

POLS 3760: Methods of Research

Syllabus – Spring 2021

Course Information

- **Section 4889 W1** – This is an Online Course
- Instructor: Dr. Kevin M. Baron (his/him/Dr./Professor)
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 - Phone: 931-221-7581
 - Office: Clement 143D
 - Office hours will be virtual meetings held via [Zoom](#) or by phone (931) 219-2140, scheduled by request as needed

**There are two types
of people in this world:**

1) Those who can extrapolate
from incomplete data

Course Description

This course will provide students an introduction into political science research and the conduct of inquiry. Taking both a theoretical and applied approach, students will learn how to approach and develop empirical political science research, understanding how to ask questions, the scientific method, theory development, and data gathering. There are multiple methods of collecting data – both qualitative and quantitative – and the course will provide several foundational methods such as case study and statistical modeling. Students will learn how to take a social scientific approach to understanding and analyzing political phenomenon using appropriate evidence, and how to clearly convey arguments, evidence, and conclusions to an audience.

Unlike the natural sciences, social science research relies on understanding human behavior, institutions, and often the interactions between the two. Political science research cannot be replicated under lab conditions, so we must seek to approach research in a manner appropriate to understanding the world around us. In learning proper methodologies, students will be able to use observable data to theorize and explain political phenomena. Methodology is driven by what questions we choose to seek answers to, and how we determine the best approach to each question.

Course Goals

The course contributes to the mission of the university and the political science program. By taking this course, students will:

1. Develop a broad familiarity with the scientific method.
2. Develop statistical numeracy to become more discerning consumers of political information.
3. Develop a capacity for the critical evaluation of political science research.
4. Apply qualitative and quantitative research methods to political science questions.
5. Apply observable data to develop theory and hypotheses

Course Objectives

The objectives of the course (and associated course goals) are as follows:

- Acquire an awareness of the diversity of research methodologies common in political science along with their characteristic strengths and weaknesses (1-5)
- Develop an ability to make relevant conceptual distinctions and develop typologies. (1-5)
- Develop the capacity to analyze and dissect theories down to their premises, assumptions, and logical structure. (1 & 3-5)
- Develop an appreciation for the different types of explanations for political phenomena. (1-5)
- Develop a familiarity with basic ethical issues in social science research. (1 & 3-4)
- Develop the ability to design and write an original quantitative or qualitative research project. (1-5)

Course Requirements

Textbooks:

- Required: Christopher Howard, *Thinking Like a Political Scientist* (The University of Chicago Press, 2017). ISBN: 978-0-226-32754-9
- Required: Neil J. Salkind and Bruce B. Frey, *Statistics for People Who (think they) Hate Statistics*, 7th ed. (Sage Publications, 2020) ISBN: 9781544381855

Other Resources – Any additional readings and online resources beyond the textbooks that will be shown in the Course Schedule section below. Ideally this course would teach you how to use SPSS – a statistical software package, that should be available on APSU networked computers on campus. Due to concerns, issues, and lack of class time from COVID-19, this course will focus on understanding statistical theory and interpretation of data. SPSS sells a student

version and the Salkind and Frey book provides exercises using this, but it is not mandatory that you purchase or do this – merely optional. Statistical data can come from multiple resources, however, a few easy to access databases include:

- [The Cooperative Congressional Election Study \(CCES\)](#)
- [American National Elections Studies \(ANES\)](#)
- [The General Social Survey \(GSS\)](#)
- [Vote View \(DW-NOMINATE Scores data on partisanship\)](#)

Assignments and Grades – There will be a mixture of assignments focused on discussion posts, response papers, Research Design Papers, and homework. **See Appendix A and B** at the end of the syllabus for more details on the assignments and grading.

Points will be assigned based on the following:

- Discussion Posts: 100 points each (20%)
- Research Design Papers: 100 points each (40%)
- Response Papers: 100 points each (25%)
- Homework: 100 points each (15%)
- Attendance and Participation: 0 Points - you are not rewarded for doing what you should be doing. Be an active learner, no one else will do it for you.

Grades will be assigned based on the following scale:

100 – 90% = A

79 -70% = C

59% and Below = F

89 – 80% = B

69 – 60% = D

Class Philosophy – Learning is an active and interactive process. This is an Online Course, which means you will be expected to be motivated on your own, do the work as listed within D2L on the course schedule, complete readings and assignments, and reach out to me to ask questions or seek clarification on topics and issues. This course is asynchronous, which means we do not meet virtually or host online discussions. All material and assignments are posted to allow you to go through the work on your time and at your pace each week, relatively speaking. You must be an ACTIVE LEARNER, no one will do this for you. You must take an active role in your education, especially for an online course. Ask questions, support opinions and reasoned arguments with fact, and remember – it is fine to challenge someone’s ideas, but not the person, respect for each other is essential

for civil discourse. If you email me a picture of your favorite animal, I will give you five bonus points on one assignment or paper.

Note for Spring 2020: Due to the ongoing health pandemic caused by COVID-19, I want to forewarn you that it is possible for changes to occur. As this course is fully online, any issues on campus should not disrupt too much, although access to resources and internet can be problematic. You will be notified directly by me about any changes to the course. Second, if you run into issues, problems related to the course, technology, or with your personal health, please let me know so arrangements can be made. I am always willing to work with you to ensure your success in the class, but you must keep me informed of your situation so we can work out a plan.

