

POLS3379.01  
CRN 84106  
3 credit hours  
TTH 9:30AM  
CHSS 232



## Research and Writing in Political Science

### How should we evaluate research?

How is good social science research done, and how do we evaluate it? This course is designed to provide a comprehensive overview of the analytical tools of political science research and writing. The foremost goal is a better understanding of how good critical thinking is conducted. Along the way, students will become good consumers of research and gain a better understanding of how to properly conduct their own research in the future.

Critical thinking is not about blindly accepting the wisdom of the “talking heads” you see on television or the information you get online. It is about admitting and being comfortable with uncertainty. In the complex arena of politics—where there are almost always multiple and competing assessments of and solutions to problems—this type of analysis is crucial. It includes the ability to break a problem into its

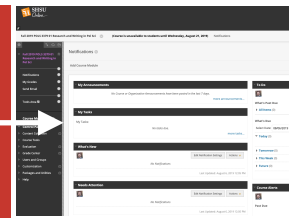
component parts, to question assumptions, to recognize and critically assess multiple and competing sources of information, to evaluate alternative perspectives on problems, and finally to design and evaluate solutions to those problems. The value of the study of the social sciences lies in the development of these skills, and it is toward these ends that this course is organized.

#### In this course, students will...

- Learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view through the lens of research design and methodology
- Develop a better understanding of the principles of research design in the social sciences
- Improve critical thinking and writing skills

# COURSE RESOURCES

1. All course materials can be found on the course's Blackboard (Bb) site.
2. Please establish a Google account if you don't have one already.



## Course Requirements

### 1. Weekly Notes Exercises (50 points @ 5 ea.)

Each week, you'll engage a variety of types of course materials: lecture videos, articles, podcasts, movie clips, book chapters, etc. I will provide a template for taking notes on these materials. The template is designed to help you draw out the most important ideas, think about connections between the materials, and develop your thinking as you move toward the application essay at the end of each unit. Your notes on the materials for the week will be collected 11 times over the semester, generally due each Sunday evening at 11:59pm via Bb. Each set of notes is worth five points. I will provide a grading rubric on Blackboard. I will also drop your lowest notes exercise grade.

### 2. Challenge Exercises (200 points @ 20 ea.)

In each of 11 weeks during the semester, you'll be wrestling with a "challenge exercise." Some of these will require you to critically consume and evaluate a piece of political science or other social science research. Other challenge exercises will ask you to get your hands dirty and engage in miniature simulations in which you'll have to think about how you would create an aspect of research. In both cases, we'll use face-to-face meetings and/or live Zoom sessions to wrestle with these challenges in small groups. Then

you'll be required to write a short report or respond to a prompt with a brief essay, usually no more than 1-2 pages. Each of these challenges is worth 20 points. Specific instructions and rubrics will be provided for each challenge exercise. I will drop your lowest challenge exercise grade.

### 3. Application Essays (300 @ 100 ea.)

Following each of the primary units for the semester, you will be required to write an application essay. In these assignments, you will write a 5-6 page essay responding directly to a prompt that forces you to wrestle with and apply course concepts. Specific instructions and rubrics will be provided for each essay. The prompts will be posted on Bb, and your essays should be submitted there as well.

## GRADE SCALE

550-495 points	A
494-440 points	B
439-385 points	C
384-330 points	D
329-0 points	F

You must earn the points listed.  
No rounding!

### DR. JASON ENIA



My work focuses on the political economies of cooperation and conflict, specifically the challenges associated with public goods provision. My current projects explore these challenges in the context of the politics of natural disasters and international weapons regimes.

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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**Hours:** T/Th 12-1 Zoom or in person; by appt.

# Policies

## Attendance & Remote Option

For Fall 2020, you are permitted to complete this course remotely. Please see the link in Blackboard for instructions on how to formally request this option.

The course will offer a mix of face-to-face sessions and Zoom sessions. Regardless of whether you are attending face-to-face or completing the class remotely, I will keep a record of student attendance throughout the semester. However, there are no points attached to attendance.

## Deadlines

Assignments may be submitted up to 24 hours after a posted deadline but will incur a 10% penalty.

It is your responsibility to ensure that your assignment is delivered on time. Everything that comes in after the stated deadline is late. If you are worried about a technology-related problem or anything else going wrong, consider delivering the assignments well before the last minute!

In addition, I strongly advise you to confirm that your document uploaded properly and obtain some form of a receipt (e.g., screen shot). I will only entertain “technological error” excuses if they are accompanied by some form of receipt.

Assignments will not be accepted beyond 24 hours after the original deadline without a prior conversation. My hope is that the “drop the lowest” policies for the Weekly Notes Exercises and Challenge Exercises will take care of many situations that might arise during the semester. However, if you know that an upcoming deadline is going to pose a problem, please discuss it with me in advance.

