

**Introduction to Political Science Research:  
Concepts, Practice, and Methods of Inquiry  
POL 295.002  
Mercer University  
Department of Political Science, Spring 2008**

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*Class:* MWF  
2:00-2:50 pm  
Knight Hall 203  
CRN 10625

*Office Hrs:* MWF 1-2 pm; MW 4:15-5 pm  
Also, by appointment

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This course serves as one of the gateways to the political science major at Mercer University. The foremost learning outcome of the class will be to introduce students to scientific methods of inquiry that are commonly used by political scientists in understanding the questions that intrigue them. Students can expect that in reaching the ultimate learning outcome for the course they will be exposed to the following:

- Discussions on the Nature of the Discipline of Political Science
- Reading of Seminal Research Literature in the Field
- Critical Issues in Research
- Practice in the Conduct of Research
- Appropriate Reporting of Findings (including standard citation forms)

The course is designed to root students in empirical theory. Some familiarity with basic math skills is essential (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division should suffice). Some understanding of algebra or calculus may be helpful but is not required.

Practical skills that will be developed over the course of the semester include:

- Group interaction and preparation.
- Short essay argumentation.
- Service Learning
- Use of MS Excel and SPSS as a data management and analysis tool

**Required Texts (3):**

1. American Political Science Association. 2001. *Style Manual for Political Science*,. Washington: APSA.
2. The CQ Researcher. 2006. *Issues for Debate in American Public Policy: Selections from The CQ Researcher*, 7/e. Washington: CQ Press. ISBN: 1-933116-86-2
3. Pollock, Phillip H. 2005. *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, 2/e, Philip H. Pollock III, 2005. Washington: CQ Press ISBN: 1-56802-997-7

**Recommended:** A user's guide to MS Excel—especially one that includes chapters on making graphs and charts. A user's guide to SPSS may be helpful but is not required.

Additional required reading will be assigned and is accessible through the class web or may be placed on reserve in the library. Students are responsible for these readings and any “handouts” given in class, as well.

### ***Points/Point Breakdown***

Assignment	%
5 Tests*	55
5 Homework/Lab Assignments*	10
4 Reports/Presentations*	10
Service-Learning Project	10
Paired Paper	15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Each weighted equally

### ***Final Course Grades are assigned according to the following criteria:***

Grade	Pts	Percentage of points obtained	Significance
A	4	92.0 - 100%	Excellence in every facet, a model for future students
B+	3.5	88.0 - 91.9%	Very Good Work, that often exceeds expectations
B	3	82.0 - 87.9%	Good Work, exceeding expectations on occasion
C+	2.5	78.0 - 81.9%	Basic Competency with some good effects
C	2	70.0 - 77.9%	Basic Competency without severe deficiency
D	1	60.0 - 69.9%	Basic competency is achieved but work is weak
F	0	0 - 59.9%	Work is too weak to receive credit for course

This course is broken into 7 sections. For sections 2-6, students will have both a homework assignment and a test.

**5 Tests** will be given on the dates listed on the class schedule. Tests will have a variety of question formats, including essays and problem-solving. It may be useful for you to bring a calculator with you.

**5 Homework Assignments and Labs** will be made throughout the semester and are due at the start of class on the day assigned. Late assignments will not be accepted. Critical to completing the assignments is the attendance of “labs” held every other Friday. Research support can be found at:

<http://tarver.mercer.edu/subject/POL.php>

### **Reports/Presentations:**

- Short Literature Review Essay is a one-page synthesization of three SCHOLARLY articles.
- Discussion Leaders for scheduled debates 2-5, several students are expected to develop 3-5 research questions based on the reading assigned from the CQ reader. Questions must explore the topic both in terms of values and methodology (measurement).
- Interview is an opportunity for students to interview a Mercer faculty member in an area of social science or about his or her research. A two page report on the interview is required on the date set on the class calendar. In the report, the student should be able to discuss the faculty member’s field of research, methodologies that they have employed in their research, and the successes and frustrations of that faculty member in conducting their research. You may approach any member of the faculty in the social sciences (Political Science, Sociology, Economics, or Psychology) with the exclusion of your course instructor.
- Final Presentation of your paired research project at the conclusion of the semester.

