“Eliminate all other factors, and the one which remains must be the truth.”

–Sherlock Holmes in *The Sign of Four*

**Course Description:** The primary aim of this course is to inculcate first year doctoral students with the process of conducting rigorous research as practiced by modern political scientists. Learning this “craft” involves mastering a number of critical components including (a) identifying and clearly stating a research question; (b) developing a theory and hypotheses; (c) designing a study that deals appropriately with issues of validity, selection, confounding, and a myriad of other inferential challenges; and (d) cogently presenting the results. The researcher’s goal is to speak credibly about causal relationships and behavioral patterns in the political world. Thus, limitations in any of the preceding areas can significantly undermine the traction of one’s work.

**Learning Outcomes:** This course is the gateway to further theoretical and methodological training. As such, the goal is to prepare students for advanced work in both political methodology and their substantive areas of research. Students who successfully complete the course will demonstrate the ability to:

- identify and describe the major approaches to research design employed in political science as well as the underlying motivations for each
- compare, critique, and debate various strategies for conducting research both in general and in the case of specific applications
- evaluate existing research on a question of interest and propose a research design for a project that would contribute to knowledge on that topic.

**Prerequisites:** While there are no formal prerequisites for this course, it is tailored for (and required of all) Ph.D. students in political science. It is best taken in the first semester of graduate studies. I do not recommend that masters-level students take this course, although I would be happy to discuss it as an option under certain circumstances.

**Credit Hours:** 3

**Office Hours:** Thursdays from 3:00-4:00pm and by appointment.

**Course Materials:** Required readings for the course will be drawn primarily from book excerpts and journal articles, all of which are available online via the USC Libraries’ electronic journal services or posted on Blackboard. Additionally, each student is expected to purchase a copy of the required books listed below. While using a small number of complete books will keep costs down, it is not a substitute for having all required (and much of the recommended) material prepared and
in your possession for each scheduled class session.

**Required:**


**Recommended:**

**Expectations and Evaluation**

Because this is a graduate seminar and not a lecture-oriented course, the success of the class will depend heavily on the full participation of each student. Broadly speaking, students will be expected to do all the required reading prior to each scheduled meeting and to be familiar with at least some of the recommended supplemental reading. Additionally, one or more students may be assigned the task of leading discussion for particular weeks or topics, and in that case are strongly encouraged to read well beyond the requirements.

You are now moving past the “consumer” stage of your academic career and into the phase in which your interaction with what you read will be more of a dialogue. In the very near future, you will also begin to assume the role of a “producer” of knowledge. Consequently you will be reading and writing very differently (and much, much more!) than you probably have in the past. I cannot stress enough how important it will be to stay on schedule, constructively provide and receive criticism, take intellectual risks, and persevere. What that means for this class is that you should not hesitate to engage deeply in discussion, start thinking right now about your research design project, and begin reading widely and beyond the syllabus.

Grades for the course will be comprised of the following three components:

1. **Class and professional participation (35%)**
   As described above, it is imperative that every student attend each class session prepared to be an active participant in discussion. Both the quantity and the quality of comments are important. Let me emphasize that you will not earn higher than a B+ in this course unless you are a well-prepared, regular, and thoughtful participant in class discussion. This also means that you should be prepared to lead discussion on any article or topic when called upon to do so. Additionally, I expect students to engage beyond the classroom. This means, at minimum, regular attendance at job talks and Political Science Research Workshop (PSRW) presentations. You will learn best by observing and participating in these kinds of forums. If teaching or other commitments prohibit you from attending, please let me know.

2. **Short(er) writing assignments (30%)**
   Students will be required to complete at least two shorter writing assignments over the course of the semester. The final number will depend in part on course enrollment as well as on the flow of the course. For the first paper (3-5 pages), due in Week 3 of the class, students will
read and summarize recent research in their area of interest. For the second paper, due in Week 13, students will identify one recently published work and perform a review of it, briefly describing the main point of the article and its approach to answering the analytical question, critiquing the theory and research design, and providing comments for improvement and/or future research. More details on these assignments will be provided separately.

