PSC 150 Introduction to Political Analysis

This course introduces students to the methodology of contemporary political science, including research techniques for studying political behavior. More specifically, this course is intended to introduce students to the “science” side of Political Science. Over the term, students will be encouraged to think like social scientists, learn how to pose questions in the manner of their discipline, undertake a study of their own and present their findings in a customary fashion. They will also participate in an analysis of the work of other scholars, a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of various methodologies, and a broader critical evaluation of the application of the scientific method to the study of politics.

Although the topic of research methods may initially appear to be a dull one, in fact, it is of outstanding importance. The noun “science” originates from the Latin verb “scire” and translates into “knowing objectively” – the ultimate goal of all mankind and not only political scientists. Does democratization lead to peaceful external relations? Do diverse cultures necessarily clash with each other? Does religion impact politics? If so, in what ways? Do “values” have an impact on politics? The popular media and journalistic accounts of international and domestic events have led to many “false truths” in answering these and other important questions. However, both citizens and political scientists have an interest in acquiring “truth statements” about such questions. Political scientists especially have a responsibility to provide such knowledge as they are to communicate their results not only to a community of scholars but also to the community of mankind.

Over the decades, but especially since the so-called behavioral revolution in the 1950s and 1960s, social scientists in general, and political scientist in particular have developed “tools,” if you will, that enable us to “come to know objectively” about political issues and phenomena of interest and importance. These tools include theoretical versus historical, and practical or policy oriented modes of inquiry and are often (mistakenly) dichotomized into qualitative and quantitative methodologies and research designs. Among them are experiments, case studies, field research, survey research and many more.

The competence in these and other methods of enquiry justifies the making of “rationally redeemable validity claims” (Jurgen Habermas’ term) that help constitute general or particular bodies of knowledge justifiably described as “truthful,” “situationally adequate,” “historically accurate,” “mature,” “cumulative” or “scientific.” However, we shall also always remember that scientific knowledge is only one form of knowledge alongside other forms of knowledge. These include, for example, intuition, common
sense, superstition, mystical knowledge, or religious knowledge, and it is important to retain the respect for these forms of knowledge while engaging in science. This course aspires to cultivate a moderate, yet discriminating level of scientific competence in delineating, constructively criticizing, adapting and rationally utilizing scientific research practices. The book we will use towards this end is:


**Suggested, but not mandatory:**

It never hurts to know of other research method books when you are having trouble understanding a particular concept. Here are a few books that are available at our library:


**Classroom Courtesy**

No laptop computers are allowed in the classroom. Members of the class will be expected to exhibit appropriate behavior to the instructor and each other. Most importantly, students are required to give to others the respect and consideration they would wish for themselves. At its best, a classroom operates as a marketplace of ideas, where open discussion permits students to digest and evaluate information. Students must realize that while it is permissible to question a competing point of view, it is never appropriate to allow the conversation to degenerate into personal attacks. It is also expected that students will exhibit good manners, listen when others are talking, and generally behave in a professional manner. Students who behave inappropriately may be asked to leave the classroom and will have points deducted from their final grades.

**Academic Honesty**

Cheating on a test or other assignment will result in an automatic loss of all points for that assignment and possibly an F for the entire course. Cheating includes looking at notes/ readings during closed-book tests. Cheating also includes copying any part of a classmate’s work or plagiarism of any kind. If you have any questions concerning what constitutes cheating and/or plagiarism, please consult with me.
Course Assignments

Regarding any of the assignments for this course, I encourage you to remain in close contact with me before and after the due dates for the assignment. Course assignments are path-dependent. This means that the further you dig yourself into a potential mistake, the more costly it will be for you to return. We want to avoid this! Moreover, I consider it important for students to get to know faculty and for faculty to get to know students. I will give more specific information regarding any of the assignments below as we approach their respective due dates. What you find in these descriptions are guidelines.

For a satisfactory result in any of the assignments below you will have to demonstrate good writing abilities. A clear writing style is an absolute prerequisite for you to be able to communicate your substantive points and arguments effectively. It is also very important that you proofread your papers for grammar and style. Once you have finished, let it sit for a few hours and then revisit it. This way you are more likely to detect errors and correct them in time before the due date. The due dates for the assignments are noted in the course schedule below. All assignments are to be typed, 1½ spaced, 12 point font New Times Roman with 1 inch margins.

Assignment 1: Research Question Paper (15 points)
In this assignment you are to formulate your own research question(s). You are also to devise your research design/strategy for examining your research question. Central tasks and questions you need to address in this assignment are the following: Introduce the subject matter. Why is it important to study this subject matter? What is/are your research question(s)? In what way will the answers be valuable and beneficial? How will you proceed in the larger paper? This paper is to be about 2-3 pages long. Due Date Oct 10.

Assignment 2: Literature Review Paper (20 points)
Your literature review paper should identify some efforts by other scholars on your selected topic plus any controversies associated with them. The paper should feature a minimum of 5-7 scholarly works pertaining to the subject area. It should contain an assessment of what we know about the topic and the empirical bases for any disagreements. This paper should also identify the “space” where you will enter the scholarly discourse in your own research paper. This paper is to be 4-5 pages long. Due Date 12 November.

Assignment 5: Research Paper (25 points)
This final assignment should represent accumulation of your previous assignments in that you assemble them into a coherent research paper and add a conclusion. This is, however, not a “cut and paste” exercise. You will need to incorporate corrections and revisions made based on the feedback you have received over the course of the semester. In its ideal form your research paper will represent a scholarly article with all the necessary components. It should be approximately 13-15 pages long. Due Date 10 December.

Examination (20 points)
We will have one written examination. The exam is based on our in-class readings and discussions. I will give further details as we approach the examination date. **Exam Date September 26.**

**Class Attendance and Class Participation (20 points)**

It is of crucial importance that you attend class and participate actively. You cannot achieve a satisfactory score in this category if you just “sit in.” I expect the following from you:

- **Preparation** — your contributions demonstrate that you carefully read the assignment and engaged in it.
- **Quality of Your Argument** — your contributions are original, accurate and relevant to the subject matter under consideration and you reason by reference to proper evidence. **Quality of Your Expression** — your contribution is intelligible, concise, and addressed to your peers and the instructor.
- **Contribution to the Process** — knowledge is a cumulative achievement. Therefore, your contributions should demonstrate that you are listening to other students’ comments, take their ideas into consideration when responding, respect them, and criticize their arguments (not them!) constructively.
- **Critical Thought** — your contributions show critical awareness, do not reiterate conventional and/or common wisdom and avoid basic logical fallacies.
- **Academic Openness** — The etymology of the term “education” is latin (ex-ducere) and translates into “leading yourself out of yourself.” Be open for alternative and dissident arguments as this is very important for our intellectual maturation.

Unexcused absences will result in a loss of points towards your final grade (1 point per missed class). Excused absences are those that are accompanied by a written explanation, together with legitimate supporting documentation. For example, if you miss a class due to extra curricular activities, please provide a letter from the faculty member organizing the event; if for medical reasons, a letter from your doctor and so on.

**Grading and Late Papers**

Your final grade is a composition of all the items described above. Late papers are generally not tolerated and will lead to a deduction of 2 points per day on that particular assignment. Here is the grading scheme:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>95-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-94</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>88-89</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>85-87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-84</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>78-79</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>75-77</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-74</td>
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<td>D+</td>
<td>68-69</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>65-67</td>
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<td>Below 60</td>
<td>F</td>
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Any student with a disability or special need should speak with me at the end of class the first day so that we can make any necessary arrangements or accommodations.