Regent University Robertson School of Government

Syllabus: Governmental Research Methods
GOV 603
Spring 2010

Dr. Mary Manjikian
(757) 352-4138
Class taught on campus Monday, 1-4 PM
Office Hours: Friday, 9-12 AM, Robertson Hall

1. **Course Description:** Analysis of basic research design strategies. Students attain statistical literacy as they generate and critique research reports normally required in a variety of governmental settings.

2. **Purpose:** This is a course about how to think – how to think about data, how to think about theories and how to think about politics. The purpose of this course is to prepare you to be both (a.) an informed consumer of research about politics as well as a (b.) producer of competent, thoughtful and methodologically rigorous independent research in the field of political science.

3. **Objectives:**
   A. To present the major approaches to conducting qualitative and quantitative analysis in political science including the case study, content analysis and even some basic statistical inference.
   B. To present and analyze questions of epistemology, or the theory of knowledge. We will ask HOW we know what we currently know about political science, what methods we have utilized to arrive at this knowledge, and whether it is actually possible to conduct objective, scientific research in the social sciences.
   C. To prepare students to conduct independent quantitative and qualitative research in political science, using proper research methodology and procedure.

4. **Competencies:**
The student will be able to
   A. Formulate a research hypothesis for further study
   B. Specify the tools and methods which are best suited to your task
   C. Discuss the particular types of biases and assumptions you might bring to your task and the best ways to control for them.
5. Course Procedures:
This course is divided into two parts – Part One: What is Political Science? And Part Two: Data Analysis. Each half will take approximately 7 weeks with a final week at the end for synthesizing and summarizing the main issues of the course as a whole. In the first half of the course we will focus a bit on philosophy of science, including ontology and epistemology. We will ask whether political science is really a science, what it means to use a scientific method, and whether a scientific method is objective or merely a Western way of “looking.” We will examine the who’s, what’s, why’s and how’s of scientific reasoning in the social sciences, before taking our tour over to the world of quantitative analysis in the second half of the course. Every week you will be responsible for mastering the information for that week, as well as to applying it to a specific problem in the field of political science.

6. Evaluation of Student Performance:

Your grade is based on the following elements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekly Essays or problem sets</th>
<th>12 @ 2.9 pts. each</th>
<th>35 points</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Discussions</td>
<td>12 @ 2.9 pts. Each</td>
<td>35 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Exams: One each at Week Four Week Eight Week Twelve Week Fifteen</td>
<td>4@ 7.5 points</td>
<td>30 points</td>
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Please note that late work will NOT be accepted for this course. The material presented in this course is cumulative, and falling behind on one week’s assignment will cause you poor performance in all subsequent weeks of the course.

You will have one written assignment per week for both parts of the class. For Part One of the course, a weekly essay will be assigned and for Part Two, a weekly problem set will be due. There is no essay required during the weeks that you have either a midterm or a final, or when you are preparing to submit your final paper. Please note that these essays are creative and challenging and require original thinking. (Some may require a bit of outside research as well.) They cannot be cranked out at the last minute. Your essays need to be between 250-500 words in length. Criteria for grading your essays are found online. Problem sets will be taken from the “working with political science research methods problems and exercises.” Please do NOT allow yourself to fall behind the deadlines listed in the syllabus, including the initial deadline for taking the SPSS tutorial. On-line students will need to type up the questions as they appear in the workbook as well as their
answers for submitting through the assignments tab. In-class students may tear out the workbook sheets and submit those if they prefer to do so.

Please note that particularly in the statistics section of this course, the material can be quite time-intensive. The only way to get really comfortable with statistics (and lose your fear!) is to spend a lot of time with the material. You need to explore the data-sets you are given, and use a trial and error approach. If you devote the time, then at the end of the semester you will feel comfortable with statistics. If you do not, then you will not.

Students taking the on-line version of this class will participate in on-line discussions. You are responsible for an INITIAL post of at least 200 words, and at least two follow up posts (of at least fifty words each). The on-line class week runs from Monday until the following Sunday evening. Initial posts are due by Thursday of the week you are in, with the discussion board officially CLOSING on Sunday evening of that week. The grading criteria for posts are listed on-line.