## W-Course Requirement

This is a “W” course, which means that at least 50 percent of your course grade will derive

from writing activities designed to help you master course objectives. Writing in this course is one of the tools I will use to help you learn course material. Some writing activities will require you to draft and revise your work, with or without instructor feedback. Others may not receive a grade but are designed to assist you in critical reflection of the course material. You should approach writing in this course as a tool to use as part of your learning as well as a tool your instructor will use to assess your level of learning.

## Academic Integrity

Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Please be aware that plagiarized work and any form of academic dishonesty will result in an “F” on the assignment. SHSU [Academic Policy Statement 810213](#) outlines the definition of academic honesty and the related disciplinary procedures.

You should also familiarize yourself of [Academic Policy Statement 900823](#), which outlines the procedures for students to file an academic grievance should you wish to appeal your grade for reasons other than academic dishonesty. Please read over these policies.

If you have any questions, please ask! I am always happy to help point you in the right direction if you have questions about proper attribution and/or citation

## Absences on Religious Holy Days

[SHSU Academic Policy Statement 861001](#) states: “Section 51.911 (b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time.” Section 2.02 states “A student who is excused under this section may not be penalized, but the instructor may appropriately respond if the student fails to satisfactorily complete the assignment or exam.”

## Disability Services

SHSU [Academic Policy Statement 811006](#) reads: “It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that no otherwise qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of his/her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any academic program or activity or in employment.” The policy continues, “The SHSU Section 504/ADA Coordinator for student academic-related matters is the Director of the SHSU Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD), located in the Lee Drain Building Annex, SHSU Box 2091, Huntsville, Texas 77341, with telephone 936-294-3512, TDD 936- 294-3786, and e-mail [disability@shsu.edu](mailto:disability@shsu.edu). SHSU and SSD promote full and equal access on the part of otherwise qualified students with disabilities to the educational and extra-curricular programs, activities, and services of the University. Students seeking academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids and services under Section 504 or the ADA should contact SSD. SSD makes the initial determinations regarding such requests.”

## Visitors in the Classroom

Only registered students may attend class. Exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis by the professor. In all cases, visitors must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. Students wishing to audit a class must apply to do so through the Registrar's Office.

## Course Evaluation

Near the end of the semester, you will be asked to complete a course evaluation. The evaluation form will provide you an opportunity to evaluate the instructor and the extent to which the course fulfilled the objectives listed on the first page of this syllabus.

## 5 TIPS FOR SUCCESS

### 1. Engage the course materials!

I've worked hard to curate a set of course materials that are interesting and engaging. Read carefully. Utilize the notes template and the Big Themes videos to help guide you toward the most important points. Ask questions when you don't understand.

### 2. Find a flow.

Hopefully, you'll notice a rhythm to this course. Almost all of the weeks have the same structure and the same categories of assignments due at the same time (generally, Sunday night at 11:59pm). My hope is that this allows you to schedule your work for this class in a way that fits into all your other responsibilities.

### 3. Allow remote to work for you!

Whether you are taking the remote option or planning to attend a weekly face-to-face session, much of this class will occur remotely. To that end, many of the course materials — podcasts, for example — can be consumed anywhere (commuting, exercising, etc.). I want to fit the course into your schedule, but I also want the material of this course to seep into your everyday thinking!

### 4. Use your drops wisely.

For weekly notes and challenge exercises, my “drop the lowest grade” policy should account for any emergencies that arise during the semester. Use these drops wisely.

### 5. Be proactive.

If you find yourself having some sort of issue that is affecting (or will affect) your performance, please speak with me ASAP. I am much more inclined to help students in the middle of the semester than at the end.



**COURSE INTRODUCTION (AUGUST 17-30)****Week 1 (Aug 17-23): Introducing the course**

1. Read syllabus.
2. Review all materials in “How this course works” on Bb.
3. Read, watch, consume any additional content in “Week 1” in “Course content” on Bb.

**Week 2 (Aug 24-30): How does science work? Getting comfortable with doubt, knowledge, & evidence**

1. Watch the “Big Themes This Week” video.
2. Read, watch, and listen to any content in “Week 2” in “Course content” on Bb.
3. Complete the “Weekly Notes” exercise. Due Aug 30 by 11:59pm. **[5 points]**
4. Complete the “Weekly Challenge” exercise. Due Aug 30 by 11:59pm. **[20 points]**

**THE CHALLENGES OF MEASUREMENT (AUGUST 31-SEPTEMBER 27)****Week 3 (Aug 31-Sep 6): Defining & operationalizing concepts**

1. Watch the “Big Themes This Week” video.
2. Read, watch, and listen to any content in “Week 3” in “Course content” on Bb.
3. Complete the “Weekly Notes” exercise. Due Sep 6 by 11:59pm. **[5 points]**
4. Complete the “Weekly Challenge” exercise. Due Sep 6 by 11:59pm. **[20 points]**
5. Take a look at the prompt for Application Essay #1 (Bb) so you have it in your head over the next few weeks.

