

Political Science 214A
Political Research Seminar
Winter 2015
Thursdays 3:10-6pm in Kerr 593

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Information on my Office Hours can be found at:

<http://polisci.ucdavis.edu/people/scheiner/escheiner/office-hours.html>

Course Summary:

The aim of this two-quarter course is to assist second year students in the completion of a (near-) publishable article-length manuscript, which most students defend by the end of their third academic year, in fulfillment of the requirements for Ph.D. candidacy status. If nothing else, we must achieve this aim over the two quarters.

The idea here is that you prepare yourself for the qualifying exam, while giving you practice in the “art” of research – and also give you a chance to see if you like doing it!

Please note that your first aim should not be to do a project that produces publishable results. Put differently, results that support the null hypothesis are ok! **Your job is to put together a compelling research question that you address in a convincing way with a careful research design. Most important, you should focus on being *intellectually careful and honest*.** You are being evaluated on your ability to compose a professional-style paper with a professional research design.

The first quarter (POL214A) will guide you through the research design process and the set-up – research question, puzzle, literature, hypothesis development, locating the “data” (meant in whatever way is applicable for the type of work you intend to do), and research design – of the article you will write. During the second quarter, you will finish the article: rewrite the first part, complete the data analysis (again, this will mean different things for different people), write up the “results,” and conclusion.

The course has four other principal foci:

1. Research design – how do you develop a project that will allow you to draw reasonable conclusions about a research question?

2. Ideal approaches to organizing a political science research paper
3. Ideal approaches to conference style presentations of your research
4. How to be a good critic and helpful colleague: you will spend considerable class-time discussing the work of your fellow classmates, and thereby develop your skills in giving and receiving feedback on work.

Assignments

Course material:

- There is almost no assigned reading in this class. You should be spending A LOT of time reading the appropriate literature on your potential topics and working through ideas for your topic.

Meetings with faculty advisors:

- Again, the aim of the course is to help you develop a high-quality paper. To this end, it is essential that you get regular feedback from faculty advisors.
 - You will need to have one faculty member agree to be your formal advisor for the 214 project, and I will ask you each (student and advisor) to sign a contract that formalizes this relationship.
 - By March 20, I need your advisor to let me know what grade (s)he assigns to your Final Paper. Please ask your advisor ASAP by what date you need to turn in your paper in order for her/him to meet the 3/20 deadline.
- In some weeks, I intend to cancel class so that we can hold meetings between you, your advisor, and me to discuss your project.
- In another week, I will ask you to meet with an entirely different faculty member to get his/her feedback on your project.

Written Assignment Format:

- All written assignments must be double-spaced and typed, have 1-inch margins (not the MS Word default). Please proofread carefully. (I have little patience for typos/missing words/poorly constructed sentences, nouns-pronouns that don't match, etc.)
- Use page numbers whenever you submit something longer than one page. (Papers without page numbers drive me insane.)
- Include a separate cover page with your name, course, assignment, and the date. This page should not have a page number on it and does not contribute to the total number of pages in the paper.

Final Paper: See the end of the syllabus for details on the paper.

- Due by 9am on Wednesday, March 18 in my mailbox & by email, but due to your advisor by whatever deadline (s)he sets.
- 10-15 pages (double-spaced) of text (not including tables / figures / appendices / bibliography, all of which should also be in the paper)
- Again, please note: The most important task here is NOT that you provide convincing evidence for your model. Rather, your job is to put together a compelling research question that you address in a convincing way with a careful research design. You want to be intellectually careful and honest. In essence, you are being evaluated on your ability to compose a professional-style paper with a professional research design. So, of course null results are fine!

Short Reports & Memos:

- You will have regular short essay assignments to help you develop your project. Please see the assignment listed under each week.

Annotated Bibliographies (AB):

- [Please turn in by email only](#)
- You should be doing a ton of reading on your project. To facilitate your work on this front, students are required to turn in 3 separate annotated bibliographies throughout the course. Each bibliography should contain notes on 6-8 article-length readings. The exercise is principally intended to help students master key readings in their area of research interest, but may include work on research design and methods.
- You should only select readings that you have not read before or, as an exception, manuscripts that you don't already have notes on and need to revisit to fully digest.
- For literature relevant to your topic of interest, annotated bibliography entries should follow a format similar to the following:
 - FULL CITATION
 - Research Question(s):
 - Theory and Hypotheses:
 - Data/Methods:
 - Findings/Conclusions:
 - Notes (critiques of the work, ideas for future work, especially relevance to your ideas/project):
- No matter your format, you must include a notes section. The notes section should be particularly useful to you. If you find yourself reading an article that is not relevant to your area of interest, skip that article (i.e., do not include it with a note saying "not relevant").
- For any additional reading (on research basics, design, methods, or the profession), you may be more creative in how you enter notes.

