1 Course Description

You will hopefully discover this fall that the academic discipline called “political science” and the career track called “politics” are not the same thing. If politics is an ongoing game between elected officials, professional lobbyists, bureaucrats and voters, then political science is the study of what rules, institutions, norms and other incentives matter for predicting or changing political behavior.¹

But “political behavior” is an incredibly broad concept and can apply to all manner of political interactions, including those that have not, historically, been thought of as political topics. In this course, you will learn about different methods of social scientific research and how they can be applied to various topical issues of the day. In the short term, you will identify one (or possibly more) of these methods and use them to examine an issue that is both interesting to you and can be considered to be a type of political behavior; in the long-term, you will write a piece of original research that attempts to answer a question about political behavior that you find interesting. In doing so, you will not only advance a political argument, but perhaps more importantly become a more sophisticated critic of other people’s arguments.

2 Course Expectations

No prior experience or coursework in political science is assumed or required of you. That said, this is listed as a political science class, and you will be expected to describe, analyze, consider and explain some sort of political behavior in the course of writing your paper. Furthermore, this course satisfies the university’s Upper-Level Writing Requirement, and the balance of your grade for the course (see below) will be based on an original piece of research writing that typically weighs in at 25 pages or more. In addition, you will be asked to work in groups and make oral presentations to the rest of the class. These tasks are all meant to resemble things that you will do in the not-too-distant future as part of the Real World™. Indeed, working in small groups and making short oral presentations is likely to be the majority of what you do during your career.

3 Required Reading

There is no textbook for this class per se, but you will be responsible for reading assignments each week of class. These will be uploaded to the Michigan in Washington CTools site in Adobe PDF format. Please note that these readings will be posted several weeks in advance, meaning that “not having had time” to prepare for class in a given week should not be an problem. Most weeks will

¹One sarcastic way to put it: a professor of political science I worked with this past summer argues that expecting political scientists to be familiar with individual politicians is like expecting astrophysicists to be able to name all the astronauts.
have about 30 pages of reading assigned. If you look below, Week 3 has closer to 40 pages assigned, so you may want to work ahead.

You should also be in the habit, if you’re not already, of reading one or more major news sources, such as the New York Times, Washington Post, International Herald Tribune, the Economist, or similar. You’ll almost certainly need to keep abreast of political news in order to do well at your internship anyway, and a working knowledge of current political events will make our class discussions much more effective.

4 Academic Honesty and Conduct

I will not tolerate academic dishonesty or plagiarism in any form: this includes failures to appropriately credit or cite the use of others’ ideas or data, cheating on an exam or quiz, or any other violation of the University of Michigan’s standards of student conduct. Academic dishonesty is grounds for automatic failure in the course. Your participation in this course is governed by the Michigan Statement of Student Rights and Responsibilities, which can be found at http://www.umich.edu/~oscr/txt_statement.htm. Links to other materials on academic dishonesty and plagiarism can be found at the end of this document.

As an aside – consider that a good chunk of the value of the “Michigan in Washington” experience is the opportunity to network with a wide variety of professionals in the Washington area. I can guarantee you that a plagiarism charge will leave a larger black mark on your reputation than will taking a bad grade for this class.

5 Grades, Attendance, Participation

Students are allowed to be absent for all or part of one class with no questions asked, but you must notify me at least 24 hours in advance by email or phone. Any additional absences will result in a 3 percentage point penalty to your final grade for the course, unless excused and documented as a medical or family emergency. If you have an illness, family emergency or religious observance that prevents you from attending class, then you need to notify me as soon as humanly possible.

Please, for any emails you might send me, include “MIW” in the subject line. This will allow me to keep track of any correspondence for class and prioritize those emails appropriately.

6 Other Course Issues

If you think that you need an accommodation for any manner of disability, please let me know as soon as possible and I will do everything I can to work with you and the UCDC staff to make the necessary arrangements. Any information you provide is private and confidential and will be treated as such.

