Scholarly Dishonesty:

- a) Academic or Scholarly Dishonesty is defined as an act of deception in which a Student seeks to claim credit for the work or effort of another person, or uses unauthorized materials or fabricated information in any academic work or research, either through the Student's own efforts or the efforts of another.

- b) It includes:
- i) CHEATING - use or attempted use of unauthorized materials, information or study aids, or an act of deceit by which a Student attempts to misrepresent mastery of academic effort or information. This includes but is not limited to unauthorized copying or collaboration on a test or assignment, using prohibited materials and texts, any misuse of an electronic device, or using any deceptive means to gain academic credit.
 - ii) FABRICATION - falsification or invention of any information including but not limited to falsifying research, inventing or exaggerating data, or listing incorrect or fictitious references.
 - iii) ASSISTING - helping another commit an act of academic dishonesty. This includes but is not limited to paying or bribing someone to acquire a test or assignment, changing someone's grades or academic records, taking a test/doing an assignment for someone else by any means, including misuse of an electronic device. It is a violation of Oregon state law to create and offer to sell part or all of an educational assignment to another person (ORS 165.114).
 - iv) TAMPERING - altering or interfering with evaluation instruments or documents.
 - v) PLAGIARISM - representing the words or ideas of another person or presenting someone else's words, ideas, artistry or data as one's own, or using one's own previously submitted work. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to copying another person's work (including unpublished material) without appropriate referencing, presenting someone else's opinions and theories as one's own, or working jointly on a project and then submitting it as one's own.
- c) Academic Dishonesty cases are handled initially by the academic units, following the process outlined in the University's Academic Dishonesty Report Form, and will also be referred to SCCS for action under these rules.

Tutoring and Writing Assistance

[NetTutor](#) is a leading provider of online tutoring and learner support services fully staffed by experienced, trained and monitored tutors. Students connect to live tutors from any computer that has Internet access. NetTutor provides a virtual whiteboard that allows tutors and students to work on problems in a real time environment. They also have an online writing lab where tutors critique and return essays within 24 to 48 hours. Access NetTutor from within your Canvas class by clicking on the Tools button in your course menu.

The Oregon State [Online Writing Lab \(OWL\)](#) is also available for students enrolled in Ecampus courses.

TurnItIn

Your instructor may ask you to submit one or more of your writings to Turnitin, a plagiarism prevention service. Your assignment content will be checked for potential plagiarism against Internet sources, academic journal articles, and the papers of other OSU students, for common or borrowed content. Turnitin generates a report that highlights any potentially unoriginal text in your paper. The report may be submitted directly to your instructor or your instructor may elect to have you submit initial drafts through Turnitin, and you will receive the report allowing you the opportunity to make adjustments and ensure that all source material has been properly cited. Papers you submit through Turnitin for this or any class will be added to the OSU Turnitin database and may be checked against other OSU paper submissions. You will retain all rights to your written work. For further information, visit [Academic Integrity for Students: Turnitin – What is it?](#)

Student Evaluation of Courses

The online Student Evaluation of Teaching system opens to students the Monday of dead week and closes the Monday following the end of finals. Students receive notification, instructions and the link through their ONID. They may also log into the system via Online Services. Course evaluation results are extremely important and used to help improve courses and the online learning experience for future students. Responses are anonymous (unless a student chooses to "sign" their comments, agreeing to relinquish anonymity) and unavailable to instructors until after grades have been posted. The results of scaled questions and signed comments go to both the instructor and their unit head/supervisor. Anonymous (unsigned) comments go to the instructor only.