Power Point Presentations

- In many class sessions, you will present your work (or that of your classmates) via Power Point-style presentations. Please follow "best practices" that we will discuss early in the course.

Grades:

- Participation: 10%
- In-class presentations: 15%
- Annotated bibliographies: 5%
- Written memos and reports: 20%
- Final paper (grade on this will be the average of the grade I give the paper and the grade your advisor gives the paper): 50%

General Course Policies and Advice

No Laptops/Tablets/etc. in Class

- Electronic devices – laptops, tablets, phones – appear to be distracting in a seminar environment. Thus, I ask that you resort to old-school paper copies of journal articles and old-school pen-and-paper note taking. In other words, please do NOT use your laptop (or tablet or smartphone or any other electronic reading device) in class. If you have a particular learning style that is particularly benefitted by looking at articles on a screen or typing your notes, please feel free to talk with me and I will be happy to consider an exception. And please silence your phones.

General Advice

- Do not take critiques personally: The aim of the entire faculty is to help you constantly improve your work and create the best research that you can. To this end, we will repeatedly – and, at times, very bluntly – criticize your work. When confronted with these critiques, some students feel hurt and, at times, angry and defensive. I urge you not to fall into that camp. Critiques are part of being in academia, and are designed to make you a better researcher!
- Work together: Too often, I am seeing a lack of collaboration – and, recently, a lack of collegiality – among graduate students. Graduate school is not a competition! And the more you all help each other, the more everyone's work will improve.
- Please let me and/or your advisors know when you have problems: The most common characteristic I have noticed among students who are not doing well in graduate school is lack of communication. If you need/plan to turn in something late for my class, that is fine. Just please just let me know so I'm not wondering if I've missed it. And if you are having problems with the program or with class, please come talk with me. There is no shame in any of that!

Class Dates, Topics, and Assignments

Warning: The class schedule is likely to change without much notice this quarter

1. January 8: Intro to the Class, Paper writing, Power Point Presentations, & Your Project

Reading:

- Read over the [syllabus](#) carefully before class. Please ask questions about the course and all assignments. **Be aware of upcoming assignments** – especially the essay due on January 20, the Draft of your Final Paper due March 3, the Poster Session the week of March 9, and the Final Paper due by March 18.
- **Guidelines for Political Science Writing – all are in the Reading folder under the Resources tab at the Smartsite for the course:**
 - Caltech Rules (Weingast):
 - <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mapss/colloquium/papers/caltech.pdf>
 - Raymond E. Wolfinger, “Tips for Writing Papers,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Mar., 1993), pp. 87-88.
 - James Stimson, “Professional Writing in Political Science: A Highly opinionated Essay”
 - http://www.unc.edu/~jstimson/Working_Papers_files/Writing.pdf
 - Boydston’s “The Ten Elements of a Good Research Project”

Written Assignment – due by email by noon the day of class

- Length: just a couple of pages – whatever does the job.
- Acquire 3 (ideally, high-quality) articles relevant to the topic you plan to pursue in this class. They may be articles you have already read or new articles. Pick articles with some variation in terms of type of journal, for example general interest (APSR, etc.) vs. subfield specific (Comparative Political Studies, International Studies Quarterly, Legislative Studies Quarterly, etc.).
- For each article, do two things.
 - 1) Outline the article as a whole in terms of its structure and the length (or proportion to whole) of each section. E.g., introduction (10%), literature review (10%), data and methods (20%), etc.
 - 2) Carefully read the introduction and outline paragraph by paragraph what happens in terms of what the author is trying to do (not what the substantive content is). E.g., first paragraph: the "hook" about the importance of the subject; second paragraph: thesis statement; third paragraph: sets argument within secondary lit; etc.
- Think about what you have learned about patterns, variation, etc., in terms of the structure of the articles and how the introduction serves to introduce the article.

Be prepared to discuss:

- **How to write a paper.** See the assigned reading, and think about what you found in your writing assignment for today. More specifically, consider how really good articles deal with the following (both in terms of form and substance):
 - Generally speaking, what makes for a good topic?

