

POLI 691H: HONORS SEMINAR ON RESEARCH DESIGN
SPRING 2016 · UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Stephen Gent
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COURSE INFORMATION

Meeting Times: MW 3:35–4:50PM, Graham Memorial 038
Office Hours: M 11:00AM–12:00PM, W 1:00–3:00PM, or by appointment
Course Website: <https://sakai.unc.edu/portal/site/poli691h-sp16>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, students will learn basic skills commonly employed in political science research, focusing on the construction and systematic examination of theories that seek to explain political phenomena. The purpose of the course is to equip students with the skills that are necessary to conduct independent research and to write a senior honors thesis under the direction of a faculty advisor. A major component of the course will be to practice these skills by completing a research proposal that outlines the research project to be undertaken for the honors thesis.

This class will emphasize research methods appropriate for projects that are designed to provide a causal explanation of a political phenomenon and to evaluate this explanation on the basis of systematic empirical evidence. Because of this focus, the course will not provide a complete preparation for all students planning to write an honors thesis. This is especially true for students whose honors project entails significant historical or normative analysis. Even students that intend to pursue empirical research will need to explore additional resources or skills not covered in this class as part of their honors research. In short, this course will provide only an introduction, albeit a solid and broad one, to the standard methods of research used in political science.

It is also important to note that this is strictly a course in research design and methods. It is not a substantive course in political science. Writing a successful honors thesis requires appropriate research skills and a substantive knowledge of politics. Students typically acquire a solid grounding in the area of political science in which they intend to work through additional courses they have completed or will take.

GRADING

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|-------------------------|-----|---------------------------|-----|
| Assignment 1 (Due 2/15) | 10% | Thesis Proposal (Due 5/5) | 30% |
| Assignment 2 (Due 3/7) | 10% | Exam (4/11) | 30% |
| Assignment 3 (Due 4/4) | 10% | Class Participation | 10% |

CLASS PARTICIPATION

The participation grade evaluation will be based on the quantity and quality of comments and questions and demonstration of knowledge of the course material. Class participation also includes class presentations and group activities. Attendance is not the same thing as participation, but if you are not in class you cannot participate. If you miss a significant number of class sessions, this will adversely affect your participation grade.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

During the semester you will need to complete three written assignments. These assignments are meant to help you develop your thesis topic and provide the building blocks for your thesis proposal. For each assignment, we will have a peer review session in class. The peer review sessions are meant to provide you with an opportunity to get feedback on your research project and work collaboratively with other students in the class. You will be expected to bring a complete (i.e., not “rough”) draft of your assignment to the peer review session. You will then have a chance to revise your assignment based the feedback before submitting the final draft. The grade for each assignment will be based upon (1) the quality of the final draft that you submit and (2) your participation in the peer review session (both as a writer and a reviewer).

If for some reason you will be absent for the peer review session, you will be required to upload a complete draft of your assignment to the Sakai Digital Dropbox before the start of class or your grade will be penalized. If you are absent, you will be also required to contact another student in the class and provide them with peer feedback on their assignment *before the due date of the assignment*. However, if you miss the peer review session, no other student is obligated to provide you with feedback on your paper. Therefore, I would strongly encourage you to attend all peer review sessions.

THESIS PROPOSAL

A primary goal of this course is the completion of your thesis proposal. You will need to have a complete draft of your thesis proposal by Wednesday, April 20. You should bring two copies of your draft to class that day—one for peer review and one for the instructor. You will also be required to present your thesis proposal to the class (on one of the days listed in the class schedule below) and meet with the instructor to discuss your draft (during the week of April 25). The final draft of the thesis proposal is due on Thursday, May 5 at 5:00PM.

EXAM

There will be an in-class exam on Monday, April 11, which will cover material on research methods.

HOMEWORK

A few times during the semester, I will post some homework problems on statistics. These homework assignments will not be graded, as they are only meant for you to gain some practice with the types of problems that might be on the exam. We will go over the solutions to the homework problems in class the day they are due. You are allowed to collaborate with other students while working on the homework problems outside of class.

