

Research Methods in Political Science

POLITICAL SCIENCE 302
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Fall 2005

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Class Description: This course is an introduction to research methods and statistics in the social sciences. The course is designed to provide an appreciation of social science research and the use of various methods to arrive at objective (or not so objective) conclusions and to allow the student to consume social science literature in various academic fields. At the end of the course, students will be expected to have a basic grasp of general methods, models, and statistical tools. The goal is to provide students with a framework to work from for future research papers and provide the student with a healthy “scientific skepticism” in a world which is fast becoming scientific on all fronts.

Required Texts:

The Basics of Social Research, 3rd Edition. By Earl R. Babbie. Wadsworth Publishing, 2004

Elementary Statistics in Social Research: the Essentials, 9th ed. By Jack Levin & James Alan Fox. Allyn & Bacon. 2004.

Additional Readings: located on electronic reserves at Lied Library website:

<http://ereserves.library.unlv.edu/eres/default.aspx>

Wolcott, Harry F. 1983. "Adequate Schools and Inadequate Education: The Life History of a Sneaky Kid." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 14 (Spring): 3-32.

Wolcott, Harry F. 1990. "On Seeking-and-Rejecting-Validity in Qualitative Research." In *Qualitative Inquiry in education: The Continuing Debate* edited by Elliot W. Eisner and Alan Peshkin. New York: Teachers College Press.

Other Resources:

Earl Babbie's book *The Basics of Social Research*, has an excellent companion website for the text. Especially useful is the Data Analysis Primer. It contains a learner's guide to SPSS 11.0 that provides the nuts and bolts of using this statistical software package. In addition, the website contains another SPSS guide: Kentor, Jeffrey. SPSS 11.0 For Windows: A Guide for Students. All of this can be accessed and downloaded for free from Wadsworth publishing company at

<http://sociology.wadsworth.com/babbie/basics3e/>. This is not required reading but is available to students who wish further information regarding Babbie's book or on the use of SPSS.

UNLV has a writing center with well-trained tutors who help students of all skill levels in all disciplines. All services are free for enrolled students. The Writing Center is located at FDH 240 and can be reached at 895-3908.

A calculator that can find the square and square root of a number will be a great asset.

Course requirements: Attendance is important because there will be a lot of material given in a short period of time. Students will create a research design to address a social/political phenomenon of their choice. The purpose of this assignment is to engage students in fundamental research methods and practices. This project is not to exceed 10 pages and is due on the last class meeting. Students should be prepared to discuss their research topic on a weekly basis. In addition, there will be 8 homework assignments that require the calculation of various statistics (with computer software and by hand), as well as 2 midterms and final exam. Make up exams are reserved for emergency situations and official university functions. Late homework will not be accepted except in emergency situations. **IN ALL CASES**, the reason must be documented (police report for an accident, doctor's letter for a serious illness on official letterhead), letter from the athletic director, etc. Students who represent UNLV at any official activity shall have the opportunity to make up assignments, but the student must provide official written notification to you no less than one week prior to the missed class(es). In regard to the observance of a religious holiday, University policy states that students must notify the instructor about anticipated absences by the last day of late registration to be assured the opportunity to make up missed work.

Grades:

2 Midterm Exams and 1 Cumulative Final Exam (15% each)
Drop lowest exam score for a Total Exam Score: 30%
8 Homework Assignments (5% each): 40%
Research Design: 20%
Attendance/participation: 10%

The assignment of letter grades is as follows:

92% <= A	80-81 = B-	67-69 = D+
90-91 = A-	77-79 = C+	62-66 = D
87-89 = B+	72-76 = C	60-61 = D-
82-86 = B	70-71 = C-	> 59 = F

* Rounding at .5

Midterm and Final Exams: There will be two in-class midterms and a comprehensive final exam. The exams will be composed of various questions regarding research methods and various statistical problems. Basic scientific calculators will be allowed, but your work must be shown on the exam. You can drop your lowest exam grade (only 2 of the 3 exams will be used to compute your course grade). Make up exams are reserved for emergency situations and official university functions. In all cases, the reason must be documented (police report for an accident, doctor's letter for a serious illness on official letterhead), letter from the athletic director, etc.

Attendance/Participation: 10% of your grade will be based on your attendance and participation. If you are habitually late, the attendance portion of your grade will be marked down substantially.