Students taking the “live” version of the class will be responsible for both the weekly discussion question listed in the syllabus as well as any additional questions or issues raised in the notes which accompany the weekly readings. You should come to class prepared to both the weekly discussion question and the questions raised in the supplemental materials/reading guides. You will also be called on to SUMMARIZE the readings and to critique them. Read carefully and take notes!

Both in-class and on-line students will take four exams: at weeks four, eight, twelve and fifteen.

7. Required Texts:

| Janet Bottolph Johnson and H.T. Reynolds, *Working with Political Science Research Methods* |
| Janet Bottolph Johnson and H.T. Reynolds, *Political Science Research Methods* |
| Steven Johnson, *The Ghost Map* |
| SPSS for Windows |

You also need to have a calculator which is capable of finding a square root.

8. Recommended Reference Materials:
Some additional texts which may help you to familiarize yourself with the SPSS statistical package are found in the Week Zero folder on-line.

9. Reading Assignments:
Week One: Studying Politics Scientifically

(Monday, January 4)

Read:
Textbook, Chapter Two, “Studying Politics Scientifically”
Toulmin, pp. 5-44

Write: Do you consider yourself a positivist or a reflexivist and why? Choose one problem that interests you in political science and present both a positivist and a reflexivist methodology for attacking the question. Discuss both the pro’s and con’s of EACH approach. You should write 250-500 words.

Discuss: Why is astronomy a science but astrology is not? What factors make something a science? What does it mean to study something scientifically? Your post should be 250-500 words.

Due Date for all work: Monday, January 11

Week Two: Measurement, Hypotheses and Variables

(Monday, January 11)

Read:
Textbook, Chapter Three, “The Building Blocks of Social Scientific Research,”
Do SPSS tutorial.
Van Evera, p. 6-43.

Write: Workbook, pp. 15-19

Discuss: Pick a hypothesis in political science that interests you and describe one method you could use for FALSIFYING your hypothesis. Make sure you map out the dependent and the independent variable as well as any spurious correlations which you might note. Write 250-500 words.

DUE DATE: Monday, January 25
Please note there is no class on Monday, January 18 due to Martin Luther King Day.

Week Three: Measurement

(Monday, January 25)

Read:
Textbook, Chapter 4, “The Building Blocks of Social Scientific Research,”
Steven Johnson, The Ghost Map

Write: In his analysis of the causes of cholera, Dr. Snow collected a different set of measurements than the other researchers at the time.
a. Describe the data he collected in comparison to the data other researchers were collecting.
b. How did his decision about what data was important inform his conclusion?
c. What social or cultural factors kept other researchers from deciding this data was important?
d. How did social and cultural understandings regarding the deserving and undeserving poor affect decisions regarding data collection?
e. EXTRA CREDIT: Can you think of any situations today in which our cultural or social understandings of a situation might bias our decisions about what data to collect? (Include the cite if you find a newspaper or other article).

Please write 250-500 words.

Discuss: Think of a problem today in which our approach might be affected by social and cultural understandings (or assumptions) which we hold implicitly. Find at least one article about the problem in a PEER-REVIEWED journal. Try to pick out at least three statements in the article which you feel reflect social and cultural understandings of the problem. Show how they affect the researcher’s findings, if possible. 250-500 words.

DUE DATE: Monday, February 1

Week Four: Puzzle-solving

(Monday, February 1)

Read:
Zinnes
Grofman, pp. 43-63
Grofman, pp. 85-101

First Take-Home Quiz:
The instructions for your first take home quiz are found in the week four folder.

Discussion: There is no discussion post due this week.

DUE DATE: Monday, February 8

Week Five: Scientific Revolutions

(Monday, February 8)

Read:
Textbook, “Conducting a Literature Review”
Kuhn, pp. 1-65.
Scott and Garrison, pp. 77-87

Write: Because the reading for this week is very heavy, your written assignment is short. You are to create an annotated bibliography for a research project that you might like to do in the future. (There is NO research paper for this course.)
You need to identify at least 2 books and 5 peer-reviewed articles that you will need to read to begin your research project. You will probably want to look through several more and choose those most suited to your research topic. You may use the library databases available through Regent as well any additional sources you need. Please list the weeks in proper MLA format.