3. Research design paper (35%)
This assignment involves producing a project that spans identification of a research question, review of the relevant literature, development of a theory and hypotheses aimed at addressing the question, and conceptualizing a research design that will shed light on the empirical traction of the theoretical account. For most students, this paper will be paired with an empirical analysis for POLI 502. Research design papers are due by **5pm on Friday, December 9**. Two final class sessions (Dec. 1 and Dec. 2) will be devoted to presentations of the research designs, followed by interactive Q&A (much like what you will observe during departmental colloquia this semester). In order to keep everyone on track, a brief write-up of the research question accompanied by some relevant citations to existing work on the topic is due no later than **Thursday, September 29**. An annotated bibliography and brief sketch of the theoretical and empirical design aspects of the paper is due no later than **Thursday, October 27**. A complete draft of the paper is due no later than **noon on Tuesday, November 29**, at which time the drafts will be circulated among the class. Further details on the research design paper (and related assignments) will be provided separately.

**Formatting:** All papers should be prepared professionally. This means using standard fonts and formatting (such as double spacing), as well as disciplinary conventions for citations and references. It would be a good idea to begin familiarizing yourself now with the APSA Style Manual, which covers the format required for submissions to many (albeit not all) political science journals. I have posted a copy of it on Blackboard. Additionally, at least one of the writing assignments must be produced in **LATEX**. It would be a great idea to start building a master reference file using BibTEX for every paper you write this semester. An accompanying APSR style file is available to begin producing references that follow the APSA style guide.

**A Note on Grading:** A minimum grade of a “C” in this course is required in order for it to count toward fulfilling the Ph.D. degree requirements. However, a grade less than a “B” is typically considered unsatisfactory, and in fact a student receiving three grades below a “B” is at risk of removal from the Ph.D. program. All work will be graded on a letter scale, with an “A” representing exceptional work, a “B+” good performance, and a “B” minimally satisfactory output.

**Accessibility:** Any student with a documented disability should contact the Office of Student Disability Services at 803-777-6142 and then follow up with me to make arrangements for appropriate accommodations.

**Incompletes and Academic Integrity:** All work must be turned in no later than the start of class on the day it is due. I do not give incompletes save for truly exceptional circumstances of a serious and unforeseen nature. In accordance with the USC Honor Code and professional standards, I expect that all work will be your own and take very seriously any form of academic misrepresentation, including improper or omitted citation of sources and misappropriation of another’s work. Students are also expected to conduct themselves in a professional and civil manner.
Week 1 (Aug. 18): Introduction and Some Basics


Application:


Week 2 (Aug. 25): Politics and The Scientific Method


Recommended:

Week 3 (Aug. 31, 11am-2pm): Models, Theory, and Hypothesis Testing


Applications (Choose One):


* Brief paper on recent published work in your area of interest due 8/31

Recommended:


Week 4 (Sept. 8): Causality and Inference

KKV: Ch. 2-3


Applications:


Recommended:


**Week 5 (Sept. 15): Observation, Identification, Selection, and Endogeneity**

KKV: Ch. 4-5 (except pg. 151-168)


*Recommended:*


**Week 6 (Sept. 22): Validity**

SCC: Ch. 2, 3, 11, 14


*Applications:*


Week 7 (Sept. 29): Conceptualization and Measurement

KKV: Ch. 5 (pg. 151-168 only)


Applications:


* Research question due 9/29

Recommended:


Week 8 (Oct. 6): Randomization and Experimental Design

SCC: Ch. 1 [Review], 8


Applications:


Recommended:


Oct. 13: No Class (Fall Break)
Week 9 (Oct. 20): Quasi-Experimental Design and “Natural” Experiments

SCC: Ch. 4-5


Applications:


Recommended:


Week 10 (Oct. 27): Approaches to Observational Data: Design

SCC: Ch. 6-7


* Annotated bibliography and theoretical/empirical sketch due 10/27

Recommended:


Week 11 (Nov. 3): Approaches to Observational Data: Applications


Week 12 (Nov. 10): Qualitative Methods and Small-N Designs

KKV: Ch. 6


Mahoney, James, and Gary Goertz. 2006. “A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research.” *Political Analysis* 14: 227-249.

*Applications:*


**Week 13 (Nov. 17): Best Practices & Parting Thoughts**


* Article review due 11/17

Recommended:

SCC: Ch. 9-10


Nov. 24: No Class (Thanksgiving Recess)

* Draft of research design due by noon on Tuesday, 11/29

Week 14 (Dec. 1; Dec. 2, 11am-3pm): Presentation of Research Designs

Each day, one half of the class will be scheduled for presentations followed by Q & A in the format of a conference session or colloquium. In addition, each paper will have an assigned discussant.

* Final research design paper due by 5pm on Friday, Dec. 9