Research Design (2500 words minimum): You will be required to develop a research design for a specific research question of your choice. In this design you will be required to 1) review and summarize the relevant literature of your topic, 2) elaborate on your research question and develop various hypotheses; 3) identify potential sources of information, datasets or methods of data collection to use to test you hypotheses (you will not have to actually collect this information); 4) discuss the method of analysis and statistical tools you would use to analyze the data if you were going to implement your design; 5) explain how your research would build on previous research and the potential problems and limitations you think you might run into. Students should be prepared to discuss their research topic and design during class and link assigned readings to their projects. **Students should also familiarize themselves with the university’s policy on plagiarism** (see page 58 in undergraduate catalog) and understand that I will recommend expulsion if I discover any academic dishonesty. Late papers will be marked down a full grade for every day (24 hour period) late.

Disability Policy: The UNLV Disability Resource Center (DRC) houses the resources for students with disabilities. If you have a documented disability that may require accommodations, you will need to contact the DRC for the coordination of services. The DRC is located in the Student Services Complex (SSC), Room 137. Their numbers are: (702-895-0866/Voice; 702-895-0652/TDD. For additional information please visit <http://www.unlv.edu/studentlife/drc>.

Schedule

Week 1:	Topic	Readings
August 29	Introduction	
August 31	Scientific Inquiry and Social Analysis	Babbie Chapter 1
Week 2:		
September 5	LABOR DAY: NO CLASS	
September 7	Paradigms, Theory and Social Research	Babbie Chapter 2
Week 3:		
September 12	Research Design/ Hypothesis Formulation	Babbie Chapter 4
September 14	Statistics and Social Research	Levin & Fox Chapter 1 & 2
Week 4:		
September 19	Concepts, Measures, and Variables	Babbie Chapter 5
September 21	Statistics and Data Analysis with SPSS	Levin & Fox Chapter 3 Kentor’s Guide to SPSS (recommended)
Week 5:		
September 26	Measures of Variability	Levin & Fox Chapter 4
September 28	Probability and the Normal Curve	Levin & Fox Chapter 5
Week 6:		
October 3	Indexes, Scales, and Typologies.	Babbie Chapter 6
October 5	Midterm I	

Week 7:	TOPIC	READINGS
October 10	Samples and Populations	Levin & Fox Chapter 6
October 12	Case Selection and Sampling	Babbie Chapter 7;
Week 8:		
October 17	Experiments	Babbie Chapter 8
October 19	Difference of Means Tests	Levin & Fox Chapter 7
Week 9:		
October 24	Survey Research	Babbie Chapter 9
October 26	ANOVA	Levin & Fox Chapter 8
Week 10		
October 31	Qualitative Field Research	Babbie Chapter 10
November 2	Unobtrusive Research	Babbie Chapter 11
Week11:		
November 7	The Research Design	Babbie Chapter 15 (outline of RD due)
November 9	Catch up/Review for Midterm II	
Week 12:		
November 14	Midterm II	
November 16	Correlation	Levin & Fox Chapter 10
Week 13:		
November 21	Regression	Levin & Fox Chapter 11
November 23	Correlation & Regression Cont.	
Week 14:		
November 28	Ethics and Research	Babbie Chapter 3
November 30	Ethics and Research Cont.	Both Wolcott Articles (Lied Library reserves)
Week 15		
December 5	Nonparametric Tests	Levin & Fox Chapter 12
December 7	Evaluation Research	Babbie Chapter 12
Finals Exam		
December 14	Final Exam (3:10 – 5:10pm)	Research Design Due in hard & electronic form

Homework Assignments

Date	Topic	Assignment
Week 3:		
September 12	Social Science Research	Homework #1: Come up with a specific research question for your research design.
Week 4:		
September 19	Measures of Central Tendency	Homework #2: Levin & Fox Chapter 3*;
Week 6:		
October 3	Measures of Variability/ Probability and the Normal Curve	Homework #3: Levin & Fox Chapter 4 & 5*;
Week 8:		
October 17	Samples and Populations	Homework #4: Levin & Fox Chapter 6*
Week 9:		
October 24	Difference of Means Tests	Homework # 5: Levin & Fox Chapter 7*
Week 10:		
October 31	Analysis of Variance	Homework #6: Levin & Fox Chapter 8*
Week 11:		
November 7		Outline of Research Design Due
Week 13:		
November 21	Correlation	Homework #7: Levin & Fox Chapter 10*;
Week 14:		
November 28	Regression	Homework #8: Levin & Fox Chapter 11*

* Homework Assignments can be found at <http://www.unlv.edu/faculty3/kfernandez/methods1.htm>