*Prior to mid-semester, you will receive feedback on your academic performance in this course.*

**Paired Project** due at the end of the semester will be an analysis and presentation of findings based on an expansion of the class “state” data set. Research should be generated in response to a topic from the CQ Reader that **has not** been discussed in class. All topics require the instructor’s approval. Students must include in their final work information about:

- Research that leads to a cohesive theory
- Hypothesis Development
- Data Collection
- Methods used to Analyze Data
- Findings based on Original Data Analysis

Further students are to present graphs, tables, charts and findings to a panel of interested parties during the last week of the semester. The typical project will be 7-10 pages when completed including the presentation of findings, charts, and graphs. As an assigned, paired-project; students have the option of an individual or paired grade. If students wish to be graded individually, then arrangements must be worked out in advance of the project being turned in.

**Service-Learning Project**, during this semester, students will work either individually or jointly on a service-learning project of their own choosing. In this project, you are required to do some form of quantitative analysis for an on-campus or off-campus group. You may do a survey, quantitative research, or an analysis of existing data but all projects need to be cleared in advance with your instructor. A minimum of 10 hours of the student's time is expected to be devoted to the project. A 2 page reflection on what you did is required on the day noted on the class calendar.

**Writing Style** Papers **must be typed**. You should use a standard sized (10-12 point) font and be aware that grammar, spelling and punctuation errors will be penalized. Late assignments will be penalized for every twenty-four hours they are late. Please be careful to spell correctly and use complete sentences. It never hurts to proofread your work. Your work will also be graded on overall quality, logic, and merit. Citation must be done in APSA style. ALL CITATIONS FOR THIS CLASS MUST BE IN APSA STYLE.

**Plagiarism** This is, of course, cheating by not giving credit for ideas not original to you. It can take the form of "copying," not noting direct or paraphrased quotations, or even failing to provide an adequate works cited list. Be careful to cite sources any time you borrow an idea or use another's work to make a point, even when it is the textbook from this class

**Honor Code** The Mercer Honor Code applies to all work completed in this class. Any class materials (tests, quizzes, papers, handouts) are not for broad distribution. If they are found in a "test file" it will be considered a violation of the honor code. I will actively pursue prosecution of violators through all means available at the university and students that cheat will be penalized. If you divulge the contents of class materials to those not having received credit for POL 295 you will be considered as having violated the code. *I pledge myself neither to give nor receive help during tests nor for any individual assignments or papers, nor to use any information other than that allowed by the instructor. I further pledge that I will not allow to go unreported to the proper persons any violations of the Honor Code and that I will give true and complete information before the Honor Council*

**Attendance** More than four absences in this class will result in a penalty on your grade in this class. A 5 point reduction on your final average will be taken for each successive absence over three (5 points will be deducted from your final average for the 6<sup>th</sup> absence, 10 points for the 7<sup>th</sup>, and so on). Ten or more absences will result in automatic failure. **YOU SHOULD COME TO CLASS!** In most cases empty seats do not absorb more material than do students. Empty seats do not participate better than students (though this is not true in certain cases). Empty seats certainly do not impress the instructor with your effort in his class. Exceptions to this policy are those absences documented with official Mercer communication.

**Discussions about Grades** from time-to-time you may disagree or question the instructor's assignment of a grade to your work. This is a normal part of university life and your instructor encourages such discussions since how are you going to improve if you are not able to discuss your work. Also, it is possible that your work was mistakenly assigned a grade when another would have been more appropriate. The following guidelines apply in discussing your performance. You must make an appointment and have a face to face conversation with the instructor (nothing will be adjusted via an e-mail or phone conversation and e-mails questioning grading practices will be ignored). Students are to wait for at least 24 hours before asking for an appointment. All of these practices also apply to end-of-term grades as well.

