

POLS3379.02
CRN 80985
3 credit hours
TTH 11:00AM
CHSS 495



Research and Writing in Political Science

How should we evaluate research?

How is good social science research done, and how do we evaluate it? This course is designed to provide a comprehensive overview of the analytical tools of political science research and writing. The foremost goal is a better understanding of how good critical thinking is conducted. Along the way, students will become good consumers of research and gain a better understanding of how to properly conduct their own research in the future.

Critical thinking is not about blindly accepting the wisdom of the “talking heads” you see on television or the information you get online. It is about admitting and being comfortable with uncertainty. In the complex arena of politics—where there are almost always multiple and competing assessments of and solutions to problems—this type of analysis is crucial. It includes the ability to break a problem into its

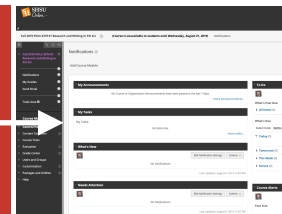
component parts, to question assumptions, to recognize and critically assess multiple and competing sources of information, to evaluate alternative perspectives on problems, and finally to design and evaluate solutions to those problems. The value of the study of the social sciences lies in the development of these skills, and it is toward these ends that this course is organized.

In this course, students will...

- Learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view through the lens of research design and methodology
- Develop a better understanding of the principles of research design in the social sciences
- Improve critical thinking and writing skills

COURSE RESOURCES

1. Readings can be found either via URL or on the course's Blackboard (Bb) site.
2. Please establish a Google account if you don't have one already.



Course Requirements

1. Lab Exercises (200 points @ 40 ea.)

There are six different sessions (see the schedule below) this semester designated as lab exercise sessions. During these meetings, you will work with a team of students to accomplish a task. Each of these tasks will involve you collaborating and turning in a report via Google Docs by the end of the session. The groups for each lab session will be randomly assigned at the start of each workshop. Each lab session is worth 40 points.

Note: You must attend the lab sessions in order to participate in the group report. In addition, I reserve the right to discount your grade based on your individual contribution to the group report. There are no makeups for lab sessions, but I will drop your lowest lab exercise score.

2. Quizzes (125 points @ 25 ea.)

There are five different online (via Bb) quizzes spread throughout the semester. These quizzes cover all course material and concepts starting with the day after the previous quiz. For example, quiz 2 (complete by September 8 covers course material from August 25 through September 7. Each quiz will clearly indicate the dates covered. There are no time limits on these quizzes. Each is worth 25 points.

3. Critical Reading Exercises (225 points @ 45 ea.)

During the semester, you'll be wrestling with five "critical reading exercises" (CRE). Some of these will require you to critically consume and evaluate a piece of political science or other social science research. You'll be required to write a short report or respond to a prompt with a brief essay, usually no more than 1-2 pages. Each of these CREs is worth 45 points. Specific instructions and rubrics will be provided for each CRE.

4. Midterm Exam (200 points)

The midterm exam takes place in class on October 12. It covers all course material between August 17 and October 7. I will provide a detailed information and review sheet in class the week of September 28. I will conduct a review session in class on October 7.

5. Final Exam (250 points)

The final exam is comprehensive and will take place on December 8 from 10:15a-12:15p. I will provide a detailed information and review sheet in class the week of November 16. I will conduct a review session in class on November 30.

DR. JASON ENIA



My work focuses on the political economies of cooperation and conflict, specifically the challenges associated with public goods provision. My current projects explore these challenges in the context of the politics of natural disasters and international weapons regimes.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Hours: MW 12-1pm; by appointment

Policies

Attendance

As per SHSU [Academic Policy Statement 800401](#), you are expected to attend class regularly and punctually. I will keep a record of student attendance throughout the semester. However, there are no points attached to attendance. In my experience, students cannot do well in this course without regular attendance.

Fall 2021 COVID Policies

To prevent COVID-19 infection and its spread to others, get vaccinated, monitor for COVID-like symptoms, and stay home if you're feeling sick. All unvaccinated members of the SHSU community are strongly encouraged to wear face coverings when indoors in public spaces. Those who are fully vaccinated are strongly encouraged to wear face coverings indoors in public spaces during periods of "substantial" or "high" transmission.

Unlike the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters, any student who is absent from this class because of illness, self-isolation, or quarantine will not be able to switch to "remote" attendance during the semester. This means that any student who needs to quarantine or self-isolate due to a positive COVID-19 test or close contact with a COVID-positive person will need a doctor's note for an excused absence. If you need a free COVID-19 test or a doctor's note, contact the SHSU Student Health Center to discuss your options. This also means that you will be responsible for making up any missed work or obtaining any material missed during your absence.

For current information related to COVID-19, please visit the [university's COVID-19 webpage](#).

REQUIREMENTS & GRADE SCALE

Lab exercises	300 points
Quizzes	100 points
CREs	150 points
Midterm exam	200 points
Final exam	250 points

In order to receive a particular letter grade, you must earn the points listed. There will be no rounding!

