

PLS 210: Political Science Research Methods

Nazarbayev University

Fall 2018

MWF, 5:00 – 5:50 PM, 8.305

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Office Hours: M 2-4 PM; R 2-4 PM (and by appointment)

Course Description and Objectives

This class is an introduction to social science research methodology. The core objective of this course is to introduce students to the principles, methods, logic, and application of empirical research in the field of social science in general, and political science in particular. Over the course of the semester, we will discuss a variety of approaches to political science research, including but not limited to: survey research, content analysis, small-n studies, large-n studies, and experiments. This course will help students identify the strengths and weaknesses of social science research in academic writings, newspapers, and other media outlets. In other words, this course will make students critical consumers of current political science literature. Furthermore, this class will also teach students the skills necessary to conduct original research. Lastly, the concepts learned in this class will be useful for the more advanced courses in political methodology (e.g., PLS 211, PLS 510, etc.).

Readings

- Johnson, Janet Buttolph, Reynolds, H. T., and Mycoff, Jason D. 2016. *Political Science Research Methods*. Sage, Los Angeles. [Hereafter “JRM”]
- Berg, Bruce M. 2001. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Long Beach: California State University. [Hereafter “Berg”]
- Kellstedt, P. M., and Whitten, G. D. 2013. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. Cambridge University Press. [Hereafter “KW”]
- Toshkov, D. 2016. *Research Design in Political Science*. Macmillan International Higher Education. [Hereafter “Toshkov”]

Moodle

We will be using Moodle (<https://moodle.nu.edu.kz/login/index.php>) to display grades, post additional readings, and for announcements. Students are advised to regularly visit the Moodle page to keep track of potential changes.

Grading Policy

Your final grade in this class will be based on the following requirements:

Midterm Exam:	20%
Final Exam:	20%
Research Design Project:	25%
4 In-Class Assignments (4*5):	20%
Attendance:	10%
Participation:	5%

1. **Exams** ($2 * 20 = 40\%$). There will be two in-class exams – a midterm and a final. The final exam will be cumulative, though more heavily focused on post-midterm materials. All exams will be closed note, closed book.
2. **Research Design Project** (25%). In order to assist in developing your research skills, I am also requiring a final research design essay of 4000-5000 words. The goal of this project is to provide an outline of potential research project you could do for an academic article or even a thesis. As such, each research proposal has to include: (1) a statement of the research question, (2) a review of the existing literature on the topic, (3) your theoretical argument, (4) your hypotheses that flow from this argument, (5) a way to empirically evaluate your hypotheses, (6) a conclusion that states how your project adds to what we know already know about the topic. Remember, this is a formal proposal for research. You will not do the actual data collection nor the data analysis (at least not for this class). However, you will have to demonstrate that what you propose would be realistic problem that is amenable to empirical investigation. We will discuss this assignment in further detail in the first few weeks of the semester, but here is a basic overview:
 - August 29: A research question (1 to 2 sentences is fine).
 - September 28: An annotated bibliography with at least five scholarly sources (500-1000 words).
 - October 19: A general statement of your theoretical argument and hypotheses (2 paragraphs for your theoretical argument, a couple of sentences for each hypothesis).
 - November 2: Draft research design proposal.
 - November 30: Final research design project due by 5:00 PM (to be uploaded on Moodle).

You need to bring a hard-copy of all the assignments mentioned above to class except for the final version, which needs to be uploaded on Moodle. Failure to do and upload any of these steps will harm your final grade. I will provide feedback but not grade each of these steps. Your final project grade will be graded solely on your completed research proposal, following the rubric. Your papers are professional products and should be formatted as such. Each paper should be double-spaced, with standard 1" margins. Proper documentation in the current APSA style is required. I strongly recommend you to visit the Writing Center – located in Block 8, 207 – before turning in the final assignment.

3. **In-Class Assignments** ($4 * 5 = 20\%$) Throughout the semester, there will be four in-class exercises, which includes quizzes, group assignments, etc. These assignments will be over the assigned readings for a given class meeting and/or on the materials presented in the lectures. Unexcused absence on the day of the assignment will result in a zero.

4. Attendance (10%)

Attendance is mandatory and will be administered at the beginning of each session. Repetitive late arrivals may result in an absence. If you arrive late or must leave early it is your responsibility to inform me. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to obtain class notes from a colleague in class; I will not repeat my lectures during my office hours. The uploaded lecture slides should not serve as a substitute for lecture notes.