**Accommodations:** Students with a documented disability should inform the instructor at the close of the first class meeting. The instructor will refer you to the Student Support Services office for consultation regarding evaluation, documentation of your disability, and a recommendation as to accommodation, if any, to be provided. Students must provide instructors with an accommodation form from Student Support Services listing reasonable accommodation to sign and return to Student Support Services. The Student Support Services office is located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Connell Student Center. In order to receive full use of services, students with documented disabilities should make arrangements with the Student Support Services Office at 301-2686 as soon as possible. Students with a documented disability who do not wish to receive services are also **strongly** encouraged to register with Student Support Services.

**Cell Phones and Pagers** need to be turned off for our class; repeated disruptions will result in a student being dismissed from class.

UNIT	WEEK	READING ASSIGNMENT	MONDAY	WEDNESDAY	FRIDAY
1. Introduction	Jan 9-11	<i>APSA Style Manuel</i> Pollock <i>Introduction</i>		Introduction	Theory: Normative and Empirical *8/24 Last Day to Drop
	Jan 14-18	<i>APSA Style Manuel</i> Pollock 1; CQ 5	Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative	What is Research in Political Science <i>Dr. Lori Johnson</i>	Library Safari <i>Meet at Tarver Library Instructional Room</i>
2. Concepts & Measures	Jan 23-25	Pollock 1		<b>Debate 1:</b> Upward Mobility	Variables/ Levels of Measurement
	Jan 28-Feb 1	Pollock 2	<b>Lab 1:</b> Charts & Graphs	<b>Homework 1, due</b> Relationships	Hypotheses  <b>Report 1 Due</b>
3. Central Tendency	Feb 4-8	Pollock 3 CQ 9	<b>Test 1</b>	<b>Debate 2:</b> Climate Change	Measures of Central Tendency
	Feb 11-15	Pollock 4	<b>Lab 2:</b> Descriptive Statistics	<b>Homework 2, due</b> Causation	Comparisons of the Mean
4. Sampling	Feb 18-22	Pollock 5 CQ 10	<b>Test 2</b>	<b>Debate 3:</b> Death Penalty	Sampling <b>Interview Report Due</b>
	Feb 25-29	Pollock 5	<b>Lab 3:</b> Distributions & Frequencies	<b>Homework 2, due</b> Polling	<b>Test 3 (take home)</b> Service Learning Project Proposals Due
<i>March 3-7—Spring Break!!!</i>					
5. Association	Mar 10-14	Pollock 5	<b>Debate 4:</b> Birth Control <b>Test 3 due</b>	Controlled Comparisons	Cross-tabulations  *3/20 Last day to Withdraw
	Mar 17-21	Pollock 6 CQ 6	<b>Lab 4:</b> Measures of Association	<b>Homework 4, due</b> Statistical Significance	<b>Good Friday, No Class</b>
	Mar 24-28	Pollock 6	Chi-Square	<b>Test 4</b>	<b>Debate 5:</b> Illegal Immigration
6. Inference	Mar 31-Apr 4	Pollock 6	Correlation & Regression	<b>Lab 5:</b> Correlation & Regression	<b>Homework 5, due</b> Direct Relationships
	Apr 7-11	CQ 15 Pollock 7	Multiple Relationships	<b>Test 5</b>	Paper Discussion  Service-Learning Projects Due
7. Conclusion	Apr 14-18	Pollock 9	Paper Conferences (bring drafts and datasets with you)!		
	Apr 21-25	Pollock 9	Presentations		
<b>FINAL PROJECT PAPER DUE: Saturday May 3<sup>rd</sup> at 2 pm</b> 🌸🌸🌸					

*P.S.* All of the faculty in the Department of Political Science are open to methods and research discussions—we want to see YOU succeed!