**Discuss:** What is something we USED TO believe about politics but no longer do?

Some examples I can think of include:

- The world is becoming more secular
- The greatest threat to the United States is from other states
- A strong central government like that of the Soviet Union will never collapse
- Women are unfit for public office
- Voters would never accept a Catholic president

Try to come up with at least three things people used to believe about politics but no longer do. Does any of these count as a scientific revolution or paradigm shift? What paradigm CAUSED people to believe these things, and what led to a change in how they view the world now?

**DUE DATE:** Monday, February 15

**Week Six: Scientific Research programs**

(Monday, February 15)

**Read:**
- Elman and Elman, pp. 1-71

**Write:** This week you are to submit a short literature review. You will not need to read all the books on your bibliography (though you might want to read the introduction to these books), but be sure to read the articles. Try to outline 2 conflicting approaches or answers to the question you are interested in. How have analysts attempted to answer this question and does any of the work now being done appear to build on earlier work? Pay attention to the authors’ own literature reviews or summaries at the beginning of their papers. How will YOUR specific contribution advance the ‘scientific research program’?

**Please read these articles relating to the proper preparation of a literature review:**
- [http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/literature_review.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/literature_review.html)
- [http://library.ucsc.edu/help/howto/write-a-literature-review](http://library.ucsc.edu/help/howto/write-a-literature-review)
Discuss: What is your reaction to the articles by Neta Crawford and Chris Brown regarding the new ‘emotional’ understandings the nature of man and the state. Do you regard these articles as paradigm-shifting? Why or why not? What are the ETHICAL implications of this new way of looking at the state and why does it matter?

Due Date: Monday, February 22

Week Seven: measurement and observation

(Monday, February 22)
Read: Textbook, Chapter 5, “Research Design,”
Write: workbook Exercise 5-1; Exercise 5-5; Exercise 5-6
Discuss: Choose one of the questions from Exercise 5-9. Formulate a research strategy and post discussion.
Due Date: Monday, March 8
Note: There is no class during the week of March 1 due to spring break.

Week Eight: Direct and Indirect Observation/Content Analysis

(Monday, March 8)
Read: Textbook Chapter 8 and 9, pp. 243-295.
Second Take-Home Quiz: Your second take-home quiz is available this week. It is due by Monday, March 15.
There is no discussion or essay this week.
Due Date: Monday, March 8

PART TWO: DATA ANALYSIS

Week Nine: Sampling; elite interviewing and survey research

(Monday, March 8)
Read: Chapter Seven, “Sampling” and Chapter 10, “Survey Research and Interviewing”
Write: Write up the results of your group’s content analysis discussion. List all the hypotheses you formulated in your group in proper format, specifying associations and causal relationships, dependent, independent and antecedent variables, as well as any spurious correlations you might have thought about.
Discuss: Write up the results of your group’s discussion regarding ‘counterfactuals’ which took place in class during week eight. Read over your colleague’s descriptions of THEIR counterfactuals and query them about their assumptions. (those taking the class on-line need to complete the assignment on their own first in order to participate.)
Due Date: Monday, March 15
Week Ten: Statistics: First Steps
(Monday, March 15)
Read: Chapter 11
Write: Workbook 11-2; 11-3; 11-7; 11-13.
Discuss: You will be analyzing the data from “An Interesting Incident”. (Posted in Blackboard) Your task is to attempt to identify the incident. You may each post TWO questions to the professor which require a yes or no answer (similar to 20 questions) in your attempt to figure out what the event is. When you have figured out the event, you need to E-MAIL me your answer. Do not post it publicly, since your classmates will still be working on the problem. (Correctly identifying the incident will get you THREE extra points on your next mid-term)
Due Date: Monday, March 22