COURSE MATERIALS

The following required books are available in the UNC Bookstore:

- Pollock, Philip H. 2012. *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, 4th ed. CQ Press.
- Powner, Leanne C. 2015. *Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student's Practical Guide*. CQ Press.

All other readings will be available online through Sakai.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Below is a class schedule with required readings. I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus, including due dates and test dates, when unforeseen circumstances occur. These changes will be announced as early as possible so that students can adjust their schedules. Course announcements will be posted on Sakai and sent to students' official UNC email addresses.

MONDAY, JANUARY 11: INTRODUCTION

- No reading

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 13: SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF POLITICS

- Kellstedt and Whitten, "The Scientific Study of Politics" (Sakai)
- Powner, Ch. 1

MONDAY, JANUARY 18: MLK

- No class

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 20: THEORY BUILDING

- Kellstedt and Whitten, “The Art of Theory Building” (Sakai)
- Powner, Ch. 2 (pp. 21–44)
- *Bring list of three possible thesis topics*

MONDAY, JANUARY 25: CAUSAL MECHANISMS

- Kellstedt and Whitten, “Evaluating Causal Relationships” (Sakai)

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27: CONCEPTS AND INDICATORS

- Pollock, Ch. 1
- Powner, Ch 2 (pp. 44–53)

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 1: RESEARCH EXAMPLES

- Carson, Engstrom, and Roberts, “Redistricting, Candidate Entry, and the Politics of Nineteenth-Century U.S. House Elections” (Sakai)
- Gent and Shannon, “Decision Control and the Pursuit of Binding Conflict Management: Choosing the Ties that Bind” (Sakai)

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 3: THESIS EXAMPLES

- Examples of Honors Theses (Sakai)

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 8: LITERATURE REVIEW

- Powner, Ch. 3 & 10

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10: PEER REVIEW

- *Peer Review Session for Assignment 1: Research Question*

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 15: RESEARCH RESOURCES AT UNC

- ****Assignment 1 Due****
- Librarians: Renée Bosman (Political Science), Michele Hayslett (Data)

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17: VARIABLES, HYPOTHESES, AND COMPARISONS

- Pollock, Ch. 2 & 3
- Powner, Ch. 4 (pp. 81–95)

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22: CONTROLLED COMPARISONS

- Pollock, Ch. 4 & 5

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24: STATISTICAL INFERENCE

- Pollock, Ch. 6

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 29: SIGNIFICANCE TESTS

- Pollock, Ch. 7 (pp. 155-169)

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2: PEER REVIEW SESSION

- *Peer Review Session for Assignment 2: Literature Review*

MONDAY, MARCH 7: SIGNIFICANCE TESTS AND CORRELATION

- *****Assignment 2 Due*****
- Pollock, Ch. 8 (pp. 183–187)

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9: CHOOSING A RESEARCH DESIGN

- Powner, Ch. 4 (pp. 89–108)

MONDAY, MARCH 14 & WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16: SPRING BREAK

- No class

MONDAY, MARCH 21: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH + REGRESSION

- Powner, Ch. 5 (Qualitative Research Design)
- Pollock, Ch. 8 (Regression)

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 23: QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH + REGRESSION

- Powner, Ch. 6 (Quantitative Research Design)
- Pollock, Ch. 8 (Regression)

MONDAY, MARCH 28: REGRESSION

- Pollock, Ch. 8

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 30: PEER REVIEW

- *Peer Review Session for Assignment 3: Research Design*

MONDAY, APRIL 4: REVIEW SESSION

- *****Assignment 3 Due*****
- Review Session for Exam

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 6: MPSA

- No Class

MONDAY, APRIL 11: EXAM

- *****Exam*****

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 13: PRESENTATIONS

- Student Presentations

MONDAY, APRIL 18: PRESENTATIONS

- Student Presentations

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20: PEER REVIEW

- *****Thesis Proposal Draft Due*****
- *Peer Review Session for Thesis Proposal*

MONDAY, APRIL 25: PRESENTATIONS

- Student Presentations

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 27: PRESENTATIONS + WRAP-UP

- Student Presentations

THURSDAY, MAY 5 (5:00PM)

- ******Final Thesis Proposal Due******