1000-900 points	A
899-800 points	B
799-700 points	C
699-600 points	D
599-0 points	F

Deadlines

All assigned work must be turned prior to the due date/time indicated. Lab session reports cannot be completed unless you are present in the lab session. Quizzes and CREs must be completed by the assigned deadline.

It is your responsibility to ensure that your assignment is delivered on time. Everything that comes in after the stated deadline is late. If you are worried about a technology-related problem or anything else going wrong, consider delivering the assignments well before the last minute!

In addition, I strongly advise you to confirm that your document uploaded properly and obtain some form of a receipt (e.g., screen shot). I will only entertain "technological error" excuses if they are accompanied by some form of receipt.

W-Course Requirement

This is a "W" course, which means that at least 50 percent of your course grade will derive from writing activities designed to help you master course objectives. You should approach writing in this course as a tool to use as part of your learning as well as a tool your instructor will use to assess your level of learning.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Please be aware that plagiarized work and any form of academic dishonesty will result in an “F” on the assignment. SHSU [Academic Policy Statement 810213](#) outlines the definition of academic honesty and the related disciplinary procedures.

You should also familiarize yourself of [Academic Policy Statement 900823](#), which outlines the procedures for students to file an academic grievance should you wish to appeal your grade for reasons other than academic dishonesty. Please read over these policies. If you have any questions, please ask! I am always happy to help point you in the right direction if you have questions about proper attribution.

Absences on Religious Holy Days

[SHSU Academic Policy Statement 861001](#) states: “Section 51.911 (b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time.” Section 2.02 states “A student who is excused under this section may not be penalized, but the instructor may appropriately respond if the student fails to satisfactorily complete the assignment or exam.”

Disability Services

[Academic Policy Statement 811006](#) reads: “It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that no otherwise qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of his/her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any academic program or activity or in employment.” The policy continues, “The SHSU Section 504/ADA Coordinator for student academic-related matters is the Director of the SHSU Office of Services for Students with

Disabilities (SSD), located in the Lee Drain Building Annex, SHSU Box 2091, Huntsville, Texas 77341, with telephone 936-294-3512, TDD 936- 294-3786, and e-mail disability@shsu.edu. SHSU and SSD promote full and equal access on the part of otherwise qualified students with disabilities to the educational and extra-curricular programs, activities, and services of the University. Students seeking academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids and services under Section 504 or the ADA should contact SSD. SSD makes the initial determinations regarding such requests.”

Visitors in the Classroom

Only registered students may attend class. Exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis by the professor. Visitors must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. Students wishing to audit a class must apply through the Registrar's Office.

Course Evaluation

Near the end of the semester, you will be asked to complete a course evaluation. The evaluation form will provide you an opportunity to evaluate the instructor and the extent to which the course fulfilled the objectives listed on the first page of this syllabus.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

1. Come to class.

This course will not go well for you if you do not attend regularly.

2. Use a calendar and to-do list

You have assignments due almost every week. Ninety percent of the students that have earned a D or F in this class have failed to turn in multiple assignments.

3. Be proactive.

If you find yourself having some sort of issue that is affecting (or will affect) your performance, please speak with me ASAP. I am much more inclined to help students in the middle of the semester than at the end.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF POLITICAL SCIENCE? (AUGUST 17-26)

DATE	TOPIC	DUE	READ BEFORE CLASS
Aug-17	Introducing the course		1. Course syllabus 2. Set up a Google account
Aug-19	Thinking about the goals of liberal science; role of doubt		1. Rauch (1993) "The Rise of Liberal Science," in <i>Kindly Inquisitors</i> , pp. 31-56. 2. Freakonomics Radio (2014) The Three Hardest Words in the English Language [listen to the podcast, approx. 29 min] 3. Radiolab (2012) "In the Valley of the Shadow of Doubt" [approx. 19 min]
Aug-24	What sorts of questions do we ask in political science?	Take quiz #1 via Bb by Aug 25 at 11pm [25 points]	1. Pollock (2009) "Facts & Values in Perspective" & "The Scientific Approach" in <i>The Essentials of Political Analysis</i> , pp. 3-5. 2. Smith & Malici (2013) "Why Do We Need a Science of Politics?" in <i>Political Science Research in Practice</i> , pp. 1-12.
Aug-26	Lab exercise #1 [40 points]		

THINKING SCIENTIFICALLY ABOUT CAUSE AND EFFECT (AUGUST 31-SEPTEMBER 9)

DATE	TOPIC	DUE BEFORE CLASS	READ BEFORE CLASS
Aug-31	What do we mean when we say that things are correlated with one another?		1. Wheelan (2013) "Correlation: How Does Netflix Know What Movies I Like?" in <i>Naked Statistics</i> , pp. 58-67. 2. Matthews (2000) "Storks Deliver Babies (p=0.008)" pp. 36-38.
Sep-2	What do we mean when we say one thing "causes" another?		1. Kilcrease (2021) "Types of Causation" in <i>How To Think, Read, & Write in the 21st Century</i> , pp. 103-107.
Sep-7	The experimental method as the "gold standard" for casual inference	Take quiz #2 via Bb by Sep 8 at 11pm [25 points]	1. Pollock (2012) "Research Design & the Logic of Control," pp. 78-86. 2. This American Life (2012) " Mr. Holland's Opus ," listen to the podcast [approx. 35 minutes]
Sep-9	Lab exercise #2 [40 points]		

THINGS GET WEIRD PART 1: MEASUREMENT (SEPTEMBER 14-OCTOBER 5)

DATE	TOPIC	DUE BEFORE CLASS	READ BEFORE CLASS
Sep-14	Defining and operationalizing concepts	Critical Reading Exercise #1 due by Sep 15 at 11pm [45 points]	1. Johnson & Reynolds (2012) "Defining Concepts," pp. 119-125; 127-133. 2. Pollock (2012) "The Definition & Measurement of Concepts," pp. 6-14.