- What sort of organizational structures do really good articles follow?
- What is involved in a good introduction to open an article? What makes an introduction particularly effective?
- What features are particularly effective and/or ineffective in the literature review?
- Where does theory fit in (both organizationally and substantively) in the article? And what makes for good theory?
- What about hypotheses? How do they fit in organizationally? And what makes for good hypotheses?
- What makes for a good analysis section?
- **Your topic.** Explain what topic you're thinking of for this class, who your advisor is, and what you've talked about with your advisor.

Presentation by me on use of Power Point:

- In class, we will also discuss strategies for power point presentations. I will place the slides we use in class at the course page at smartsite.ucdavis.edu.

2. January 15: Research Design and Your Paper Topics

Reading:

- KKV, Ch1
- Lave, Charles, and James G. March. 1975. *An Introduction to Models in the Social Sciences*. New York: HarperCollins, Ch1&2: pp. 2-42. (From the POL242 coursepack.)

Plan to Discuss:

- Re-read your paper assignments and the essays that you wrote for POL242.
 - *We will discuss the ideas in these essays.*
- Think about Donald Rumsfeld's (February 12, 2002) comment that "As we know, there are known knowns. There are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns. That is to say, we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns, the ones we don't know we don't know."
 - *What does that mean and how does that apply to doing social science research?*
- <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/09/24/can-greater-transparency-lead-to-better-social-science/>
 - *Read and plan to discuss.*

Written Assignments - due by noon on Tuesday of this week in my mailbox & by email:

(1) 2-page proposal: what, why, and how

- The first part of your two-page topic proposal should identify what you intend to investigate – that is, clearly state your research question.
- The second part should explain why the question is important and/or interesting to both an academic and a broader audience.
- The third part should provide some information on how you intend to pursue this topic – for example, you might already have an idea of your argument, which you should then identify and briefly justify; or, you might identify the literature you plan to tap in order to develop theoretical expectations regarding your question; or, you might discuss the methodological approach that seems best suited for your topic and/or what data you plan to use.
- Note that, as you develop your proposal, you also should consider any particular challenges you are likely to encounter in pursuing this research topic or, in other words, the feasibility of the project.
- In short, your two-page proposal should contain the following:
 1. A statement of the research question
 2. An explanation of why the question is important and/or interesting
 3. An indication that you have begun to develop a plan for answering the question

(2) Annotated Bibliography 1 (AB1) – see "Information on Assignments" above for information on these. [email only](#)

In class presentation:

- Prepare an 8-minute Power Point presentation that lays out your proposal. I will cut you off after 8 minutes. [Please email me your slides by noon the day of class.](#)
 - Be sure to follow good Power Point presentation strategies.

- In particular, focus on:
 1. Justifying the importance of your topic
 2. The feasibility of your project in a two-quarter class
 3. What sort of analysis (large N? experimental? Etc.) you need to do given the type of topic you have
- We will spend 5 minutes discussing each presentation/proposal. Plan to discuss in class each presentation/proposal, based on:
 1. Your general impressions
 - a. Important topic?
 - b. Feasibility?
 2. Our understanding of work on research design
 3. How to improve the presentation itself.

3. January 22: POL242 Applied to POL214

Signed Project Description/“Contract” – due in class this week:

- Prepare a brief description of your research project, including a statement of your research question and brief discussion of the literature it addresses. Discuss this description with your faculty advisor and incorporate his/her feedback.
- The description you turn in must be accompanied by a signature (on the “contract,” which I will post under the Resources tab at Smartsite) from your faculty advisor.

Written Assignment: Redo your final assignment from POL242, but now apply the question to your 214 project.

Logistics

- [Due by noon on Tuesday of this week in my mailbox & by email](#)
- No more than **8** double-spaced pages.
 - Please include a separate cover sheet with your name, etc. on it.
 - Please only place your name on that separate cover sheet.
 - Please include page numbers on all non-cover pages.
 - For other formatting instructions, please see the syllabus.

Question

You must produce a professional-quality paper by mid-May. [Given the constraints you face – time, where you live, and finances – how will you plan to conduct your research for 214?](#)

- That is, how do you plan to spend your research time over the next few months?