5. Participation (5%)

I strongly encourage you to participate during class. There will be several opportunities for participation in classroom discussions. In order to receive full points on this component, students should come to class prepared to discuss the assigned readings for the day. Disruptive and uncivil classroom behavior, such as side conversations with friends, texting, and not participating in classroom discussions in a productive manner will affect your participation grade.

Letter Grade Distribution

Final course grade will be assigned with the following grading scale:

≥ 95	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-	≤ 50.00	F
70.00 - 74.99	C+		

Other Considerations

No make-up quizzes or exams will be given, except under extreme circumstances. Late work will be severely penalized. If students have a conflict then they are expected to discuss the matter with the instructor **before** the assignments are due, not after. Students are also required to provide documentation substantiating the reason for the absence within three business days; certificates submitted after this deadline will not be accepted. The make-up assignments must be taken/completed within one week of the original test date. I do not scale or curve exams. Also, I do not envision any extra credit opportunities.

You may contest the grade on an exam up to one week after it is returned. If you believe that there has been a grading error, submit a written description of the error you believe occurred with your work. However, you are required to wait 24 hours after it is returned to you before contacting me to discuss your grade. Clerical errors will be corrected; decisions about the amount of partial credit for any assignment will not be revised.

Academic Honesty

Academic integrity is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. Academic dishonesty of any sort will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Any student plagiarizing (or cheating on tests) will receive an automatic "F" in the course, no exceptions! The following is

taken verbatim from Nazarbayev University Student Code of Conduct: “Plagiarism is intentionally or carelessly presenting the work of another as ones own. It includes submitting an assignment purporting to be the students original work which has wholly or in part been created by another person. It also includes the presentation of the work, ideas, representations, or words of another person without customary and proper acknowledgment of sources.”

False information about absences, illnesses, or other circumstances will also be considered as a form of academic dishonesty.

The lecture slides, readings, and assignments for this course are copyrighted, so you do not have the right to distribute, record or sell them.

Class Outline

Students are expected to complete the assigned readings **before** the day they appear on the syllabus. **I reserve the right to change the syllabus at my discretion.** All changes will be announced in class. It is the responsibility of the student to take note of any changes.

Week 1 (August 13-17): Introduction

- JRM: Chapters 1 & 2
- Berg: Chapter 12

Week 2 (August 20-24): The Empirical Approach to Political Science

- JRM: Chapters 2 & 3
- KW: Chapters 1 & 2

Week 3 (August 27-31): The Research Process

- JRM: Chapters 3 & 4
- **Wednesday: Quiz #1 & Research Question Due**
- Friday: HOLIDAY - CONSTITUTION DAY

Week 4 (September 3-7): The Research Process II

- JRM: Chapters 4 & 5
- KW: Chapter 5

Week 5 (September 10-14): Research Design

- JRM: Chapters 6

Week 6 (September 17-21): Exam Week

- JRM: Chapters 6
- **Wednesday: Quiz #2 & Midterm Review**
- **Friday: Midterm I**

Week 7 (September 24-28): Sampling

- JRM: Chapters 7 & 8
- **Friday: Annotated Bibliography Due**

Week 8 (October 1-5): Small-N Analysis

- JRM: Chapter 9
- Toshkov: Chapter 10

Week 9 (October 8-12): FALL BREAK

Week 10 (October 15-19): Survey Research and Interviewing

- JRM: Chapter 10
- **Wednesday: Quiz #3**
- **Friday: Theoretical Argument and Hypotheses Due**

Week 11 (October 29-November 2): Mixed and Nested Designs

- Toshkov: Chapter 11
- Lieberman, Evan S. 2005. "Nested Analysis as a Mixed-Method Strategy for Comparative Research." *American Political Science Review* 99:435-452.

Week 12 (October 22-26): Making Sense of Data

- JRM: Chapter 11

Week 13 (November 5-9): TBD

- **Friday: Research Design Proposal Draft Due**

Week 14 (November 12-16): Mini-Conference

- Mini-Conference
- Salmond, Rob and David T. Smith. 2011. "Cheating Death-by-Powerpoint: Effective Use of Visual Aids at Professional Conferences." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44.3: 589-596.

Week 15 (November 19-23): Wrapping-Up

- Mini-Conference
- Research Design Review
- Toshkov: Chapter 12
- **Friday: Quiz #4 & Final Exam Review**

Research Design Project and Final Exam

- **November 30: Research Design Project Due**
- **TBD: Final Exam**