Sep-16	Three tricky concepts (to define and operationalize) in political science research		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Seyd (2016 wp) "How Should We Measure Political Trust?" 2. Hessler (2014) "If Everyone Votes Yes, is it a Democracy?" 3. Wellerstein (2020) "Counting the Dead at Hiroshima and Nagasaki"
Sep-21	Lab exercise #3 [40 points]		
Sep-23	Measurement errors, pt. 1	Critical Reading Exercise #2 due by Sep 27 at 11pm [45 points]	1. Brians et al. (2011) "Measurement Error: The Enemy," pp. 102-105.
Sep-28	Measurement errors, pt. 2	Take quiz #3 via Bb by Sep 29 at 11pm [25 points]	1. Radiolab (2012) "Inside 'Ouch!'" listen to the podcast [approx 27 minutes]
Sep-30	Valid & reliable measurements		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pollock (2012) "Reliability & Validity," pp. 14-23. 2. Johnson & Reynolds (2012) "The Accuracy of Measurements," pp. 133-144.
Oct-5	Lab exercise #4 [40 points]		

MIDTERM EXAM (OCTOBER 7-12)

Oct-7	Midterm review session (in class)		
Oct-12	Midterm Exam [200 points]		

THINGS GET WEIRD PART 2: SAMPLING (OCTOBER 14-NOVEMBER 2)

DATE	TOPIC	DUE BEFORE CLASS	READ BEFORE CLASS
Oct-14	What is sampling? Why sample?		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wheelan (2013) "The Central Limit Theorem: The LeBron James of Statistics" pp. 127-142. 2. Ellis (2020) "Here's How to Properly Read an Election Poll"
Oct-19	What is sample bias?	Critical Reading Exercise #3 due by Oct 20 at 11pm [45 points]	1. Bhandari (2020) "Sampling Bias: What is it and Why Does it Matter?"
Oct-21	Sample bias in the real world		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cummings (2017) "I'm a Brain Scientist and I Let My Son Play Football" 2. Jenny Ludmer (2015) "Sampling Bias in Science: Here's Why You Need to Go Back to the Source" 3. Shane (2020) "Trump's Popularity Slips in the Latest Military Times Poll -- and More Troops Say They'll Vote for Biden"
Oct-26	Strategies for sampling	Take quiz #4 via Bb by Oct 27 at 11pm [25 points]	1. Schutt (2015) "Sampling and Generalizability," pp. 147-175.
Oct-28	Lab exercise #5 [40 points]		

Nov-2	How big should a sample be? Tradeoffs...	Critical Reading Exercise #4 due by Nov 3 at 11pm [45 points]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Brians et al. (2011) "Determining Appropriate Sample Size," pp. 145-150. 2. Hopkins (2020) "Covid-19 Vaccine Trials Need Only a Fraction of People to Get Sick"
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THINGS GET WEIRD PART 3: WHAT "CONTROL" GROUP? (OCTOBER 14-NOVEMBER 2)

DATE	TOPIC	DUE BEFORE CLASS	READ BEFORE CLASS
Nov-4	Returning to experiments; controlling for some other factors		1. Brians et al. (2011) "The Classic Experiment" pp. 118-123.
Nov-9	How do we think about "control" when we can't do an experiment?	Critical Reading Exercise #5 due by Nov 10 at 11pm [45 points]	
Nov-11	Discussing the positives and negatives of a few social science experiments		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Buckley (2010) "To Test Housing Program, Some Are Denied Aid" 2. Zimmer & Weiland (2020, NYT) "Many Trial Volunteers Got Placebo Vaccines. Do They Now Deserve the Real Ones?"
Nov-16	Accidental experiments	Take quiz #5 via Bb by Nov 17 at 11pm [25 points]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Johnson, Donley, & Dawes (2019) "The Accidental Experiment That Changed Men's Lives" The Atlantic 2. Dubner (2015) "How Do We Know What Really Works in Healthcare?"
Nov-18	Instrumental variables		1. Friedman (2012) "Economy, Conflict, and Rain Revisited"
Nov-23	Lab Exercise #6 [40 points]		

FINAL EXAM (NOVEMBER 30-DECEMBER 8)

DATE	TOPIC	DUE BEFORE CLASS	READ BEFORE CLASS
Nov-30	Final exam review session		
Dec-8	Final exam, 10:15a-12:15p (in CHSS 495) [250 points]		