

Syllabus

PLS210 – Political Science Research Methods

Instructor: Dr. Willardson

Office 8.133

Course: Political Science Research Methods

Office Hours: MWF 13:00-14:00, and by appt.

Class: T/Th 0900-1015 in 8.310

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Office Hours: T: 1330-1500 and F 11:00-12:30 and by appt.

Course Objectives

This course has three main objectives. The first is that students will become familiar with the research process. The second objective is that students will learn more about specific methods for conducting social scientific research in the context of political science, and will be able to utilize these methods for their own research. The third is that students will become stronger writers of political science research. These objectives are building blocks toward making students into capable students – able to study and research for their future upper-level PSIR courses – and into capable individuals. **The skills learned in this course will be valuable in any career.** You will learn to read, research, organize, and write the results of your research.

Course Description

This is a foundational course in the political science and international relations major. It, along with PLS211 (Quantitative Methods in Political Science) provide the necessary background for students to read and understand political science research. This course also helps prepare students to conduct research (even if that research consists of a literature review) and write papers in upper-level political science courses. This class has a good deal of reading. More importantly, it requires a good deal of writing. The writing required for the course varies in its length and format for different assignments, but is meant to strengthen students' ability to express themselves in specific contexts. This course focuses on methods, form, and content of research. I have high expectations for student work. Each student is expected to do the assigned work on time (see [Late Work](#) for my policies on late work) and to the best of his or her abilities.

Required Textbooks

In this course we will use a number of selected readings, many of which will be available on Moodle. We will also use the following textbook, which you should pick up with your other course materials from the library.

Berg, Bruce L. and Howard Lune. 2012. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences, 8th Edition*. Allyn and Bacon, New York.

Table 1: All Graded items and Total Points for Course

Item	Due	Points Possible
Participation	Ongoing	100
Short Papers (2 @ 50 points each)	See Schedule	100
Theory Exercise	October 3	50
Midterm Exam	November 2	100
Methods Exercise (2 @ 50 Points Each)	See Schedule	100
Literature Review and Proposal	October 19	100
Research Design Draft	November 7	100
Final Research Design	November 28	150
Total Points		800

We will also be using a number of chapters excerpted from Johnson and Reynolds (2012) which will be available on Moodle.

Johnson, Janet Buttolph and Reynolds, H.T. 2012. *Political Science Research Methods*. Sage, Los Angeles.

Grading

Individual assignments and exams will be graded according to rubrics and instructions. Your overall grade for the course will be determined by the cumulative points that you earn on those assignments divided by the total number of points possible in the course. Grades are assigned using the following scale

Letter Grade Distribution:

≥ 95.00	A	65.00 - 69.99	C
90.00 - 94.99	A-	60.00 - 64.99	C-
85.00 - 89.99	B+	55.00 - 59.99	D+
80.00 - 84.99	B	50.00 - 54.99	D
75.00 - 79.99	B-	≤ 50	F
70.00 - 74.99	C+		

Table 1 shows the graded items and their total points for the class. A description of these graded items is found in the next section. Your grade will be calculated by totaling the number of points earned by you on each of the graded items and dividing that total number by 800 total points for the course.

Note: I will post grades for all assignments on Moodle. However, your grade is not determined by Moodle. It is calculated according to the points earned divided by the total number of points in the class as above. Moodle is a bookkeeping tool and not your official grade.

Brief Description of Assignments

Participation

In this course we will be learning by doing. We will do a number of exercises in class along with some traditional lectures to convey information. All students in this class are expected to be in class (you can't participate if you are not present), engaged with the material, and contributing to class. Your contribution comes in two forms - positive contributions to discussion and activities and avoiding negative contributions. Students will not behave in ways that distract other students or the professor. This means no side conversations, no cell phone (instagram, VK, WhatsApp, etc.) or sleeping. In-class activities will not be *graded* for points, but failure to participate will reduce your participation grade. Failure to attend consistently, negative contributions, and a poor attitude will greatly reduce your participation grade which counts for 12.5% of your total grade.

Note: If I feel as if students are not doing the required readings before class, I reserve the right to initiate unannounced reading quizzes that will account *for part or all of the participation* grade in class. Class attendance is less effective if you have not prepared yourself by reading the required materials.

Short Papers

Short papers are designed to help you to learn to write clearly and concisely. Two of these papers are assigned during the first part of the class. Each of these papers has a theme. Each paper is described in more detail in the appendix at the end of the syllabus.

