

Sam Houston State University
Department of Political Science

Course Syllabus (577)
The Scope and Methods of Political Science (3 credits)
Fall 2007

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Office Hours:
Tuesday: 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm
Thursday: 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm
or by appointment

Class meets: University Center, Tuesday 6:00 pm – 8:50 pm

Please Note: *The instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus, including dates for examinations, presentations, and the due date of materials, as needed. These changes will be announced in class and may appear in Blackboard announcements. It is the student's responsibility to become aware of the changes.*

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This is a study of the discipline of modern political science and public administration. It would lead to an inquiry into the literature, scope and techniques of research with particular emphasis upon the mathematical and quantitative methods of empirical research.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: The course examines the scope, methods, and techniques of modern political science and public administration. Thus, it deals with (1) the nature and range of concerns of the discipline, (2) the basic principles and assumptions of inquiry (the approaches, concepts, and logic commonly used), and (3) specific techniques for gathering and analyzing data. Particular emphasis will be placed on empirical and quantitative methods and techniques - that is, those involving observation and rigorous systematic examination. Students will be introduced to statistical methods. The major techniques will be surveyed, and you will get some experience using them. Students will be introduced to the use of the computer in data analysis. There is also emphasis on development of writing skills.

- **Gaining factual knowledge** (terminology, classifications, methods, trends) through the study of terms and manipulation and interpretation of data
- **Learning to apply course material** (to improve thinking, problem solving, and decisions) through weekly exercises that probe thinking skills,
- **Developing specific skills**, competencies, and points of view needed by professionals in the field most closely related to this course, through the development of computer and writing skills that show competency
- **Developing skill in expressing oneself orally or in writing** through weekly assignments and writing the research design,
- **Acquiring an interest** in learning more by asking questions and seeking answers through weekly assignments and writing the research design.

Required Text

1. O'Sullivan, Elizabeth and Gary R. Rassel. *Research Methods for Public Administrators, fourth Edition*. New York: Longman. 2003 ISBN: 0-321-08558-2.
2. Czaja, Ronald and Johnny Blair. *Designing Surveys: A Guide to Decisions and Procedures*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press. 1996. 0-8039-9056-1.
3. Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations, 6th edition*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press. 1996.
4. SPSS for Windows, Student edition

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

The course will involve a combination of lecture and discussion, with the emphasis on the latter. Students are expected to have read and thought about the assigned material proper to class so as to be able to understand the material and participate in class discussion. Active participation in class is expected. Absences will adversely affect the class participation grade. It is the student's responsibility to arrange to make up any missed work. Late submission of assigned work will lower the grade for the assignment by *one letter grade for each late day*.

GRADES:

Your final grade will be determined thus:

Assignments	35 points
Final Exam	30 points
Research Design	25 points
Presentation of paper	10 points

90-100 =A, 80-89 = B, 70-79 = C, 0-69 =F

Students have to submit a (a) a research design, and (b) written exercises (qualitative and quantitative). In addition, you will make an oral presentation of your research design at the end of the semester. The duration of the presentation is 15 minutes and students are expected to use power point slides and other materials (handouts, etc.) for their presentation.

Student grades will be posted on the SAMINFO. Students should save all graded items until the final grade is posted on SAMINFO. If there is a problem with your final grade it cannot be resolved if you do not have original copies of the paper and examinations. The grade in my record will stand unless you can provide documentation that I have made an error; so, save everything!

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

There is one writing assignment for this class. A **research design**, which the student might reasonably be able to execute in the future. Topics for the research design will be chosen in consultation with the instructor. A draft (electronic version) of the research design is due November 21, 2006 and the final version is due December 5, 2006.

Research Design

A **research design** is a plan for carrying out a research project. It lays out the problem to be examined and hypotheses to be tested, puts them in the context of the research that has already been done, and spells out carefully how the necessary information will be gathered and applied to test the hypotheses proposed. *Note that you will not actually do the research in this class.* Rather, you will be providing a plan of how to do the work at some later point (which may or may not come). You will have to do some library research to see what research has been done on the topic and what need to be done next. You will also have to figure out how to get the necessary data, what methods you will use in applying it, and the standards you will use to determine if you accept or reject your hypotheses. The piece by Guba provides a list of items that might be covered. Choose a topic you could actually do and would be of interest to you. Make it large enough to require some serious work and small enough to be done by you alone or with a few assistants you could hire on a limited research budget. This would be a good vehicle to begin examining a thesis topic. Replication or extension of earlier studies is very appropriate.

Time line: Starting thinking about a topic that is of interest to you right from the very beginning of the semester. Check the format for research design and start working on it. Consult Turabian for the construction and writing format of the paper. You can fine tune your hypotheses but you may not change the topic between the first draft and the final version. The research design should be about 20 pages, not counting the Works Cited or Appendices.

Research Design for MA students:

This project is used as a mock design or as part of a prospectus for students interested in doing a thesis. **For non-thesis students:** You can choose any type of topic you wish in consultation with the professor.

For thesis students: You must consult with this professor as well as the professor that will oversee your thesis. This is an excellent opportunity for you to do some leg work on the thesis that will save you a lot of time later on.

Research Design for MPA students:

This project must be designed with your employer or intern supervisor as well as the professor so that it covers the scope that is needed. This project will actually be implemented when you take POL578, Research in the Public Sector next semester. Every good MPA program has a research component in it so that students can get the feel for doing research on the job. You will consult with your supervisor about the type of research that the organization needs. We will then work on it together to see that it is the scope that is necessary to meet the requirements of the PA578 class.