**Week 4 (Sep 7-13): Measurement errors**

1. Watch the “Big Themes This Week” video.
2. Read, watch, and listen to any content in “Week 4” in “Course content” on Bb.
3. Complete the “Weekly Notes” exercise. Due Sep 13 by 11:59pm. **[5 points]**
4. Complete the “Weekly Challenge” exercise. Due Sep 13 by 11:59pm. **[20 points]**

**Week 5 (Sep 14-20): Creating valid & reliable measures**

1. Watch the “Big Themes This Week” video.
2. Read, watch, and listen to any content in “Week 5” in “Course content” on Bb.
3. Complete the “Weekly Notes” exercise. Due Sep 20 by 11:59pm. **[5 points]**
4. Complete the “Weekly Challenge” exercise. Due Sep 20 by 11:59pm. **[20 points]**

**Week 6 (Sep 21-27): Wrapping up measurement**

1. Read, watch, and listen to any content in “Week 6” in “Course content” on Bb.
2. Complete and submit Application Essay #1. Due Sep 27 by 11:59pm. **[100 points]**

**THE CHALLENGES OF FINDING AN APPROPRIATE SAMPLE (SEPTEMBER 28-NOVEMBER 1)****Week 7 (Sep 28-Oct 4): What is sampling & why do we do it?**

1. Watch the “Big Themes This Week” video.
2. Read, watch, and listen to any content in “Week 7” in “Course content” on Bb.
3. Complete the “Weekly Notes” exercise. Due Oct 4 by 11:59pm. **[5 points]**
4. Complete the “Weekly Challenge” exercise. Due Oct 4 by 11:59pm. **[20 points]**
5. Take a look at the prompt for Application Essay #2 (Bb) so you have it in your head over the next few weeks.

**Week 8 (Oct 5-11): Sample bias**

1. Watch the “Big Themes This Week” video.
2. Read, watch, and listen to any content in “Week 8” in “Course content” on Bb.
3. Complete the “Weekly Notes” exercise. Due Oct 11 by 11:59pm. **[5 points]**
4. Complete the “Weekly Challenge” exercise. Due Oct 11 by 11:59pm. **[20 points]**

**Week 9 (Oct 12-18): Strategies for sampling**

1. Watch the “Big Themes This Week” video.
2. Read, watch, and listen to any content in “Week 9” in “Course content” on Bb.
3. Complete the “Weekly Notes” exercise. Due Oct 18 by 11:59pm. [5 points]
4. Complete the “Weekly Challenge” exercise. Due Oct 18 by 11:59pm. [20 points]

**Week 10 (Oct 19-25): Thinking about sample size**

1. Watch the “Big Themes This Week” video.
2. Read, watch, and listen to any content in “Week 10” in “Course content” on Bb.
3. Complete the “Weekly Notes” exercise. Due Oct 25 by 11:59pm. [5 points]
4. Complete the “Weekly Challenge” exercise. Due Oct 25 by 11:59pm. [20 points]

**Week 11 (Oct 26-Nov 1): Wrapping up sampling**

1. Read, watch, and listen to any content in “Week 11” in “Course content” on Bb.
2. Complete and submit Application Essay #2. Due Nov 1 by 11:59pm. [100 points]

**THE CHALLENGES OF THINKING ABOUT WHETHER ONE THING CAUSES ANOTHER (NOVEMBER 2-DECEMBER 9)****Week 12 (Nov 2-8): The challenges of making inferences**

1. Watch the “Big Themes This Week” video.
2. Read, watch, and listen to any content in “Week 12” in “Course content” on Bb.
3. Complete the “Weekly Notes” exercise. Due Nov 8 by 11:59pm. [5 points]
4. Complete the “Weekly Challenge” exercise. Due Nov 8 by 11:59pm. [20 points]
5. Take a look at the prompt for Application Essay #3 (Bb) so you have it in your head over the next few weeks.

**Week 13 (Nov 9-15): Correlation versus causation**

1. Watch the “Big Themes This Week” video.
2. Read, watch, and listen to any content in “Week 13” in “Course content” on Bb.
3. Complete the “Weekly Notes” exercise. Due Nov 15 by 11:59pm. [5 points]
4. Complete the “Weekly Challenge” exercise. Due Nov 15 by 11:59pm. [20 points]

**Week 14 (Nov 16-22): Double-blind experiments as the gold standard**

1. Watch the “Big Themes This Week” video.
2. Read, watch, and listen to any content in “Week 14” in “Course content” on Bb.
3. Complete the “Weekly Notes” exercise. Due Nov 22 by 11:59pm. [5 points]
4. Complete the “Weekly Challenge” exercise. Due Nov 22 by 11:59pm. [20 points]

**Week 15 (Nov 23-29): Thanksgiving — NO COURSE MEETINGS**

1. Work on Application Essay #3

**Week 16 (Nov 30-Dec 9): Wrapping up the course**

1. Read, watch, and listen to any content in “Week 14” in “Course content” on Bb.
2. Complete and submit Application Essay #3. Due Dec 9 by 11:59pm. [100 points]