

PSC 302-002 – Research Methods in Political Science  
Spring 2007  
Friday 2:30-5:20pm  
Room BEH 102

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Office Hours: R 10:30-12, F 1-2:30, and by appointment.

### **Class Description**

This course will introduce students to a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods utilized by contemporary political scientists. Upon completion of the course, students will have an appreciation of social science research and an ability to be critical consumers of (social) scientific literature in general. At the end of the course, students will be expected to have a basic grasp of general methods, models, and statistical tools. Students will also complete the course with the tools needed to effectively conduct their own research, whether in their subsequent undergraduate courses, graduate studies, in the workforce or as thoughtful citizens. Finally, students will complete the course with a foundation in the use of statistics in the conduct of political science research and a familiarity with SPSS, one of the most popular statistical software packages.

### **Course Requirements**

#### **Required Texts**

Earl R. Babbie, *The Basics of Social Research* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Wadsworth Publishing, 2005) ISBN: 0534630367.

Jack Levin & James A. Fox, *Elementary Statistics in Social Research: The Essentials* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Allyn & Bacon, 2006) ISBN: 020548493X.

#### **Additional Readings/Resources**

Any additional readings for the course, helpful web links, and other info will be posted on the course website on WebCT/WebCampus.

The Babbie text has a useful companion website at <http://sociology.wadsworth.com/babbie/basics3e/> that, while not required, has a lot of helpful information.

You might also find it useful to get a guide for using SPSS. The Babbie companion website does have a guide, Jeffrey Kentor's *SPSS 11.0 For Windows: A Guide for Students*, that can be accessed and downloaded for free. A number of print guidebooks are also available. I did not order any for the class because there were too many variables. In the lab, we will be using SPSS 11. However, the current version of SPSS is 14. Most of the current guides in print are updated for the current version so there may be new features, looks, etc. that will not match what you will see in the lab. Therefore, I will leave it to your judgment as to which, if any, is a better option for

you. There are a number of decent options out there that a search of Amazon will reveal. Two options are:

Brian Cronk, *How to Use SPSS: A Step-by-Step Guide to Analysis and Interpretation*. (Glendale, CA: Pyrczak Publishing, 2002) ISBN: 1884585426. Designed for SPSS v11.

Darren George & Paul Mallery, *SPSS for Windows Step by Step: A Simple Guide and Reference 14.0 Update* (Boston: Pearson, 2007) ISBN: 0205515851.

I also encourage you to use RefWorks, a web-based bibliographic software package that enables you to manage your citations and rapidly construct bibliographies. More info can be found at <http://www.library.unlv.edu/help/refworks/index.html>

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. More details at <http://writingcenter.unlv.edu/>

A calculator that can find the square and square root of a number will also be useful.

### **Assessment**

*Exams (30%)*: Two midterm exams (10% - the lower of the two grades will be dropped) and one cumulative final (20%) will be given during the semester. They will cover various issues regarding research design and statistical issues that we will be covering throughout the course of the semester.

*Research Design (20%)*: During the semester, you will develop a research design of 8-10 pages to answer a specific research question of your choice. The research design will be composed of six parts: 1) explain how your research would expand our knowledge by building upon previous research; 2) a literature review; 3) an articulation of your research question and the development of hypotheses; 4) the identification of sources of information, datasets or methods of data collection that would allow you to test these hypotheses (you will not actually do the data collection); 5) describe and justify the research methods and statistical tools you would employ were you to implement your research design; and 6) discuss the potential problems and limitations you might encounter were you to conduct the research project.

*Homework Assignments (8 at 5% each – 40% total)*: Throughout the semester, I will give you homework to test your comprehension of the material and have you apply the techniques we have learned. They will be posted on WebCT.

*Attendance/Participation (10%)*: Exit surveys of political science majors consistently show that this is one of the most difficult courses they take at UNLV. We will be covering a lot of fairly dense material in a relatively short period of time. Therefore, attendance is important. Every absence after the second will reduce your participation grade by 1%. If you miss a class, be sure to check with a classmate as to what you missed. Students who arrive late or leave early will be marked absent without prior approval by the instructor. Students who expect to miss class because of the observance of a religious holiday will have an opportunity to make up missed work provided that the instructor has been notified in writing regarding the anticipated absence

by the last day of late registration. Students who expect to miss class due to an officially sanctioned, UNLV activity (e.g., intercollegiate athletics) must notify the instructor in writing at least 7 days prior to the anticipated absence and provide written verification of participation. The instructor also reserves the right to conduct quizzes.

Good participation involves coming to class with reading assignments completed and prepared to discuss the material. You should be prepared to discuss your research topic and design during class as well as making connections between readings and your projects. A word of caution - we are in a computer lab. Do not succumb to the temptation to play with the computer on non-course related things. We will not have time to repeat what you miss. The classroom will be an environment in which everyone is treated with respect. Keep interruptions to a minimum. Cell phones and pagers should be turned off, late arrivals and early departures avoided, and no “side-bar” conversations held.

*Final Grades:* The points for each of these elements totals 100. Translated into letter grades, course grades will be determined by the following: A (93-100); A- (90-93); B+ (87-90); B (83-87); B- (80-83); C+ (77-80); C (73-77); C- (70-73); D+ (67-70); D (63-67); D- (60-63); F (60 and below).