The written products should use proper grammar and correct style. Consult the recommended style manual, by Kate Turabian. Her scientific notation system is required by this department for papers and theses. List the manual used in the bibliography. Pen corrections are acceptable and are preferable to errors. The student, not the typist, is responsible for the final proofreading. Footnotes, endnotes, or scientific notation (works cited) style may be used for citations. A bibliography of sources cited should be included. The research designs should be about 20 pages typed (not including endnotes, appendices, or bibliography), double spaced, and use 12 points font, preferable Times New Roman.

Longer papers are acceptable, shorter papers are not. Short papers will receive a substantial grade penalty.

Protection of Human Subjects:

The federal government has established guidelines regarding the participation of human subjects in research. In order to conduct research, involving humans (and animals) at SHSU, oversight is required by a university committee. Part of the process involves certification from the National Cancer Institute at <http://www.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials/learning/page3>. Click on Human Participant Protections Education for Research Teams to register for the tutorial. This is a free tutorial. The course and certification is available through the university's web page. Use the Fast Link to Office of Research and Sponsored Projects and choose Compliance information, then Human Subjects Protection, then Education for Research Teams. This will link you to the website so you can complete the course and certification process on-line.

ORAL PRESENTATIONS

Students will make an oral presentation of their research design. You will summarize your research project and discuss the essential components of it. You are to speak to your classmates; *do not present the remarks to me*. The point is to help you improve your presentation skills. *You may consult notes but do not read from your paper*. Make sure that the presentation does not exceed 15 minutes. Power point slides should be used in your presentation along with other appropriate materials to enhance its quality. You will be graded both on the quality and contents of your presentation and on your ability to speak and answer questions raised by your classmates.

Classroom Conduct:

Students will refrain from behavior in the classroom that intentionally or unintentionally disrupts the learning process and, thus, impedes the mission of the university. **Cellular telephones and pagers must be turned off** before class begins. Students are prohibited from eating in class, using tobacco products, making offensive remarks, reading newspapers, sleeping, talking at inappropriate times, wearing inappropriate clothing, or engaging in any other form of distraction. Inappropriate behavior in the classroom may result in a directive to leave class. Students who are especially disruptive also may be reported to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action in accordance with university policy.

Visitors must receive the instructor's permission to attend class. Visitors are allowed on a limited basis only; i.e. once or twice a semester. Visitors must maintain the decorum as the rest of the class or they will be asked to leave the class.

Americans with Disabilities:

Requests for disability accommodations must be initiated by the student. A student seeking accommodations should go to the Counseling Center and Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) in a timely manner. This instructor requires documentation from the Counseling Center in order to provide accommodations.

COURSE OUTLINE

You will find that this course teaches two courses in one and that they are mixed together. Thus, you may find the course confusing at times. The O'Sullivan and Rassel text provides a logical development of basic methods used for measuring political behavior. We also study survey research because it is the most commonly used tool for so much of what we think we know in the discipline. At the same time we examine the *science* in political science through your development of a research proposal. We discuss writing early in the course so that you can begin your research design early. We also discuss ethical use of research, which also applies to social science (political) research.

You may feel lost at first, but you will become more comfortable as the semester proceeds. The discussion and readings will become more meaningful when you have completed the exercises, thus the order in the syllabus. First you read the material before class. Second, we have class discussion. Third, you complete the assignments using the method learned. This process ought to make you comfortable with the chapter.

The dates for specific topics are approximate. There may be some variation in the schedule, but you will be informed of changes. *Check the Blackboard for announcements.* Other reading assignments not listed may be announced in class.

Please note that extra credit work will not be assigned to any student in the class.

Tentative Schedule

8/21/07	Introduction to Research Methods	Chapter 1
8/28/07	Organizing Research	Chapter 1 (cont'd)
9/4/07	Designs for Description	Chapter 2
9/11/07	Designs for Explanation	Chapter 3
9/18/07	Measuring Variables	Chapter 4
9/25/07	Sampling	Chapter 5
10/02/07	Contacting and Talking to Subjects Data Collection Designing Surveys	Chapter 6 Chapter 7 Czaja and Blair
10/09/07	Secondary Data Analysis Combining Indicators	Chapter 9 Chapter 10
10/16/07	*Assignment*	
10/23/07	Univariate Analysis	Chapter 11
10/30/07	Examining Relationships	Chapter 12
11/6/07	Examining Relationships	Chapter 13
11/13/07	Regression Analysis and Correlation	Chapter 14
11/20/07	*Assignment*	
11/27/07	Ethics in Research **Submit Research Design**	Chapter 8
12/4/07	Oral Presentation of Research Design	
12/11/07	***Final Exam***	

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Cheating on the exams or the paper will result in administrative sanctions including being reported to the Dean of Students, failing the course, or academic expulsion.

This instructor takes academic dishonesty very seriously and will penalize students who engage in it. SHSU defines “cheating” as

- “1) copying from another student’s test paper, laboratory report, other report, or computer files, data listings, and/or programs.
- 2) Using, during a test, materials not authorized by the person giving the test.
- 3) collaborating, without authorization, with another student during an examination or in preparing academic work.
- 4) knowingly, and without authorization, using, buying, selling, stealing, transporting, soliciting, copying, or possessing, in whole or in part, the contents of an unadminstered test...
- 7) Purchasing, or otherwise acquiring and submitting as one’s own work any research paper or other writing assignment prepared by an individual or firm.

5.312 ”Plagiarism” means the appropriation of another’s work or idea and the unacknowledged incorporation of that work or idea into one’s own work offered for credit.”

[Http://www.shsu.edu/administrative/faculty/sectionb.html#dishonesty](http://www.shsu.edu/administrative/faculty/sectionb.html#dishonesty)