

Scope and Methods of Political Science

Professor Wahlbeck
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Office Hours: MW 1:45-3:30

Political Science 101 (11)
Funger 210
Monday & Wednesday, 9:30-10:45

Purposes. The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the systematic study of politics. This will be different from your previous political science classes. Rather than study a specific topic or part of the world, we are instead going to study the study of politics by examining the ways and means by which political scientists try to explain the workings of political institutions and citizens. We will learn, utilize, and evaluate the “tools of the trade” of contemporary political science.

Readings. The following books are available at the campus bookstore:

Janet Buttolph Johnson and Richard A. Joslyn. 1995. *Political Science Research Methods*. Third Edition. Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press.

Larry Gonick and Wollcott Smith. 1993. *The Cartoon Guide to Statistics*. New York: HarperCollins.

Marcus E. Ethridge. 1994. *The Political Research Experience*. Second Edition. Guilford, CT: Dushkin Publishing Group.

The Johnson and Joslyn book (J & J) offers a discussion of research methods in political science. As you can see from the following list of readings, it will serve as our primary text in this course. This book is an introduction to research methods. As such, it is not an exhaustive discussion of the topics we will cover. To supplement the discussion of statistics in Johnson and Joslyn, we will also use Gonick and Smith. Ethridge is an optional book that provides additional materials on a number of topics that we will discuss. All three books are available at the Gelman Library reserve desk.

Attendance. It is not advisable or advantageous to attend class sporadically. Please make every effort to attend all class sessions. Attendance will be taken on random days; if you are unable to attend, please advise me in advance when possible.

As you know, we will not hold class on Labor Day (September 1), Columbus Day (October 13), or the Wednesday before Thanksgiving (November 26). Please note that we will hold class on Tuesday, October 14.

Grades. I will base your course grade on the following:

Midterm Exam	25%
Documentary Research Proposal	10%

Data Analysis Assignments (2)	30%
Survey Questions	10%
Survey Research Report	20%
Class participation/attendance	5%

Please note that in order to pass the course, all requirements must be completed. No extra-credit projects are allowed. Of course, failure to complete the assignments in a timely manner will result in a point deduction unless excused for exceptional reasons, such as a documented medical problem.

Assignments. This course will have three principal exercises: a document-based research project, an observational study, and a campus survey. The first exercise will be a document study. There are numerous data sources that are derived from official documents, e.g., the U.S. Government Budget, congressional voting records, federal court filings, campaign contributions. Each student will conduct their own study of a question resolved by examining these documentary sources. The second exercise will be a group assignment. I will form small groups that will design an observational study to explore a research question. Groups might choose to study patterns of running at the Smith Center, Metro passenger behavior, J Street interactions. The third exercise is a survey of George Washington University undergraduate students. As a class, we will construct a survey instrument, conduct the survey, and analyze the results.

Course Outline. The following is the list of topics for each week, along with the corresponding reading and assignments. I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus as the semester progresses.

<i>Week</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Assignment</i>
August 25-27	The Study of Politics	J & J 1	
September 3	What is Science?	J & J 2	
September 8-10	Relationships, Hypotheses, and Paradigms	J & J 3	
September 15-17	Measurement and Research Design	J & J 4, 5	
September 22-24	Sample Selection & Midterm Exam		Midterm Exam on September 24
September 29-October 1	Documentary Analysis	J & J 9	Research Proposal Due October 1
October 6-8	Introduction to Stata & Descriptive Statistics	J & J 11, Gonick 2	

October 14-15	Bivariate Data Analysis & Reasoning with Statistics	S.J. Gould, Gonick 7, 8	Data Analysis Assignment #1 Due
October 20-22	Observational Research	J & J 8	Begin Group Assignment
October 27-29	Bivariate Data Analysis	J & J 12, Gonick 8, 9	
November 3-5	Bivariate Data Analysis & Survey Research	J & J 10	Data Analysis Assignment #2 Due
November 10-12	Survey Construction & Sampling	J & J 7, Gonick 6	Survey Questions Due November 12
November 17-19	Multivariate Data Analysis	J & J 10, Gonick 11	Survey Conducted
November 24	More Data Analysis		Survey Data Due November 24
December 1-3	Research Reports & Evaluating Research	J & J 14	Survey Research Report Due December 8