

## Introduction to Research in Political Science- Sample Syllabus

This course introduces you to the fundamentals of political science research. While most other political science courses examine the *findings* of this research, this class focuses on the *methods* political scientists use to develop and convey these findings. You will learn how to ask questions about politics, answer these questions using the scientific method and appropriate evidence, and how to convey your arguments, evidence, and conclusions to others. We will focus both on quantitative and qualitative research methodology. You will also learn “R”, an open source statistical program.

The course topics will include the logic of the social scientific method; the measurement of political concepts; research design and methods of data collection; the basic principles of statistical inference; and the use of qualitative data to study political phenomena. You must be committed to learning how to study the political world from a social scientific perspective. We will regularly be engaging with contemporary political developments and discussing how to assess them using the social scientific approach.

By the end of the course, students should be able to

- Understand and apply the basic principles of quantitative and qualitative research methods
- Evaluate arguments about real world politics using the social scientific method
- Develop a research project using the social scientific approach
- Use “R” for basic statistical analysis

### Required Materials

Paul M. Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. New York: Cambridge University Press (2009)

Neil Salkind. *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications (2016)

Gary Goertz and James Mahoney. *A Tale of Two Cultures: Qualitative and Quantitative Research in Social Sciences*. Princeton: Princeton University Press (2012)

Joel Best. *Damned Lies and Statistics: Untangling Numbers from the Media, Politicians, and Activists*. Berkeley: University of California Press (2001)

“Try R” Code School: <http://tryr.codeschool.com/>. A free course introducing you to our main statistical program, R.

## **Requirements and Grades**

### **Readings**

Students are expected to read the assigned readings prior to the classes on the same subjects. Readings either come from the assigned textbooks, or will be posted on Blackboard. Readings posted on Blackboard are indicated with (Blackboard) next to them.

### **Attendance**

You are allowed to miss two classes without an excuse. Beyond this, the best way to request an excused absence is to talk to me about it **in advance**. I allow for excused absences for Skidmore associated athletic and performance events, class projects that take you away from campus, and religious observances. **If you know well ahead of time that you will be missing class for one of these reasons, it is your responsibility to talk to me at least one class period ahead of time.** For example, if you know you will be absent on a Tuesday, it is your responsibility to let me know no later than the Thursday immediately preceding. In terms of unexpected absences, if you become sick or have to leave campus unexpectedly for a family emergency, please let me know as soon as possible. If you ask for an excuse after an event has occurred for which you had advance warning (for example, you missed class for an athletic or performance event but did not notify me beforehand), the excused absence **will not** be granted. Every unexcused absence beyond your two allowed absences will result in the deduction of 1% from your total semester grade. So, if you were initially assigned a 90% (A-) for the course but have one unexcused absence, your final grade would be an 89% (B+). When in doubt, talk to me first!

### **Mid Term Evaluation**

I am committed to making our classroom a place that is conducive to effective discussion and learning for everyone. To do so, I need your input. Around the middle of the semester, I will be sending out a brief survey asking you to share classroom dynamics that are working for you, and areas where you feel we could improve. Though I cannot take everyone's comments into consideration, together we will discuss the survey results to help improve the course for the remainder of the semester. These evaluations are also immensely helpful for me in planning for future courses.

### **Assignments**

Mastering the material in this course requires a highly active engagement with the assigned material. As such, there will be regular written homework assignments pertaining to readings and lecture materials (yes, some math is required!), alongside participation in lecture, two exams, and a research paper. The assignments and weight of each are as follows.

- A research paper on a political science topic that interests you. The goal is to apply the analysis skills you have learned in class by conducting an empirical analysis of a political science research question. Parts of the paper will be assigned as homework throughout the quarter to avoid the plagues of procrastination. As one of our founding fathers, Benjamin Franklin, proclaimed: *"you may delay, but time will not,"* and the more hopeful, *"Do you love life*

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*[research]? Then do not squander time, for that is the stuff life [research] is made of.*"  
The final paper should be between 10 and 15 pages, double spaced, with a standard font and 1" margins. (30%)

- Weekly homework assignments to be announced in class. (15%)
  - Every week for the first 8 weeks of the course, you will be asked to complete a different lesson from our "Try R" course that will help you learn the basics of "R" for homework assignments and your final research paper.
  - Every *other* week you will also have a substantive homework assignment.
- In-class midterm examination (25%)
- In-class final examination (25%)
- Participation in lecture. While this class is heavier on lecture than others, you are still required to come to class prepared and having done the assigned readings prior to class. You will find I am a very *conversational* lecturer, meaning I will often ask for your input and understanding throughout a given class period. Participation includes (but isn't limited to) asking clarifying questions about a given reading or my lecture, critiquing a research design or methodological approach, and demonstrating understanding of a given week's material. (5%)

### **Grading**

Your "R" assignments will be marked simply as completed or not completed. Homework assignments will be graded on a 3 point scale. A 3 means that your work has very little errors and exceeds expectations. A 2 means that your work has some error but generally meets my expectations. A 1 means that your work has a great deal of error and falls below my expectations. You will receive scores on exams and research papers that translate into your final letter grade for the course.

