

# **Political Science 308**

## **Introduction to Political Research**

Pennsylvania State University  
Spring 2016  
Tuesday & Thursday 4:15 - 5:30 p.m.  
167 Willard

Professor Christopher Zorn  
Department of Political Science  
236 Pond Lab  
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Office hours: By appointment.

### **Course Description**

This course provides an introduction to research design and the concepts employed in conducting social scientific research, particularly in political science. The main goal is to expose students to the basics of empirical research in political science, and to have them develop an understanding of the concepts and guiding principles in such research. The course materials will focus on why empirical research is conducted to study political phenomena, how to design and conduct research projects, and what role data / statistics play in empirical studies.

### **Policies**

- Assigned readings must be completed before each class meeting.
- Late assignments will not be accepted.
- All students must adhere to the PSU honor code (please refer to the statement on academic dishonesty at the end of the syllabus).
- Students are responsible for checking messages sent through Angel regarding class-related matters.

### **Readings**

This textbook is required reading for the course. Other materials may be made available through ANGEL.

- Johnson, Janet Buttolph, H. T. Reynolds, and Jason D. Mycoff. 2016. Political Science Research Methods – 8th Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press. (DO NOT purchase the workbook by Mycoff).

## Evaluation

The grades in this course will be assigned according to the PSU grading system. Please see <http://www.registrar.psu.edu/grades/grading-system.cfm>. The final grade will be based on the following criteria:

- **Midterm Exam (20%)**

There will be an in-class exam, based on the course materials covered up to that point.

- **Cumulative Final Exam (30%)**

The final exam will be based on the materials covered in the entire course.

- **Assignments (5% each; 15% total)**

There will be three short take-home assignments through the course of the semester, each worth 5% of the total course grade. The purpose of these assignments will be to ascertain your grasp of the concepts taught in the course.

- **Paper (25%)**

At the end of the course, you will submit a research design paper of 6 to 8 pages. You will choose a paper topic of interest and get it approved by the instructor. A brief description of your paper topic is due on February 18. In the research design, you will be expected to make an argument (informed by theory), present one or more hypotheses, describe the data and methods you will employ in your analysis, and outline expected findings. You will also make a brief (5 minute) presentation to the class on your paper topic ; the grade for the presentation will be part of the total paper grade. 20 percent of the course grade will be for the written paper and 5 percent for the presentation. The final paper will be due on Monday, May 2.

- **Participation (10%)**

In order to achieve the goals of this course, we need to engage in extensive discussion of relevant topics. Class discussions are an integral part of the course and you will have considerable influence on the class sessions. Your participation in class discussions will be evaluated on the bases of both quantity and quality. I would like to hear from you frequently, but it's also important that your comments are relevant to the materials under discussion. Participation in class discussions will comprise 10% of the course grade.

Participation and attendance are closely linked since it is not possible to be involved in class discussion if you are not present in class. I expect you to be in class each week. Missing

class will have a significant effect on your participation grade. It is also important that you come to class on time; each class session will start exactly at 4:15 p.m.

## **Grades**

The following grade distribution will be used in this course:

93% and above	A
90% to 92%	A-
87% to 89%	B+
83% to 86%	B
80% to 82%	B-
77% to 79%	C+
70% to 76%	C
60% to 69%	D
59% and below	Fail

## **Statement on Academic Dishonesty**

The Department of Political Science, along with the College of the Liberal Arts and the University, takes violations of academic dishonesty seriously. Observing basic honesty in one's work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all members of the community are required to subscribe.

All course work by students is to be done on an individual basis unless an instructor clearly states that an alternative is acceptable. Any reference materials used in the preparation of any assignment must be explicitly cited. Students uncertain about proper citation are responsible for checking with their instructor.

In an examination setting, unless the instructor gives explicit prior instructions to the contrary, whether the examination is in-class or take-home, violations of academic integrity shall consist but are not limited to any attempt to receive assistance from written or printed aids, or from any person or papers or electronic devices, or of any attempt to give assistance, whether the one so doing has completed his or her own work or not.

Lying to the instructor or purposely misleading any Penn State administrator shall also constitute a violation of academic integrity.

In cases of any violation of academic integrity it is the policy of the Department of Political Science to follow procedures established by the College of the Liberal Arts. More information on academic integrity and procedures followed for violation can be found [here](#).

## Disabilities

The Pennsylvania State University encourages qualified people with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities and is committed to the policy that all people shall have equal access to programs, facilities, and admissions without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by University policy or by state or federal authorities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell the instructor as soon as possible. Reasonable accommodations will be made for all students with disabilities, but it is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor early in the term. Do not wait until just before an exam to decide you want to inform the instructor of a learning disability; any accommodations for disabilities must be arranged well in advance.

## Course Schedule

<b>January 12</b>	<b>Course Introduction</b>
<b>January 14</b>	<b>Political Research: Overview</b> Chapter 1
<b>January 19-21</b>	<b>Why Conduct Empirical Research?</b> Chapter 2
<b>January 26-28</b>	<b>Asking Questions</b> Chapter 3 Assignment One (due 1/28)
<b>February 2</b>	<b>Hypotheses, Concepts, and Variables</b> Chapter 4
<b>February 4</b>	<b>No Class</b>
<b>February 9-11</b>	<b>Measurement</b> Chapter 5 Assignment Two (due 2/11)
<b>February 16-18</b>	<b>Causal Inference</b> Chapter 6 Reiter and Stam (1998) <i>Paper topic due on February 18</i>
<b>February 23-25</b>	<b>Samples and Sample Selection</b> Chapter 7

<b>March 1</b>	<b>Midterm Examination</b>
<b>March 3</b>	<b>Empirical Observations</b> Chapter 8
<b>March 8-10</b>	<b>No Class (Spring break)</b>
<b>March 15-17</b>	<b>Surveys and Interviews</b> Chapter 10
<b>March 22-24</b>	<b>Data</b> Chapter 11 Assignment Three (due 3/24)
<b>March 29-31</b>	<b>Statistical Inference</b> Chapter 12
<b>April 5</b>	<b>Examining Relationships</b> Chapter 13
<b>April 7</b>	<b>No Class</b>
<b>April 12</b>	<b>Examining Relationships, Continued</b> Chapter 13 (conclude)
<b>April 14</b>	<b>No Class</b>
<b>April 19-21</b>	<b>Paper Presentations</b> No readings assigned
<b>April 26</b>	<b>No Class</b>
<b>April 28</b>	<b>Final Exam Review Session</b>
<b>May 2</b>	<b>Final papers due</b>