

PS 5540-101 (CRN: 15671)
Practical Research Skills
Spring 2015

Professors' Information

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Course Content and Objectives

This course is designed to provide the student with a practical understanding of various research techniques used in political science and other social sciences. The course will include basic skills in designing research studies, as well as specific skills necessary to conduct research. These include but are not to case studies, content analysis, sampling techniques, survey design and implementation, and experimental research. The goal is to provide the students with practical skills that can be utilized in careers inside and outside of government, as well as future academic study.

Assigned Readings

- Required readings will be assigned during the semester and posted on our AsULearn class web site, or they will be available through JSTOR or other library electronic resources.

Grades/Assignments

Weekly Assignment: a set of questions related to the readings will be placed on our AsULearn class web site **AND/OR** an individual assignment will be given. You must upload your answers by 4:00 pm on Wednesday (2 hours before class). **Submissions after 4:00 pm will not be permitted.** You should bring a copy of your work to class as a reference during our class discussion. The weekly questions/assignments count for 40% of your overall grade.

Research Design Project: On Wednesday, April 29, 2015 at 6:00 PM, students must submit a research design paper. This will contribute another 30% of your final grade. The paper should be typed and between 18-20 pages in length. The topic of the paper should be a research question in political science that you find intriguing/interesting. On April 29th you will make a short presentation (~8 minutes) on your design and any findings you might have (some students may be able to complete the research, whereas others will submit a research design. The assignment must represent original work that is not previously, simultaneously, or subsequently submitted for any other assignment in any other class. Proper citation is required. Topics should be cleared with the instructors.

Participation and weekly presentations/contributions: Thirty percent (30%) of your grade will be based on class attendance, participation, and presentation of your weekly work. As a learning experience, the seminar will depend heavily on the quality of class participation and student interaction. It is essential that members of the seminar attend **all** sessions, participate actively in classroom discussions, and complete all required readings prior to class. **In this graduate seminar, passive participation (“just being there”) will not suffice for a passing grade in participation.** Each week, you will discuss your work, and the class will provide potential problems and offer solutions to improve this work. We will randomly select students to comment on the readings, others’

assessment of it, and their own critique. Students are expected to respond to the questions posed by their colleagues as well as by the professors.

Course Grading

Weekly Assignments =	40% (throughout the semester)
Participation/weekly presentations =	30% (throughout the semester)
<u>Design project and presentation =</u>	<u>30%</u>
Total =	100%

GRADE SCALE

94-100 = A	77-79 = C+
90-93 = A-	74-76 = C
87-89 = B+	70-73 = C-
84-86 = B	Below 70 = F
80-83 = B-	

Late Assignments

We do not accept late assignments.

Cheating and Plagiarism

Written work must be properly cited in accordance with accepted style manuals (Chicago Manual of Style, APA, MLA, etc.). If you take an idea from the text, another book, newspaper, or any other source, you must give the author credit. Furthermore, changing one or two words in a sentence is not an acceptable substitution for not using quotation marks. It is expected that all assignments represent original work not previously, simultaneously, or subsequently handed in for credit in another course, unless this is done with the prior approval of all instructors involved. Academic dishonesty detracts from the value of an Appalachian degree. Therefore, we will not tolerate lying, cheating, plagiarism, or stealing in any form and will oppose any instance of academic dishonesty. This course will follow the provisions of the Academic Integrity Code, which can be found on the Office of Student Conduct Web Site: www.studentconduct.appstate.edu. Violations may result in failure for the course and disciplinary action with the university.

Etiquette

Since this is a political science class, we will discuss a number of topics, many of them controversial. If you are concerned about any “sensitive” material, it is your responsibility to discuss this with us. You are encouraged to voice your opinion, but please be respectful of the many different opinions of other people. Texting, sleeping, doing puzzles, or reading non-course related materials are prohibited.

Cell phones, pagers, and computers: Electronic devices should be turned off during class. Exceptions include medically necessary assistive devices; approved emergency communications devices operated by authorized personnel; or, cell phones registered with APPSTATE-ALERT—these must be set on vibrate or silent mode during class periods. Do not text message or do crossword puzzles in class. Computers may be used in the classroom for note taking and course related purposes only. Instant messaging, checking Facebook or email, texting, Tweeting, etc. are prohibited during class. If you are caught browsing the Internet, texting, using Facebook or doing any other social networking, you may be asked to leave and you will receive 0 credit for attendance and participation. If you use a computer, please sit in the first two rows of the classroom.

The writing center is available if you are having difficulty with any of the written work (3144). Writers of all levels of ability may find the writing center useful.

Disabilities

“Appalachian State University is committed to making reasonable accommodations for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. If you have a disability and may need reasonable accommodations in order to have equal access to the University’s courses, programs and activities, please contact the Office of Disability Services (828.262.3056 or www.ods.appstate.edu). Once registration is complete, individuals will meet with ODS staff to discuss eligibility and appropriate accommodations.” Please notify me if you require any accommodations related to a disability.