*Grading Notes:* Incompletes will only be offered when requested in writing on behalf of a student by the Chair of the Department of Political Science or the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts. All grade disputes must be in writing and must be submitted within one week of the assignment or exam being returned to you.

Ordinarily no makeups will be given for missed assignments or exams. However, if extraordinary circumstances require one, then students must do the following in order to qualify: (1) inform the instructor of the problem at some time prior to the exam itself and/or (2) provide documentation of the issue (e.g. doctor’s note, police report) that necessitated your absence. All make-up exams will be scheduled immediately upon your return to class.

Extra credit will not be offered.

### **Academic Misconduct**

Academic integrity is a legitimate concern for every member of the campus community; all share in upholding the fundamental values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility and professionalism. By choosing to join the UNLV community, students accept the expectations of the Academic Misconduct Policy and are encouraged when faced with choices to always take the ethical path. Students enrolling in UNLV assume the obligation to conduct themselves in a manner compatible with UNLV’s function as an educational institution. For details on the Student Conduct Code, see <http://studentlife.unlv.edu/judicial/misconductPolicy.html>

The instructor reserves the right to have students’ assignments submitted electronically and assessed by plagiarism detection software. The University requires all members of the University Community to be familiar with and to follow copyright and fair use laws. **YOU ARE INDIVIDUALLY AND SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR VIOLATIONS OF COPYRIGHT AND FAIR USE LAWS. THE UNIVERSITY WILL NEITHER PROTECT NOR DEFEND**

YOU NOR ASSUME ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR EMPLOYEE OR STUDENT VIOLATIONS OF FAIR USE LAWS. Violations of copyright laws could subject you to federal and state civil penalties and criminal liability as well as disciplinary action under University policies. To help familiarize yourself with copyright and fair use policies, the University encourages you to visit its copyright page at [www.unlv.edu/committees/copyright](http://www.unlv.edu/committees/copyright). Plagiarism in any form will result in a failing grade for the course and the instructor will file a case with the Office of Student Conduct.

### **Student Accommodation**

UNLV complies with the provisions set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, offering reasonable accommodations to qualified students with documented disabilities. If you have a documented disability that may require accommodations, you will need to let me know within the first two weeks of the semester and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) for the coordination of services. The DRC is located in the Student Services Complex (SSC), Room 137, and the contact numbers are: VOICE (702) 895-0866, TTY (702) 895-0652, FAX (702) 895-0651. For additional information, please visit <http://studentlife.unlv.edu/disability/>

### **Student Support**

The Teaching and Learning Center has collected a number of resources to help you succeed at [http://tlc.unlv.edu/student\\_success.htm](http://tlc.unlv.edu/student_success.htm)

### **Course Schedule** (subject to change)

January 19 Introduction/Scientific Inquiry and Social Analysis  
Reading: Babbie Chapter 1

January 26 Paradigms, Theory and Social Research/Research Design and Hypothesis Formulation  
Readings: Babbie Chapter 2 & 4

February 2 Statistics and Social Research/Concepts, Measures, and Variables  
Readings: Levin & Fox Chapter 1 & 2, Babbie Chapter 5  
**Homework 1: Research Question for your Research Design**

February 9 Statistics and Data Analysis with SPSS/Measures of Variability  
Readings: Levin & Fox Chapter 3-4, Kentor's Guide to SPSS (recommended)  
**Homework 2: Measures of Central Tendency Due February 13 noon**

February 16 Probability and the Normal Curve/Indexes, Scales, and Typologies  
Readings: Levin & Fox Chapter 5, Babbie Chapter 6  
**Homework 3: Measures of Variability/ Probability and the Normal Curve Due February 20 noon**

February 23 **Midterm 1**

March 2 Samples and Populations/Case Selection and Sampling  
Readings: Levin & Fox Chapter 6, Babbie Chapter 7

March 9 Experiments/Difference of Means Tests  
Readings: Babbie Chapter 8, Levin & Fox Chapter 7  
**Homework 4: Samples and Populations**

March 16 Spring Break – no class

March 23 The Research Design/Survey Research  
Readings: Babbie Chapter 15 and 9  
**Homework 5: Difference of Means Tests**

March 30 ANOVA/Qualitative Field Research  
Readings: Levin & Fox Chapter 8, Babbie Chapter 10  
**Homework 6: Analysis of Variance**

April 6 Unobtrusive Research/Correlation  
Readings: Babbie Chapter 11, Levin & Fox Chapter 10  
**Outline of Research Design due**

April 13 **Midterm 2**

April 20 Regression (&Correlation Continued)  
Readings: Levin & Fox Chapter 10-11  
**Homework 7: Correlation**

April 27 Ethics and Research (guest lecturer, Prof. Ken Fernandez)  
Readings: Babbie Chapter 3, Walcott articles on WebCT  
**Homework 8: Regression**

May 4 Nonparametric Tests/Evaluation Research  
Readings: Levin & Fox Chapter 12, Babbie Chapter 12

Friday May 11 2:30-4:30 PM **Final Exam**  
**Research Design Due**