Theory Exercise

The theory exercise is meant to help students understand the relationship between their research question, literature review, and hypotheses in their own research and writing. This assignment is described in more detail in the appendix at the end of the syllabus.

Midterm Exam

The midterm exam will consist of 10 multiple choice and 5 T/F questions about the substantive issues we have covered to this point in the semester. There will be 4 short written questions as well.

Methods Exercises

There are two methods exercises throughout the course. The first is meant to illustrate challenges in survey research. The second is meant to help students with understanding case studies. More information on these exercises is found at the end of the syllabus.

Literature Review and Proposal

This is the first part of the research design which is the major writing assignment for the course. In this paper students will turn in a 1500 word literature review that covers at least 10 sources related to their research question. The literature review will not be an annotated bibliography, but an instrumental review of relevant sources that helps to build theory and set up a research project. This is a draft for the final project, but should be a completed project by itself. After the literature review a short (400-500 words) section will describe the plan for the rest of the research design.

Research Design Draft

After receiving feedback on the literature review and proposal, students will write a draft of their research design. The research design will be 4000-5000 words and will include the research question, the literature review, and the proposed method for answering the question. The method section will include discussion of measurement, validity, challenges, resources needed, and a timeline/plan for conducting the research.

Final Research Design

The final research design will be a cleaned-up and improved version of the draft.

Course Schedule

Table 2 in Appendix 1 shows an outline of the topics and deadlines for the course. See the next section *Readings* for each week's reading assignments.

Course Readings

In this section I list the required readings for the course. This reading is meant to give you foundational knowledge in the substantive issues and techniques we will discuss in the course. You are also expected to do a great deal of reading of your own research topics throughout the semester. You will need to do this reading in order to complete your literature review and your research proposal. Please plan on spending at least 3-4 hours per week outside of class *each week* in order to stay caught up with the material.

Week 1

Tuesday: Syllabus ([Moodle](#))

Thursday: Johnson and Reynolds Chapters 1-2 ([Moodle](#))

Week 2

Tuesday: Pinker, Steven. 2014. "Why Academic Writing Stinks, and How to Fix it." ([Moodle](#))

– Knopf, Jeffrey W. 2006. Doing a Literature Review. PS: Political Science and Politics 39:127-132 ([Moodle](#))

Thursday: Johnson and Reynolds Chapter 3 ([Moodle](#))

– Berg Chapter 1.

Week 3

Tuesday: Eco, Umberto. 2015. "How to Write a Thesis" MIT University Press. (Excerpt) ([Moodle](#))

– APSA Citation Guide ([Link](#)) pages 17-33.

Berg Chapter 12

– Thursday: Materials in Class (Zotero)

Week 4

Monday: Johnson and Reynolds Chapter 4 ([Moodle](#))

Wednesday: Berg Chapter 2

Week 5

Tuesday: Johnson and Reynolds Chapter 5 ([Moodle](#))

Thursday: Johnson and Reynolds Chapter 6 ([Moodle](#))

Week 6

Tuesday: Berg Chapter 3

Thursday: Berg Chapter 4

Week 7

Tuesday: Berg Chapter 5

Thursday: Johnson and Reynolds Chapter 10 ([Moodle](#))

Week 8

Tuesday: Johnson and Reynolds Chapter 7 ([Moodle](#))

Thursday: Berg Chapter 10

Week 9

Tuesday:

Thursday: Midterm

Week 10

Tuesday: Berg Chapter 11

Thursday: Bennett, Andrew and Colin Elman. 2007. Case Study Methods in the International Relations Subfield. *Comparative Political Studies* 40:170-95. (Find it using Google Scholar)

Week 11

Tuesday: Gerring, John. 2004. What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good For? *American Political Science Review* 98:341-54. (Find it using Google Scholar)

Week 12

Tuesday: TBA

Policies

Attendance

Attendance in this course is necessary for student success. Any non-excused absence will be grounds for adjusting grades downward. Excused absences (such as documented illness, university-approved travel, etc.) must be cleared with me as soon as possible. Students are responsible for making up work missed during absence. In-class quizzes and assignments cannot be made up due to an absence of any sort. Late work is penalized. I reserve the right to grant an extension for work for absences that are cleared prior to occurring, or on the same day as class in the case of emergencies, but only in extraordinary circumstances.

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated under any circumstances. All students have been notified of Nazarbayev University's Student Code of Conduct and you have agreed to follow the university's standards. Plagiarism is defined as "intentionally or carelessly presenting the work of another as one's own." In short, all of the work you turn in for this class is expected to be yours and yours alone. Plagiarized work will receive a zero and students will be reported to university authorities. Lying about absences, illnesses, or other circumstances will also be considered as academic dishonesty.

