UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SEMINAR

The purpose of this course is to teach you about political science research by having you read original research papers and undertake a small-scale individual or joint research project. The course will also help prepare you to do an honors project in political science or international relations during your senior year (should you wish to do so). We will cover such topics as framing a question for original research, finding appropriate data, undertaking rigorous analysis, writing in social science style, and using the APSA referencing style. I will also explain the new honors program and help you, if necessary, pick a topic and arrange to work with a specific faculty member during the senior year.

The best way to introduce you to political science research is to have you do it, all the while reading and analyzing good examples of such work. Accordingly, after reading and critiquing varying approaches to political science research, you will be asked to complete an original research project. It is likely that some of you will work on individual projects while others will opt for joint projects. In any case, you will be expected to complete all phases of this project—designing the study, finding or gathering appropriate data, carrying out the analysis, and writing up the results. What you should take away from the class is an understanding of how to plan and carry out good research, experience at having done so on a small scale, and some of the tools necessary for undertaking a major, original piece of political science or international relations research during your senior year or in other settings.

Note: In addition to this course, you should think about substantive or technical courses that you might need to take this semester or during the summer in preparation for a senior honors project.

Office Hours: Tue. & Thur., 11:00-12:00, and most other times 8am-5pm.

GRADING

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With respect to your papers, I look at the way in which your work draws on but also extends previous research, the originality of your hypotheses, the appropriateness of the data you collect (or use), the skill with which you analyze the data, and all aspects of the writing.

COURSE MATERIALS

Readings (with a few exceptions that will be noted in class) are on electronic reserve.
CLASS SCHEDULE

Jan. 19  Organization, purpose, expectations; critique a simple research project.

Jan. 26, Feb. 2 & 9  Reports on American politics; comparative politics; international relations; discussion of hypotheses, sources/quality of data, additional hypotheses.

Feb. 16  Hand in, then discuss, ideas for possible projects.


Mar. 1  Report on Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, Turner, and Gerber et al.; further discussion of the research project.

Mar. 8  On-going discussion and work on research projects.

Mar. 15  Spring break

Mar. 22  Discussion of Alford et al.; discussion of research topics.

Mar. 29  Discussion of on-going research. Preparing an outline.

Apr. 5  Discussion of writing styles. How to get started. Current honors students talk about their projects (tentative). About honors projects.

Apr. 12  Editing, rewriting.

Apr. 19  Discussion/critique of drafts.

Apr. 26  Preparing tables; final copies and presentations.

May 3  Oral presentations of research results. Papers due.

ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments should be typed, double-spaced.

Jan. 19–First, read Sigelman and Bullock. Hand in a short paper (typed, double-spaced, 12-point type) that includes: a) no more than ½ page in which you summarize briefly what they did and what their primary conclusions were; b) up to ½ page of specific ideas about how they might have designed the study better (within approximately the same time/energy constraints). Then look over the power point presentation and write a short paragraph in which you answer the following questions: What do you now conclude about “presidential campaign coverage”? Was Sigelman and Bullock’s interpretation correct?

American Politics Quarterly 19:5-32.

**Jan. 26**–Read the first two papers/chapters below and one of the next two (as directed in class). For each one, write a 1-1½ page report in which you: a) state the author’s hypotheses; b) summarize the data used, method of analysis, and results; c) evaluate data, methods, and results; and d) state two (or more) additional hypotheses that the author(s) might, theoretically, have tested. Be prepared to summarize and discuss the material you read.


**Feb. 2**–Same as for Jan. 19, with the readings below.


**Feb. 9**–Same as for Jan. 19, with the readings below.


Feb. 16–Write a short description of at least two possible projects that you (alone or as a group) might undertake. Circulate early to entire class (as per instructions). Read others’ proposals as instructed. After class, hand in the project descriptions.

Feb. 23–Read the Putnam, Wattenberg, Dalton, and Hibbing & Theiss-Morse items noted below. Write a 2-2½ page report in which you: a) evaluate the case for greater citizen involvement in civic organizations (how well Putnam and Wattenberg have made the case that there is now lower political interest, involvement, and knowledge and how well Dalton has countered that argument); and b) evaluate the case that lesser involvement is a danger to democracy.


Mar. 1–(Part I) Read the Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, Turner, and Gerber et al. items noted below. For each one, write a 1-1½ page report in which you reflect on their methods. You might address some of the following questions for Hibbing & Theiss-Morse: Have they made a convincing case for their theses? What, exactly, does the data from the focus groups contribute? Does it make specific results more believable? (Which ones?) If they did not have the survey data in ch. 4, could they have written as persuasive a book? Lacking the survey data, would you have advised them to write the focus group chapter differently? For Turner, you might address the following: How convincing is his evidence? Has he made a good case for generalizing his findings beyond the specific stories they worked with? Beyond the individuals in the experiments? For Gerber, et al., you might write about the ability to apply similar methods to other research problems. In addition, you might opine briefly about the propriety of this kind of field work.


Mar. 1–(Part II) Hand in a brief (3/4 to 1 page) statement about tentative plans for your “long” research project. Insofar as possible, this should identify: a) the topic of your research; b) the specific data you intend to work with; c) how you will begin the analysis. With respect to (c), be as specific as possible; saying “I will look for patterns in the data” or “I’ll look for relevant literature” isn’t satisfactory.

Mar. 8–Be prepared to summarize your research plans and answer questions raised by the class. Hand in a number of references (at least three or four) that you will consult in the process of doing your research. Use correct bibliographic style. The type of references will vary, depending on your topic, but in most instances should be academic books and articles as opposed to newspaper stories, commentary, and the like that may pop up on the Web.

Mar. 22–Read the following article. There is no written assignment (you have plenty of other work to do), but be prepared to discuss it in class.


Mar. 29–Hand in a literature review of work related to your topic. 2-3 pages + list of references.

Apr. 5–Hand in an outline of the report of your project.

Apr. 11–First, partial draft (no more than 1½ pages) of your report. (NOTE: Assignment is due on Wednesday afternoon so that I have time to read the draft before class on Thursday.)

Apr. 18–Second, partial draft (redraft of initial page plus more writing—minimum expected is 3 pages). (NOTE: Assignment is due on Wednesday afternoon so that drafts can be circulated and read before class on Thursday.)

Apr. 26–Prepare one or more tables/figures to go over in class. We will critique both content and style.

May 3–Class presentations; hand in your paper(s). Note that this is a day after classes end and is in lieu of a final exam.