POLS 390:
Fall 2012

Political Inquiry and Analysis:
Research Design and Methods for Urban Politics and Policy

Tuesday, Thursday 3:00 – 4:15pm
KUYKENDALL 307

Instructor:
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Office Hours: Tuesday 9-10:45am or by appointment.

Course Description
Political, social and economic development and the public policies that shape it are, in part, based on clear, reasoned, and minimally (or at least explicitly) biased understandings of the world around us. My way of teaching Political Inquiry and Analysis focuses on understanding the role that research plays in answering important urban political and policy questions. Beginning in week 3, we will discuss various types of political and social science research. We will then discuss research design for urban political analysis, which will form the basis for individual and group projects. From here the class takes a brief look at both quantitative and qualitative methods for answering social science questions. Students are expected to become familiar with the language and tools of measurement, hypothesis testing, units of analysis, validity tests and variables; as well as with participant observation, semi-structured interviews and historical analysis. In particular, students will learn the strengths and limitations of each of these approaches to social research. Finally, the class will discuss issues of interpretation and conclusions, with a focus on presentation, audience and representation.

Preparation
This class is designed for Political Science undergraduate majors and requires an interest in urban politics, and a desire to understand research questions, methodologies and analysis. Many of this course's readings and subjects for analysis center on poverty,
inequality and wealth, so an interest in how these subjects relate to political and policy analysis may be helpful.

**Objectives**

Students who complete PS 390 will have a basic familiarity with how a research project is designed; a firm grasp of the variety of research tools that can be employed to answer empirical questions; a general understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of alternative research designs and methods; and receive exposure to some of the basic analytic tools to develop, implement, interpret and present a research project. This course is an undergraduate-level introductory course tailored to the needs of Political Science majors planning to design and complete a capstone project in their Senior year.

**Course Structure and Requirements**

The course will meet twice per week. During these sessions we will discuss the assigned readings and relate them to individual projects and interests. Attendance is required for each session and will be recorded.

Students will be required to complete a midterm exam and other small in-class and/or take home exercises, as well as develop a topical area of interest in collaboration with no more than 4 other students in the class. The topical area of interest will be a unifying theme for each student throughout the course, and the basis for a term project. The group project will consist of two parts. First, each individual member of the group is expected to complete a review of the literature or field relevant to their topic (5 pages single-spaced) that examines previous studies of the issues, the range of interpretations that researchers have made on their findings and possible areas for future research. Second, each group will collaboratively design a survey and compile responses. The results of this survey will be the basis for a final group paper analyzing the data on the topic of interest (10 pages single-spaced) that includes concise descriptions of the proposed research questions, significance, data sources and data manipulation, and a discussion of relevance, findings and conclusions. Each group will make presentations of their research project during the final two weeks of the class.

As part of the class sessions I will periodically call on individual students to discuss what they have found in researching their individual and group topics.

**Grading Breakdown**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>In-class/Take Home Assignments</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-Term Examination</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Project</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation sessions (own presentation and attendance)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Class Participation</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>5%</td>
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**Readings**

As with any class, doing the readings prior to our meetings is essential. Without this shared base of understanding you will not be able to complete the assignments, and I will not be able to identify where there is the most confusion. Readings will be posted on the class website. Many of the readings are from Babbie, Earl (2002). *The Basics of Social Research. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group*, so purchasing this book is helpful. In addition to this text, there will be numerous articles for discussion. All readings will be available on the class Laulima website at least one week before we discuss them in class. **Be sure to check the site regularly!!**

**Class Schedule**

**Week 1: August 21, 23**

**Overview**

Introduction to the course, instructor’s research interests, student introductions and topical interests. Basic concepts

**Assigned readings:**


**Week 2: August 28, 30**

**Research Design**

**Exploration:** Identifying a general interest, learning the literature, assessing its relevance.

**Assigned readings:**

- Babbie, Chapter 4.
- Readings on individual topic of interest.

**Week 3: September 4, 6**

**Research Design**
Exploration: Gaps in the literature, gaps in knowledge.

Assigned readings:

- Readings on individual topic of interest.

Week 4: September 11, 13

- Online and library research literature review exercise (Ebscohost, Econlit, Sociological Abstracts, others)

Week 5: September 18, 20

Research Design

Refinement: Hypothesis development and testing, units of analysis, validity tests.

Assigned readings:

- Babbie, Earl. Chapter 5.
- Readings on individual topic of interest.

Week 6: September 25, 27

Key Tools in Social Science Analysis

Quantitative methods: Measurement, variables, sampling, selection bias, time series, cross sectional data.

Assigned readings:

- Babbie, Earl. Chapters 6-7.
University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, Department of Political Science

• Readings on individual topic of interest.

Week 7: October 2, 4

Key Tools in Social Science Analysis
Quantitative methods: Experiments, Surveys, cautionary notes on statistics.

Assigned readings:
• Babbie, Earl. Chapters 8-9.
• Readings on individual topic of interest.

Week 8: October 9, 11

Key Tools in Social Science Analysis
Qualitative methods: Interviews, participant observation, life history.

Assigned readings:
• Weiss, Carol H. 1998. Evaluation. Ch. 11 (pp.252-270)
• Readings on individual topic of interest.
• In-class exercise: Generating Qualitative Data

Week 9: October 16, 18

*** Mid-term Exam ***

Week 10: October 23, 25

Social Science Reasoning
Interpretation: Making arguments; points of view.

Assigned readings:
• Babbie, Earl. Chapters 13-14.
• Weiss, Carol H. Chapter 12.

Week 11: October 30, November 1 (Prof Spencer out of town)
***Literature Review Due***

**Week 12: November 6 (election day holiday), November 8**

**Social Science Reasoning**

**Representation:** Numbers and storytelling; accurate and meaningful graphics.

**Assigned readings:**

**Week 13: November 13, 15**

**Presenting Social Science Arguments**

**Communicating your argument:** Identification of audience, strength of findings, implications for future research, action, or decisions, graphical support techniques.

**Assigned readings:**
- Weiss, Carol H. Chapters 13-14.

**Week 14: November 20, 22 (Thanksgiving Holiday)**

**Presenting Social Science Arguments**

Presentations of student papers

**Week 15: November 27, 29**

**Presenting Social Science Arguments**

Presentations of student projects

**Week 16: December 4, 6**

**Last classes**

***Final Papers Due***