Asking for extra points, extra credit, or a higher grade is also a form of academic dishonesty¹. Students *earn* grades based on their effort and results, grades are not *given* by me. Students have the right to question the grading of a particular item, and to make an appeal if they feel a grade for a given assignment was not fair. This should be done within a week of receiving feedback on an assignment. Any appeal to an assignment that occurred earlier in the semester at the end of the term will not be considered.

Religious Holidays Policy

Any student missing class quizzes, examinations, or any other class or lab work because of observance of religious holidays shall be given an opportunity during that semester to make up missed work. The make-up will apply to the religious holiday absence only. It shall be the responsibility of the student to notify me of a religious holiday absence **prior to its occurrence**. This policy covers other religious/cultural family obligations. Your use of this policy is governed by the provisions of the Academic Dishonesty policy above.

Office Hours

I hold regular office hours (indicated on the top of the syllabus.) Students are encouraged to come and see me during my office hours. I am also available by appointment, but I prefer that students come see me during scheduled office hours, if possible. I reserve the right to send students away who come and see me outside of office hours without an appointment. **Please be considerate of my time.**

Writing Center

Writing is a key component of your education at NU. Your grade is dependent on you turning in assignments that convey ideas clearly using standard language, format, citation style, etc. Students

¹This is also something that will ruin your reputation with faculty members. Please do not do this. The time to worry about grades is on each assignment and exam - not at the end of the term when the final tally is made.

are encouraged to work with the writing center to improve their writing. I will use my discretion in requiring students to use the writing center if assignments are consistently poorly written. I will notify you in writing if I will require you to work with the writing center on future papers.

Extra Credit

I do not provide extra credit assignments for students. On occasion, I may award 2-5 extra credit points for students who are to class on time or who participate in outside class activities suggested by the professor (such as talks and presentations that relate to the course). This little bit of extra credit may amount to 1-2 percent of the total possible points. This allows students who are working hard to move up a grade if they are close to the border. I do not provide extra assignments to make up for missed or late work. Do not ask me about providing you extra credit. **The answer will always be no.**

Late Work

Work is due at the beginning of the class when it is due (see schedule). Work that is turned in after the beginning of class, later in the day is penalized by 5%. Each following day work is penalized by 15%. This penalty is calculated by taking the earned grade on the assignment and multiplying it by (1-% deducted). For example, a paper turned in on Thursday when it was due on Tuesday will be penalized 35%. If a student earned 85% for the work, the score, with late penalty applied, would be $\approx 55\%$ ($.85 * (1 - 0.35)$) of the points possible for the assignment. **Turn your work in on time.**

Full Assignment Descriptions and Rubrics

Short Papers

All papers in this class should follow this general format:

1. Margins of 1 inch (2.54 cm) on all four margins
2. Name and date in top left corner
3. Title of paper centered and bold (give paper a title).
4. Use a regular font (Times New Roman, Georgia, Calibri, etc.) in 12 point.
5. Papers may be single or double-spaced.
6. Hard copy of papers must be stapled with a single staple in the upper left corner if more than 2 pages. You may print on both sides of paper.

The papers will be graded according to the [short paper rubric](#) included here. These papers will be at least 500 words, but no more than 750 words in length.

Short Paper 1

Due: 14 September at beginning of class. (Hard copy and uploaded to Moodle.)

Prompt: Can politics be understood empirically?

<i>Element</i>	Below Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Substantive Answer	(0-9 points) Student does not answer the question asked. Bad organization of ideas. Student does not have a thesis for paper. Student does not support assertions with evidence or logical arguments.	(9-12 points) Student meets basic requirements. Answers the question asked in a satisfactory manner. Uses organization, evidence, and logic to make a coherent argument based on a central thesis within the paper.	(12-15 points) Student meets all requirements for the meets expectation column to the left. In addition to meeting the basic requirement uses original arguments, compelling writing, or other elements to enhance the arguments made.
Writing	& (0-3 points) Writing is unorganized. Spelling and grammatical errors throughout. No organization to writing. No paragraphs. No citations, or poorly executed citations. Lots of repetition. No clear flow of ideas.	(3-4 points) Student writing has minimal mistakes. Length either too long or too short. Good flow, but may have some rough areas. Citations (when needed) are correct.	(4-5 points) Student meets all expectations and has very smooth writing that enhances the arguments being made in the substantive answer.
Formatting	(0-3 points) Formatting does not meet the expectations outlined in the syllabus for formatting.	(3-4 points) Formatting conforms to most standards.	(4-5 points) Formatting meets all expectations outlined in syllabus.