In your answer, please include the following:

- Based on past class discussion and the work you have read in your classes, what considerations do you need to take into account in designing your project in order to make this really good political science?
 - In answering this question, consider:
 - What does it mean to do good political science?
 - What potential pitfalls do you need to watch out for in designing your project?
- Be sure to justify your choices. [Given your research topic](#), why are you choosing some research design approaches, but not others?
 - In answering this question, please don't just state the obvious: Of course, you are not going to go do field work or develop a large-scale new experiment during this time.
 - Instead, focus on comparing the strengths and weaknesses of different viable options: quantitative vs. qualitative analysis. Longitudinal vs. cross-sectional analysis. One country (or state or municipality) vs. many. Studying regular citizens vs. elites. Experimental vs. observational study. Etc.
- Please give specific examples from your reading of successful (and perhaps not so successful) efforts to carry out designs.

Power Point Presentation:

- Prepare a 10-minute Power Point presentation in which you present the plan that you develop in your paper.
 - I will cut you off after 10 minutes
 - Be sure to lay out the justifications pro/con that are in your paper
- [Please email me your Power Point slides by noon the day of class.](#)
- Be sure to follow good Power Point presentation strategies.

4. January 29: No Class so you can work on your projects

At the start of this week, I want to set up a meeting between you, your advisor, and me for the week after this one.

Writing Assignments – due by noon on Tuesday of this week in my mailbox & by email:

- (1) 3-page memo: theory and hypothesis development
 - [Please note that I will share this memo, along with my own written comments on it, with your advisor to help guide our meeting next week.](#)
 - The first part of this three-page memo should briefly restate your research question.
 - The second part should place your research question within a broader body of literature; that is, identify what previous scholars have said and theorized about with respect to this issue.
 - The third part should identify and justify your argument/model & lay out the testable hypotheses (or single hypothesis) that flows from this
 - The fourth part should provide some information on how you plan to test your hypothesis(es).
 - In short, your three-page hypothesis memo should contain the following:
 1. A brief statement of the research question
 2. An overview of pertinent literature
 3. An explanation and justification of your model and hypothesis(es)
 4. An indication of how will you test your hypothesis(es)
- [AB2 – email only](#)

Additional Item:

- This week, I will pick a “discussant” (based on research interest) for each person in the class, so each of you will ultimately serve as a discussant for another participant in the class.

5. February 5: No Class so you can work on your projects & to create time for meetings for you, your advisor, and me

Meetings this week between you, your advisor, & me. We will discuss your 3-page memo, your project, and how to proceed from here.

6. February 12: Research Design

Guest presentation on doing posters – also see handout link at the course webpage

Meet with a second faculty advisor this week:

- This week, you should meet with a second faculty advisor (not your official 214 advisor, and not me) to discuss your project.
- You should include the results of that meeting in the Report that you submit to me next week.

Written Assignments: due by noon on Tuesday of this week:

(1) 3-4 page report: Research Design – *due to both me and your discussant (hard copies in mail boxes & by email)*

- The purpose of this Report is to present an overview of your research design.
- You should briefly restate your question and your model.
- You should then explain how you intend to evaluate/test your argument. What are observable/testable implications of your model? Within that section you should address what data you will use and how you will obtain the data. Further, you should justify your choices (why these and not others?).
- You should avoid using overly sophisticated quantitative techniques when simpler ones (such as a t-test) will do the job just as well.
- Indicate what you expect to find from your hypothesis tests (or, alternatively, explain what results you could get that would tell you that you were wrong).
- Explain what different results would mean for your model. Would certain results offer evidence in support of your model? What would a null result suggest? What results would suggest that your model is wrong? Would certain results be indeterminate in terms of evaluating the accuracy of your model? Might alternative models explain each of these results as well?
- What is your timeline for the completion of this project? Please be aware that (a) the final, final, totally complete draft of the paper is due in mid-May, and (b) ideally, you will present preliminary results in your poster session in less than 4 weeks from now.
- In short, your report should contain the following:
 1. A brief statement of the research question and argument/hypotheses
 2. A considered, persuasive explanation of how you intend to evaluate your model.
 3. A discussion of the data you intend to use
 4. An indication of what you expect to find from your hypothesis tests
 5. An explanation of different results might mean for your model.
 6. Timeline

(2) AB3 – due by email just to me

Power Point Presentation – please email me slides by noon on the day of class.

- You will each give a **critical** 10-minute presentation on the report for which you are the **discussant**. You will not present on your own project.
- Please present the following very succinctly in your presentation:

- Very quickly: research question, theory, and data
- Testable/observable implications of theory (i.e., hypotheses) and how they will be tested.
- Critique of the research design – including/especially are the data being used reasonable for the question and do we have a clear sense of how to interpret different results with respect to the model.
- We will then spend 10 minutes as a class discussing the project.