Week Eleven: Bivariate Data analysis
(Monday, March 22)
Read: pp. 426-261
Write: Look at the Pew data-set on Muslim Americans and their attitudes. Specify at least two hypotheses about the variables in the dataset. Run at least two bivariate correlations in SPSS for the data, then WRITE UP a complete report on how you thought about the problem, what you did, and what you found.
Discuss: Please read the article in your weekly folder called, “Who Wins at the Olympics?” Please make sure you answer ALL discussion questions.
Due Date: Monday, March 29

Week Twelve: Bivariate data analysis
(Monday, April 5) -- Note: class will be ONLY on-line this week.
Read: pp. 461 to end of the chapter
QUIZ THREE: Available on-line from Monday, April 5 through April 12.
Due Date: Monday, April 12

Week Thirteen: Multivariate Data Analysis
(Monday, April 12)
Read: Pp. 503-525.
Write: Workbook 13-1; 13-2.
Discuss: You will be performing a linear regression using the SPSS data set I have created for you and made available on-line. See your weekly folder for more details.
Due Date: Monday, April 19
Week Fourteen: More Multivariate Data Analysis
(Monday, April 19)
Read: PP. 525-549.
Write: Workbook: exercise 13-7;
Discuss: You are to use the National Election Study data-set available on your text’s companion website for this week’s assignment. See your weekly folder for more details.
Due Date: Monday, April 26

Week Fifteen: Review
(Monday, April 26)
Read: No new reading this week.
Write: No essay.
Discuss: No discussion.
Exam Four: Please allow yourself sufficient time to work with the two data-sets for your final exam.
Due Date: Monday, May 3.

Please note: for on-campus students there will be two additional laboratories to work on SPSS to be held on campus at another time which is mutually agreeable to all students. Those students who are studying on-line but are within a reasonable geographic area from the VB campus are STRONGLY URGED to attend these laboratory sessions as well.

10. Grades: Your grades will be available for viewing via blackboard at the end of each week and at the end of the semester.

11. Attendance: For on-campus students, attendance is mandatory unless prior arrangements are made for a situation such as a family emergency. All work due at your weekly class will be marked as failing if you do not also attend that week’s class.

For on-line students, failure to submit work on-time will be construed as a weekly absence. Late work will not be accepted, as stated under grading criteria.

12. Final Exam Scheduling: Exams will be given on-line for both distance education and local students. The tests are available only for a finite time period and cannot be accessed once the file has been closed. The exam will be opened two days prior to the due date for that week’s materials and will close at midnight, EST on the due date. Please make sure you allow yourself sufficient time for any technical glitches which you might experience.

13. Academic Honesty: Students shall abide by the highest standards of academic honesty. All students should review the discussion of “Academic Integrity” in the University Catalog. In the event the professor determines that a student has either cheated or plagiarized on a class assignment or exam, the professor shall determine what effect this academic dishonesty shall have on the student's grade. The professor has the discretion to assign an "F" grade to the student's assignment, exam, or for the
course. Any further disciplinary actions shall be determined by the law school administration.

14. **Incomplete Grades:** Incompletes will be given only in extreme situations such as a death in the family. If you plan your time well, you will have sufficient time to complete all assignments during this term. Students who DO request an incomplete are required to submit a time management plan showing how many hours worth of work are outstanding and how they have scheduled those hours into their life so that the work will be completed within six weeks of the end of the course.

15. **Student Feedback:** Students are encouraged to be in frequent contact with the professor throughout the course. There is a formal evaluation form to be completed towards the end of the course, but you may contact the professor at any time via phone or e-mail to discuss specific concerns regarding assignments, grading and topics to be covered throughout the course.

16. **Biblical Integration:** We will integrate this material with our faith in a variety of ways this semester. We will complete an assignment in Part Two which looks at survey data on religiosity and belief. In addition, in Part One, we will look at the question of “truth with a capital T” and the ways in which our own belief systems may interact with post-modernist claims about truth. We will also consider ethical questions in our discussions of how to use and interpret data, as well as how to treat scientific subjects.

17. **Late Assignments:** Every student is allowed one 72 hour grace period for ONE assignment, to be taken at your choosing, with no penalty. I do not require documentation of the emergency or even an explanation. However, I recommend holding this in reserve so that if a “true” emergency arises (illness, etc.) you still have it to draw upon.