**No matter how careful, instructors sometimes make mistakes in grading.** I will be happy to regrade any exam or assignment. I ask, however, that you hold on to any item for at least 24 hours after it is returned to you before asking for a regrade. Any request for a regrade must be made in writing and within one week from the item being returned to you, after which no regrading will be done. The entire assignment will be regraded, which means that the grade may go up, go down, or stay the same.

### **Late Assignments Policy**

I have a *strict* no late assignments policy. You cannot turn in an assignment late and receive any amount of credit for it. If you do not turn in an assignment on the date it is due, you will have an opportunity to earn half credit by doing an alternative assignment. For example, if you turn in a homework assignment late, you may choose to be given an alternative homework with a different set of questions to turn in for half credit.

### **Academic Integrity**

All students are responsible for adhering to Skidmore's policies regarding academic integrity (<https://www.skidmore.edu/advising/integrity/>). It is expected that all materials submitted as part of any class exercise be the actual work of the student whose name appears on the material. All work that draws from other sources must use an appropriate citation format (e.g. APA, Chicago-Style, MLA). *All student work in this class will be analyzed electronically via Turn It In for violations of the College's Honor Code and may also be included in a database for the purpose of testing for plagiarized content.*

### **Classroom Policies**

#### **Cell phones, Laptops, and Classroom Behavior**

All phones must be silenced *before* class begins. Use of laptop computers during class is strictly prohibited. Several credible experimental studies have shown that computer note-taking adversely affects one's ability to synthesize and retain information (see, for example: <http://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away>). Also, it can be annoying and distracting for other students to have the person sitting next to them using their laptops for non-course related purposes (which, let's be honest, happens!) Students must comply with Skidmore's Policy on Civility and Comportment in the Classroom ([https://www.skidmore.edu/political\\_science/majors/handbook/comportment.php](https://www.skidmore.edu/political_science/majors/handbook/comportment.php)).

#### **Office Hours**

Students are encouraged to meet with me throughout the semester. If you feel you are having difficulties, you should attend office hours as early as possible in the semester to discuss strategies for improvement. Your feedback is also important to me. Please come visit my office hours if you have questions about the class or suggestions of how your learning may be improved. I also welcome the chance to get to know you better, so please feel free to stop by to chat, say hello, and talk current events. Chances are the more often you come by, the more likely it is you'll meet one of my two dogs (a beagle named Ladybird and a basset hound named Baily), who will make semi-regular appearances.

#### **Disabilities**

Students with disabilities are responsible for making their needs known to myself and seeking assistance through Skidmore's disability and accessibility services (<https://www.skidmore.edu/accessibility/>) at the *beginning* of the semester.

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need academic accommodation, you must formally request accommodation from Meg Hegener, Coordinator of Student Access Services. You will also need to provide documentation which verifies the existence of a disability and supports your request. For further information, please call 580-8150 or stop by the office of Student Academic Services in the Starbuck Center.

#### **Syllabus Changes**

At one point or another, we may get off schedule with our lecture and discussion and the syllabus will need to be revised mid-semester. **I reserve the right to adjust readings and assignments as I see fit throughout the course.**

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## **Week 1- Introduction**

Best → Chapter 1

Rogers Smith. “Should We Make Political Science More of a Science or More About Politics?”  
*PS: Political Science and Politics*: 199-201. (Blackboard)

“Try R” → Lesson 1: Using R.

## **Week 2- An Overview of the Social Scientific Approach**

Best → Introduction and Chapter 1.

Kellstedt and Whitten → Chapter 1

Salkind → A Note to the student, p. xvii-xviii || Chapter 1

Goertz and Mahoney → Introduction and Chapter 2

“Try R” → Lesson 2: Vectors

## **Week 3- Overview of the Research Process + Research Questions, Theories and Hypotheses**

Kellstedt and Whitten → Chapter 2

Henry Brady, Sidney Verba, and Kay Scholzman. “Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation.” *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 2 (1995): 271-294. (Blackboard)

“Try R” → Lesson 3: Matrices

### **Due → Homework 1**

## **Week 4 – The Nature of Causal Relationships**

Kellstedt & Whitten → Chapter 3

William R. Shadish, Thomas D. Cook, and Donald T. Campbell. *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Generalized Causal Inference*. Belmont: Wadsworth. Chapter 1. (Blackboard)

Goertz and Mahoney → Chapter 3

“Try R” → Lesson 4: Summary Statistics

### **Due → Research Paper Question and Bibliography**

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## **Week 5- Conceptualization and Measurement**

Kellstedt and Whitten → Chapter 5

Salkind → Chapter 6

Best → Chapter 2

L.J. Zigerell. “Researchers have a lot of freedom about which findings to emphasize. That can be a problem.” *The Washington Post- Monkey Cage*. September 18, 2017.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/09/18/researchers-have-a-lot-of-freedom-about-which-of-their-findings-to-emphasize-that-can-be-a-problem/?utm\\_term=.65fd9b750ce3](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/09/18/researchers-have-a-lot-of-freedom-about-which-of-their-findings-to-emphasize-that-can-be-a-problem/?utm_term=.65fd9b750ce3) (Blackboard)

“Try R” → Lesson 5: Factors

### **Due → Homework 2**

## **Week 6- Research Design**

Kellstedt and Whitten → Chapter 4

Goertz and Mahoney → Chapter 14

Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, “The Importance of Research Design” in *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, edited by Henry E. Brady and David Collier. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Chapter 7. (Blackboard)

Joshua Tucker. “This new initiative is trying to make scientific research more reliable.” *The Washington Post-Monkey Cage*. June 8, 2017. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/06/08/this-new-initiative-is-trying-to-make-scientific-research-more-reliable/?utm\\_term=.2079feeae99b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/06/08/this-new-initiative-is-trying-to-make-scientific-research-more-reliable/?utm_term=.2079feeae99b). (Blackboard)

Alan Gerber and Donald Green. “The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment.” *American Political Science Review* 94, no. 3 (2000): 653-663. (Blackboard)

“Try R” → Lesson 6: Data Frames

### **Due → Research Paper Literature Review**

## **Week 7- Describing Variables and Making Comparisons**

Kellstedt and Whitten → Chapter 6

Best → Chapter 4

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Salkind → Chapters 2-4

“Try R” → Real-World Data

**Due → Homework 3**

### **Week 8 – Sampling and Statistical Inference**

Kellstedt and Whitten → Chapter 7

Best → Chapter 3

“Try R” → What’s Next

### **Week 9 – Bivariate Hypothesis Testing**

Kellstadt and Whitten → Chapter 8

Salkind → Chapters 5 and 7-9

**Due → Homework 4**

**Due → Research Paper Theory and Hypotheses**

### **Week 10- Multiple Regression Models – The Basics**

Kellstadt and Whitten → Chapter 10

Salkind → Chapters 15 & 16

### **Week 11- Multiple Regression Models – Applications**

Kellstadt and Whitten → Chapter 12

Mark Tessler and Michael Robbins. “Talk of Rigged Elections Undermines Democracy.” *The Washington Post- Monkey Cage*. October 21, 2016.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/10/20/talk-of-rigged-elections-undermines-democracy/?utm\\_term=.495f355995cb](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/10/20/talk-of-rigged-elections-undermines-democracy/?utm_term=.495f355995cb). (Blackboard)

Gary Langer and Chad Kieweiet de Jonge. “The polls didn’t predict Trump’s win in 2016, but this technique did.” *The Washington Post-Monkey Cage*. June 13, 2017.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/06/13/this-new-polling-method-predicted-trumps-win-while-we-were-testing-it/?utm\\_term=.388767c0cf05](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/06/13/this-new-polling-method-predicted-trumps-win-while-we-were-testing-it/?utm_term=.388767c0cf05). (Blackboard)

**Due → Homework 5**

**Due → Research Paper Design**

### **Week 12- Quantitative Tools for Causal Inference**

Jason Seawright. "Regression-Based Inference: A Case Study in Failed Causal Assessment," in *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, edited by Henry E. Brady and David Collier. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers (2010). Chapter 12. (Blackboard)

Thad Dunning. "Design-Based Inference: Beyond the Pitfalls of Regression Analysis?" in *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, edited by Henry E. Brady and David Collier. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers (2010). Chapter 13. (Blackboard)

Best → Chapter 5

### **Week 13- Qualitative Tools for Causal Inference**

John Stuart Mill. "Two Methods of Comparison," in *Comparative Perspectives: Theories and Method*, edited by Amitai Etzioni and Fredric Dubow. Boston: Little Brown (1970). (Blackboard)

Goertz and Mahoney → Chapters 7 and 8.

David A. Freedman. "On Types of Scientific Inquiry: The Role of Qualitative Reasoning," in *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, edited by Henry E. Brady and David Collier. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers (2010). Chapter 11. (Blackboard)

### **Week 14- Case Studies and Historical Narratives**

John Gerring. "What is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?" *American Political Science Review*. 98, no. 2 (2004): 341-354. (Blackboard)

Daniel J. Galvin. "Qualitative Methods and American Political Development," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Political Development*, edited by Richard Valelly, Suzanne Mettler, and Robert C. Lieberman. New York: Oxford University Press (2016). Chapter 11. (Blackboard)

**Due → Final Research Paper**