7. February 19: No Class so you can work on your projects

At the start of this week, I want to set up a meeting between you, your advisor, and me for the week after this one. By the time we meet, you should have your data and familiarized yourself with it. You should let us know what sorts of problems you expect to have with those data. The ideal will be to have preliminary results to share with us, but the main aim is to have an airtight research design at this point.

Writing Assignments – due by noon on Tuesday of this week in my mailbox & by email

- Based on class discussion in Week 6, your meeting with a second advisor, and additional thinking/reading you have done, revise the Report that you wrote for last week.
- Please note that I will share this Report, along with my own written comments on it, with your advisor to help guide our meeting next week.

8. February 26: No Class so you can work on your projects & to create time for meetings for you, your advisor, and me

Meetings this week between you, your advisor, & me. We will discuss your 3-4 page Report, your project and how to proceed from here. By the time we meet, you should have your data and familiarized yourself with it. You should let us know what sorts of problems you expect to have with those data. Again, the ideal will be to have preliminary results to share with us, but the main aim is to have an airtight research design at this point.

Also, we need to ask your advisor by what date you need to turn in your Final Paper in order to have his/her grade for you turned in to me by morning of Friday, March 20 (at latest!).

9. March 5: Polished rough draft of the Poster presentations you plan for your projects (note that you're responsible for bringing/mounting your poster!)

Writing Assignment – due by noon on Tuesday of this week in my mailbox & by email:

- Complete draft of your paper. See the prompt listed (below) for the Final Paper.

10. The Week of March 9 - Date/Time TBD: Poster Session (note that you're responsible for bringing/mounting your poster!)

After conferring with faculty on their availability, we will set the Poster Session for a day this week.

Final Paper: Information to follow on the next page

Due by 9am on Wednesday, March 18 in my mailbox & by email.

But due to your advisor by whatever deadline (s)he sets.

Final paper for POL214A

Basic Logistics:

- [Due by 9am on Wednesday, March 18](#) in my mailbox & by email, [but due to your advisor by whatever deadline \(s\)he sets.](#)
- 10-15 pages (double-spaced) of text

Assignment:

The final paper for this class will be the “front-end” of your research paper that will be due at the end of POL214B. It should be as if you were writing the paper for POL214B and then decided to stop after setting up your hypotheses.

*Please note: The most important task here is NOT that you provide convincing evidence for your model. Rather, your job is to **put together a compelling research question that you address in a convincing way with a careful research design.** You want to be intellectually careful and honest. In essence, you are being evaluated on your ability to compose a professional-style paper with a professional research design. So, of course null results are fine!*

You should include:

- Introduction:
 - What is the research question?
 - Why is this research question interesting/important?
 - What is the puzzle?
 - What is your thesis?
 - How will you test it?
- Literature
 - What does the literature tell us about the research question?
 - Why is the literature insufficient?
- Theory
 - Explain your tentative model, which you are offering to answer your research question
 - Be sure to include clear step-by-step mechanisms
 - What justifies your model?
- Design & Hypotheses
 - What are observable/testable implications of your model?
 - What is your research design? How will you evaluate/test your model?
 - Why is your research design helpful? What types of conclusions will it allow you to draw? Causation? Mechanisms? Generalizations?
 - What data you will use and how you will obtain the data?
 - Describe the data clearly
 - What is the unit of analysis?
 - Time period?
 - Sample size?
 - Probably include tables/figures with descriptive statistics
 - Justify your choice of data (why these and not others?).

- What variables will you use and why? Why not others?
 - If doing quantitative analysis, what kind of techniques will you use? Why? Potential shortcomings with these techniques?
 - What about potential measurement error, collinearity, omitted variables, selection, and other forms of bias and identification problems?
- Expectations
 - Indicate what you expect to find from your hypothesis tests (or, alternatively, explain what results you could get that would tell you that you were wrong).
 - Explain what different results would mean for your model.
 - Would certain results offer evidence in support of your model?
 - What would a null result suggest?
 - What results would suggest that your model is wrong?
 - Would certain results be indeterminate in terms of evaluating the accuracy of your model?
 - Might alternative models explain each of these results as well?
- Do you have any results to report at this time?
- Self-critiques & Other
 - Be sure to note potential concerns that readers might have with your design and your ability to draw conclusions from your results.
 - Can you do additional empirical tests for robustness purposes?
- Timeline
 - What is your timeline for the completion of this project? Please be aware that the final, final, totally complete draft of the paper is due in mid-May.