Because you will not have access to your typical Michigan printing allotment at the UCDC building, I intend to allow everyone to have their laptop or tablet computer accessible during class in order to have access to reading assignments. Please do not refer to e-mail, Facebook, etc. during class time.
7 Brief Overview of Assignments

Training you to write an original piece of effective research is the ultimate goal of this course, and so the various steps in this process, taken together, will represent nearly the entire grade for the course. However, the process is broken up into multiple sections. Each constituent piece of the process—selecting a topic, producing an initial bibliography, and so on are all graded separately. During the term, you will need to meet with me individually to discuss how your project is going. The rough time frame of these meetings is listed below, and I’ll share more information on that process as needed.

Finally, a few weeks on the syllabus have an additional reading assigned as a “Group Assignment.” I will ask you to identify which of these five articles sounds the most interesting to you, and then assign you to small groups which will have to lead discussion of each paper during those weeks. I’ll act as a safety net during these discussions, but you’ll need to do as much as you can to talk about the paper, understand why it was undertaken in the way that the authors did, and offer your feedback.

8 Relative Weights for Each Assignment

1. Preliminary Research Question (2%)

2. Revised Research Question + Annotated Bibliography (4%)

3. R.Q. Restatement: Introduction + Topical Outline (6%)

4. Revised Introduction + Literature Review + Topical Outline (8%)

5. In-class presentation of assigned reading (5%)

6. Draft: Intro + Lit. Review + Methods/Data + Point Outline (15%)

7. Peer Reviews (5%)

8. In-class Presentations (10%)

9. Final Papers (35%)

10. Participation / One-on-One Meetings (10%)

9 Grading Scale

Grades will be assigned using the typical A - F scale, with a “plus” referring to grade ending in 7-9, “neutral” to a grade ending in 3-6, and “minus” to a grade ending in 0-2. In other words, a B+ covers scores between 87% and 89%, a B- between 80% and 82%, and so on.
10 Course Content and Readings (DRAFT)

Introduction, Background and History

Week 1 (September 9th): Introduction: The Scientific Method and Walking Through Social-Scientific Inquiry


Week 2 (September 16th): From Theory to Argument: Falsifiability and the Art of Social Science


2. Hoover, K., & Donovan, T. 2011. The Elements of Social Science Thinking (8 pages)

3. Claude, I.L. Power and International Relations (Excerpts on “the balance of power.”) (11 pages)

Week 3 (September 23rd): Measurement: Validity and Reliability in the Variables You Pick


Week 4 (September 30th): Causal Logic and Counterfactual Reasoning


PRELIMINARY RESEARCH QUESTION DUE

Week 5 (October 7th): A Successful Literature Review


STUDENT APPOINTMENTS, 1 OF 5

Different Ways to Do Research

Week 6 (October 14th): Content Analysis (Guest Lecturer: Prof. Margaret Howard) (Neill in Los Angeles)

Readings to be determined by Dr. Howard.

Week 7 (October 21st): Comparative Political Research and Case Selection


REVISED RESEARCH QUESTION + ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE

STUDENT APPOINTMENTS, 2 OF 5

Week 8 (October 28th): Qualitative Research Methods (Guest Lecturer: Prof. Elizabeth Ben-Ishai)


Other Optional Readings:


R.Q. RESTATEMENT: INTRODUCTION + TOPICAL OUTLINE

Week 9 (November 5th): Working With Quantitative Data


STUDENT APPOINTMENTS, 3 OF 5

Week 10 (November 12th): Guest Speaker TBD

DRAFT DUE: INTRO + LITERATURE REVIEW + TOPICAL OUTLINE
Week 11 (November 19th): Topical Discussion and Example: The “Affordable Healthcare for America Act” (2009-10)


STUDENT APPOINTMENTS, 4 OF 5

Week 12 (November 26th): No Class: Thanksgiving

DRAFT DUE: INTRO, LITERATURE REVIEW, METHODS/DATA/EVALUATION AND POINT OUTLINE

Week 13 (December 2nd): Group Peer-Review Sessions

STUDENT APPOINTMENTS, 5 OF 5

Week 14 (December 9th): In-class Presentations

DECEMBER 16TH: FINAL PAPERS DUE (ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION)