POLS 390 Political Inquiry and Analysis (W)

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Course Overview

This course is designed to introduce undergraduate students to the logic of inquiry and the methodology of empirical research in the social sciences generally and political science in particular. Students will examine basic elements of empirical research, explore a wide range of methodologies, and analyze how they are applied to actual cases. Readings, both theoretical and applied, are assigned in an effort to prepare students to evaluate existing research and to design their own research paper. By the end of the course, students are expected to have an expanded sense of research strategies available to them, a deeper understanding of research design (mostly in qualitative research), a stronger grasp of logic, and a capacity to read and evaluate the diverse scholarship produced in our discipline.

Readings, and writing assignments for this course emphasize three goals. First, students should understand the general issues related to the meaning, logic, and conduct of social science inquiry. To help students’ understanding, this course will deal with questions beyond the technical aspects of method – interpretation, ethics, politics, development of concept and theory (history), validity, and so on. Second, students should have knowledge of alternative strategies for qualitative research design, data collection, and data analysis. Specific possibilities and problems that each method may have for particular projects should be considered throughout the semester. Third, students should pursue concrete steps to apply their chosen theory and execute their methodology well in their own research design. For this purpose, we will trace all steps of the research design – asking the research questions, defining concepts, choosing proper methods, collecting and analyzing data, and so on.

Course Requirements

1. 5 Analytical Papers (25%)

Since this is an on-line course, there is no attendance check and no in-class participation. Instead, 5 analytical papers will be submitted by their due dates. Students can choose one article from “example readings” and write a review of the article. Take the article apart into the basic components of a research paper described in “Research Paper Assignment,” and analyze it in those terms (research questions, arguments, definition of concepts, chosen methods, strengths and weaknesses of the research in terms of theory and methodology, possible alternatives you suggest to improve the weaknesses, and so on). Each analytical paper should be about 2–3 pages in length.
2. Possible Research Questions (10%), Annotated Bibliography (10%), and Developing Operational Definitions and Research Strategies (10%)

Please check details in “Research Paper Assignment” (pages 9-11).

3. Final Research Paper (30%)

Please check details in “Research Paper Assignment” (pages 9-11).

4. Final Exam (15%)

The final exam is a take-home exam. Students will choose one question and write a 5-page essay for the final exam. Students will receive exam questions by e-mail on the day announced and must submit their answers on time. More details about the final exam will be announced later in the semester.

Note:

1. This is a writing intensive (W or WI) on-line course, which means you have to deal with more reading and writing assignments than in a regular class. Please keep this in mind, and understand that skipping readings and failing to turn in assignments on time will hurt your final grade. (You need to work at least 3-5 hours a week.)

2. Familiarity with statistics might be helpful to understand several concepts and theories, but not required.

**Readings**

All readings will be available in electronic form on the course webpage. Students are expected to keep up with each week’s readings.

**Academic Integrity**

UHM website on academic dishonesty and related issues is available at:

[http://www.catalog.hawaii.edu/about-uh/campus-policies1.htm](http://www.catalog.hawaii.edu/about-uh/campus-policies1.htm)

All such matters will be referred to the department chair.
Course Schedule

Week 1  Introduction: The Study of Politics as a Social Science

No assigned readings.

Week 2  Positivism, Interpretivism, and Critical Approaches

Required Readings


Example Readings


Week 3  Concepts, Model, and Theory- Developing Research Question

Required Readings


Example Readings


Week 4  **Construing Causation and Explanation**

**Required Readings**


**Example Readings**


***Possible research questions due on Feb. 26 (Friday).***

Week 5  **Measurement and Measurement issues**

**Required Readings**


**Example Readings**


***2nd analytical paper due on Mar. 4 (Friday).***
Week 6  **Observation and Units of Analysis**

**Required Readings**


Week 7  **Issues of Case Selection**

**Required Readings**


**Example Readings**


***Annotated bibliography due on March 18 (Friday).***

Week 8  **Spring Recession**

Week 9  **Comparing Cases I: Variables, Correlations, and Logics of Control**

**Required Readings**


Example Readings


***3rd analytical paper due on April 1(Friday).***

**Week 10  Comparing Cases II: Typologies and Logic of Conjunction**

**Required Readings**


**Example Readings**


**Week 11  Comparing Cases III: Time, Space, and Narrative in Comparative Historical Analysis**

**Required Readings**


**Example Readings**


***Developing operational definitions and research strategies due on April 15 (Friday).***

**Week 12** Qualitative Evidence and Process of Acquiring Them: Participant Observation & Interview

**Required Readings**


**Example Readings**


***4th analytical paper due on April 22 (Friday).***

**Week 13** Qualitative Evidence and Process of Acquiring Them: Documents and Other Social Artifacts

**Required Readings**


**Example Readings**

Carpenter, R. Charli. “Women and Children First: Gender, Norms, and Humanitarian Evacuation in the


**Week 14 ** Data Analysis

No assigned readings. (Lecture PPT will be provided.)

***5th*** analytical paper due on May 6 (Friday).

**Week 15 ** Final Exam (Take-home)

*Research paper due on May 11 (Friday).*
Research Paper Assignment

A principal requirement of this course is the design and execution of research paper focusing on a question of contemporary interest in political science. The writing assignments are intended to provide the opportunity for students to apply both abstract concepts and various methods to actual case. A substantial part of this course is devoted to seek answers about elements of good research paper, and course structure follows the steps of research design focusing on important aspects of the research process.

Although the specific elements of a research design vary with different topics and methods, there are two fundamental aspects to all designs. First, you must clearly identify the question you want to answer and justify its importance. Second, you must explain your concepts and methods in detail and justify your chosen strategies. To fulfill these two aspects, it is important to link your research to existing theory embedded in the relevant literature on the subject.

A statement of the research question:

Good questions are grounded in the existing literature. They often reconcile a theory with an observation that doesn’t seem to fit, or fill in a gap in existing theory. They frequently begin with a “WHY” question, and seek explanations for political actions or events.

Literature review:

Good research questions often emerge from a literature review, too. You sometimes find that you are not convinced by an author’s explanation in your readings. You may think the research methods are not appropriate to the subject, or there are other plausible explanations. You may find that changes of time and space also would affect the results.

Even though you will have a research question before you start a project, the first step of the research design is to review previous research on the topic. The review should summarize, synthesize, and critically evaluate the literature as a whole. (You should concentrate on the forest rather than being preoccupied with individual trees in the forest!!) Discussion of the literature should emphasize the strengths and weaknesses of existing work in terms of both theory and methodology. Your research will attempt to build on these strengths and improve those weaknesses.

A statement of theory and/or hypotheses:

Your design needs to identify the specific propositions and research hypotheses to be examined or “tested” in your research. You also should discuss how these explicitly stated and logically related ideas about the relationships among the phenomena were derived.

A definition of concepts:

You need to identify, define, and operationalize the central concepts in your paper. You should indicate as clearly as possible what your concepts mean and how you will recognize them when you observe them in your research (e.g. when you analyze the relationship between political participation and economic...
development, what do you mean by economic development? What would convince you that one country or group of people is more economically developed than another?)

An observation and measurement strategy:

You need to justify your methods of observing and collecting evidence or data as being appropriate and feasible.

A testing strategy:

You need to think about how to measure the relationships between the concepts in your hypotheses, and how to check if your hypotheses are right or wrong.

Limitations of research strategies:

No matter how careful and thorough you have been in developing your research design, there is no perfect yet feasible research design. All research strategies have inherent limitations. You need to discuss these limitations explicitly and consider their likely consequences. You will be able to try to identify alternatives through this effort.

1. Possible Research Questions, due on Feb. 26 (10%)

Think about three potential research topics based on your own interests and develop at least one research question per topic. Explain why you think the topic is important and how you plan to answer these questions. Since you are at the early stage of research design, it is acceptable to present very rough ideas about your research design. Each student should consult with the instructor about potential topics and relevant literature for this assignment. (All students must have consulted with the instructor and have their paper topic approved by March 7.) This assignment should be about 2–3 pages in length.

2. Annotated Bibliography, due on Mar. 18 (10%)

The annotated bibliography is a summary of an article, book chapter or book. It typically contains: (1) a description of the author’s research question and/or hypotheses; (b) the methodology employed in the author’s work; (3) the main conclusions of the piece. You will write an annotated bibliography of five academic sources (around 300 words per source) in order to familiarize yourself with the key debates around one specific issue, which will allow you to better ground your research question in the existing literature on the topic you elect to study. Thus, you will have to conclude the annotated bibliography before writing the essay proposal, or the outline. The annotated bibliography should be about 4–6 pages in length.

3. Developing Operational Definitions and Research Strategies, due on April 15 (10%).
Identify, define, and operationalize your major concepts, and explain how you intend to observe the concepts. After developing sets of operational definitions, how will you observe and collect evidence or data? This assignment should be about 3–5 pages in length.

4. Final Research Paper, due on May 13 (Friday)

The final paper has to demonstrate that you have put serious effort into all the previous writing phases. It should have a clearly enunciated argument, cogently articulated intermediate units (where you develop your argument), and a final section. The research paper should be about 15–20 pages in length.

Before handing the paper in, please read it several times and ask yourself some questions. Is my argument clear? Do I provide enough evidence to support my main arguments or do I make unsubstantiated claims? Have I incorporated into the paper distinct points of view about the argument in question, pointing out their advantages and disadvantages? In making my main argument, am I showing that one can convincingly rule out alternative patterns of explanation? Last but not least, have I corrected any spelling or grammar mistakes?

At this point, much of this guideline may seem abstract and confusing. As the course progresses, the elements of the research design will become much clearer and more concrete. Don’t panic! Contact your instructor anytime you have troubles to deal with your assignments.

Important Note:

All writing assignments should be double-spaced, with 1-inch margins (top, bottom, left, and right), and in a font no smaller than Times New Roman 11. They should follow the general rules of academic writing including the rules of grammar and spelling. Students are expected to submit all assignments by the due dates. Unless accompanied by a legitimate and documented excuse, one full letter grade will be docked every 24 hours past the deadline. All paper assignments must be completed in order to receive a passing grade in the course. (There is no incomplete.) The instructor’s comments on written assignments (including the final take-home exam) will be given within 2 weeks of their submission.