Figure 1: Short Paper Rubric

Short Paper 2

Due: 26 September at beginning of class. (Hard copy and uploaded to Moodle.)

Prompt: What is your current writing process for papers? Will you change that process based on what we've learned so far? Why or why not?

Theory Exercise

Due 3 October at beginning of class. (Hard copy and uploaded to Moodle)

Using the criteria for the short papers, pose your preliminary research question as a question and a preliminary theory for what you think the answer to the question may be - and why. (**Note:** The theory exercise will use the same rubric as the short papers.)

Research Question

Due 28 September at beginning of class.

The research question should be a one-sentence question on a political science topic. The question should be informed by a preliminary literature search. The question will certainly evolve as you work on your proposal and research design drafts. However, this first question should be thought-out and should reflect a question in which you have genuine interest and which you have begun to research. You will turn in the question on a 3x5 index card that I will hand out at the beginning of class. You will need to come prepared with your question. This is ungraded, but failure to turn in a question on this date will result in points off on your literature review and proposal which is due on 18 March.

Methods Exercises

Due October 10 and November 21 at beginning of class. (Hard copy and uploaded to Moodle)

The two methods exercises will each begin with an in-class portion. The in-class assignment will include instructions for what you need to do to finish the exercise.

Literature Review and Proposal

Due 19 October at the beginning of class (Hard Copy).

This is the first part of the research design which is the major writing assignment for the course. This is a 2000-2500 word literature review that covers at least 10 sources related to your research question. The literature review will not be an annotated bibliography, but an instrumental review of relevant sources that helps to build theory and set up a research project. This is a draft for the final project, but should be a completed project by itself. After the literature review a short (≈ 500 words) section will describe the plan for the rest of the research design. This will include the variables you are examining, how they will be measured, the method of gathering and analyzing information, potential problems, etc.

Research Design

This section describes the final research design project which is due on 28 November - as well as the draft which is due on 7 November.

This assignment is a full research proposal for a research project to be carried out by the student. My expectation is that this proposal could be used to actually carry out a research project in a subsequent class. It is meant to demonstrate your skill in asking research questions, conducting preliminary research, constructing a literature review, and planning how to carry out a research project to answer your research question. The draft and final project will contain the following elements:

1. Title Page (Title, name, date, and abstract)
2. Research Design
3. Works Cited

The research design itself will consist of the research question as part of an introduction, a literature review, a theory section, and a research plan that outlines the steps you will undertake to answer your research question. Your paper may include appendices describing variables, data, sources, interview subjects, etc. The research plan should be detailed and describe not only what you plan on doing, but the potential obstacles that you will encounter along the way. The research plan will follow the formatting requirements listed above in the [Short Papers](#) section above.

The question, literature review, and theory sections should be about 2500 words in length. Your research plan should be another 1000-15000 words. This excludes the title page and references.

If you single-spaced the assignment, it will translate into about 10 pages of text. This is a big assignment, which is why we will be working on elements of it throughout the semester. You need to be serious about finding a topic and working on research from day 1 of the class, otherwise, you will get behind and this project will suffer. This project is worth about 30% of your grade between the draft and final project. It is worth just over 40% when you include the literature review and proposal. It is a *major* element of the course. I will use a similar grading rubric for evaluating the final research design proposal - with some more specific points distributed among the elements.

Table 2: Course Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Deadlines
1	5 September	Course Introduction and Syllabus	
	7 September	The Empirical Approach to Political Science	
2	12 September	Good Writing	
	14 September	Research Process	Short Paper I
3	19 September	Good Writing II	
	21 September	Good Writing III	
4	26 September	Research Design	Short Paper II
	28 September	Research Design II	Research Question Due
5	3 October	Measurement I	Theory Exercise
	5 October	Causal Inference	
6	10 October	Ethics in Research	Methods Exercise I
	12 October	Interviewing	
7	17 October	Interviewing II	
	19 October	Surveys	Lit. Review and Proposal
8	24 October	Sampling	
	26 October	Case Studies	
9	31 October	Exam Review	
	2 November	Midterm Exam	Midterm Exam
10	7 November	Content Analysis	Research Design Draft
	9 November	Case Studies II	
11	14 November	Case Studies III	
	16 November	Writing Day	
12	21 November	TBA	Methods Exercise II
	23 November	TBA	
	28 November	NO CLASS	Final Research Design