Schedule (subject to change)

Readings are to be completed prior to class & assignments must be completed/uploaded by **4:00 pm the day of class**.

Week #1 1/14

Review of Syllabus; Introduction to the Course

Week #2 1/21

Research Design/Causal Logic

- Kellstedt and Whitten, “Research Design”
- Kellstedt and Whitten, “Evaluating Causal Relationships”
- King, Keohane, and Verba, “Causality and Causal Inference”

Assignments:

Develop four research questions that are answerable. Specify various constructs and develop a basic theory explaining the relationship among constructs. How will you measure your constructs?

Week #3 1/28

Case Studies/Field Research/Soaking and Poking

Assignments:

Find an article or book that utilizes one or more case studies. Identify the purpose of the article or book and research question. What is the theory? How are the cases selected? What methods are used in studying the cases? Do the chosen cases allow the question(s) to be answered effectively?

Week #4 2/4

Elite Interviews and Focus Groups II

- Bernhard, H. Russell. pp. 180-213
 - Fowler and Mangione, pp. 11-94
 - Leech, Beth (2002) “Asking Questions: Techniques for Semistructured Interviews”
 - Goldstein, Kenneth (2002) “Getting in the Door: Sampling and Completing Elite Interviews”
- Optional:
- Aberbach, Joel & Bert Rockman (2002) “Conducting and Coding Elite Interviews”
 - Berry, Jeffrey (2002) Validity and Reliability Issues in Elite Interviewing”

Assignments:

Come up with a research question in which you might use elite interviews, preferably from your list from week 2. Design a series of questions for conducting interviews. Discuss the selection of interview subjects, format of interview, location, and any other relevant information. Now do the same using a focus group design.

Week #5 2/11

Elite Interviews and Focus Groups II

Assignments:

Interview subjects or conduct focus group. Provide a report of the results and challenges in conducting the interviews or having a focus group. Discuss with class.

Week #6 2/18

Archival Research/Collecting and Coding Information

Johnson and Reynolds, "Document Analysis."

Assignments:

Book of the States Elections assignment (to be distributed).

Week #7 2/25

Content Analysis

- Gray, Paul S., John Williamson, David A. Karp, & John R. Dalphin (2007) "Content Analysis"
- Vinson, C. Danielle (2013) "Content Analysis: Local Media and Congress"
- Vinson, C. Danielle (2003) "Conclusion: Local Media Coverage of Congress and Its Members"

Assignment:

Find an article or book that uses content analysis and write a critical review of it.

Week #8 3/4

Sampling

- Johnson and Reynolds, "Sampling"
- Lavrakas, Ch. 2

Assignment:

Assignment to be distributed.

Week #9 3/18

Survey I—Designing Questionnaires

- Lavrakas, ch. 1
- Dillman, chs.2-4
- Brady, Henry E. (2000) "Contributions of Survey Research to Political Science"

Optional:

- Gray, Paul S., John Williamson, David A. Karp, & John R. Dalphin (2007) "Survey Analysis"
- Kellstedt, Lyman A. and James L. Guth (2013) "Survey Research: Religion and Electoral Behavior in the United States, 1936-2008"

Assignment:

Design a short questionnaire to answer one of your research questions.

Week #10 3/25

Surveys II—Survey Implementation

Assignments:

Resubmit your questions from previous week with corrections.

Week #11 4/1

Survey III—Survey Results

Assignments:

Implement survey and discuss results with class.

Week #12 4/8

Experiments I

- Campbell and Stanley, *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research*
- Taber and Lodge 2006.
- Pefley and Hurwitz 2007.
- Optional:
 - Gray, Paul S., John Williamson, David A. Karp, & John R. Dalphin (2007) “Experimental Research”
 - March and Stoker, Chapter 15 The Experimental Method
 - Nelson, T. E., Clawson, R.A., and Oxley, Z. M. (1997) “Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and Its Effect on Tolerance”
 - Devine, P. (1989) “Stereotypes and Prejudice: Their Automatic and Controlled Components”
 - Smith, Elizabeth (2013) “Experimental Research: If Bill Clinton Were a Woman?”
 - Smith, Elizabeth, Asleigh Smith Powers, and Gus Suarez (2005) “If Bill Clinton Were a Woman: The Effectiveness of Male and Female Politicians Account Strategies Following Alleged Transgressions”

Week #13 4/15

Experiments II

Assignments:

Design an experiment to answer a research question of your choosing. Write up exactly how you would conduct the experiment. Explain your experimental design. See your readings for an example on how to write this up. Identify your control groups and stimulus groups. Explain the experimental stimulus.

Week #14 4/22

Wrap-up

Work on Design Project

Week #15 4/29

Prepare a ~8 minute presentation of your design project to give to the class.