COVID-19 Statement and Guidelines

Austin Peay State University is concerned for the health and well-being of the entire community. The nature of COVID-19 is such that each of our individual actions affects not only our personal well-being but also those of every other person with whom we interact or share a space. Given the possibility of changes to CDC guidelines or those of local or state officials, students and faculty alike will need to be adaptable and flexible as events may occur that necessitate a change in the course schedule or mode of delivery. To minimize the disruption that might occur if a student falls ill or is unable to attend classes for some other legitimate reason, class materials must be made available electronically to students unless the nature of the coursework makes this impossible.

To enhance the health and safety of the APSU community, it is expected that every member of this course acknowledges the following university guidelines:

Masks and face coverings: All students are expected to wear masks or face coverings and maintain physical distancing in all university buildings. Both are necessary classroom requirements that will help keep our community safe.

1. All students and instructors must arrive to class wearing a mask or face covering over their mouth and nose. If a student does not have a mask or face covering, the student must pick up a disposable mask (available throughout campus – in classrooms and in administrative academic department offices) before joining the class session.

2. If a student habitually arrives to class without wearing a mask or face covering, the student may be advised that they can only attend an online section of the course, if such an option is available, for the remainder of the semester. If the course is not available online, the student will be informed that the in-person course is the only option and they will be given one more opportunity to return to class and wear a mask or face covering. The instructor will file a report with the Dean of Students in the Office of Student Affairs. The student may face sanctions up to and including the student being administratively withdrawn from the course and not receive a refund of tuition or fees.
3. If a student refuses to put on a mask or face covering in a class, after being instructed to do so, the instructor will request that the student leave the class. The instructor will file a report with the Dean of Students in the Office of Student Affairs. The student will face sanctions up to and including the student being administratively withdrawn from the course and not receive a refund of tuition or fees. If a student refuses to leave the classroom upon request from an instructor, campus police will be called to escort the student from the classroom. In this case, the student will again be referred to the Dean of Students in the Office of Student Affairs. If this situation occurs, the faculty member may take a break or dismiss the class for that day at their discretion. (Questions regarding Failure to Comply Code of Student Conduct violations should be directed to the Dean of Students, 931-221-7323).
4. If a student has a medical condition that inhibits the student's ability to wear a mask or face covering, the student must contact Disability Services to receive an accommodation (931-221-6230). If a student seeks an exception to the mask requirement, the faculty member and advisor should work with the student to seek an online section of the course. If an online section is not available, or the student does not wish to enroll in the online course, the faculty member will provide instruction to the student remotely, using available lecture capture and other appropriate technology.

Student Absences: Students unable to attend class due to COVID-19 policy or another serious illness, will:

1. Notify their instructor and follow campus guidelines regarding a safe return to campus;
2. Not be penalized for class absences assuming they make up missed assignments in a timely fashion, in consultation with (and at the discretion of) the instructor; and
3. Be provided reasonable accommodations to access all course materials and will be given the opportunity to complete missed assignments online as is practicable.

Student Illness: If a student tests positive for COVID-19 or is experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms (fever or chills, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, cough, muscle pain, sore throat, headache, fatigue, new loss of taste or smell, congestion or runny noses, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea), remain at home, please [complete the COVID 19 reporting form](#), and seek medical assistance or COVID-19 testing if instructed to do so. Students may reach out to Boyd Health Services for guidance. The student should not return to class (or campus activities) until the student has been released by Boyd Health Services. Boyd Health Services will provide guidance during the quarantine/isolation period and a representative from the Office of the Dean of Students will contact the student to provide additional information.

Student Complaints and Appeals Procedures - Discuss your concerns with your faculty member or contact the department chair if you need assistance in resolving an issue. APSU has a variety of policies and procedures for students to file a complaint, appeal, or grievance. [Please visit this webpage for more information.](#)

Academic and Classroom Misconduct - Students are always expected to conduct themselves appropriately. Academic and classroom misconduct will not be tolerated. Students must read the “Code of Student Conduct” in the new Student Handbook for an understanding of what will be expected of them within the academic setting. Policy 3:035 will be followed in reporting any suspected cases of academic misconduct.

Disability Policy – At any time during the semester a student who has a disability which may affect their academic performance is encouraged to make an appointment with me to discuss this matter, and/or should contact Disability

Services; telephone 221-6230; TTY 221-6278; fax 221-7102; or go to the APSU [Office of Disability Services website](#).

Policy on minors in the classroom - Minors (any non-student under the age of 18) accompanying staff, faculty, students or visitors on campus are not permitted in the classroom.

Service animals in the classroom - Consult Policy 3:007 Animals on Campus for appropriate situations allowing service animals in the classroom.

Class Schedule:

- **Part 1: Asking Good Questions**
 - **Week 1, Jan. 19 to 24: Why do we do research?**
 - Howard, Preface and Introduction
 - Salkind and Frey: Note to the Student; Part 1 and Chapter 1
 - Scientific Method Overview
 - **Week 2, Jan. 25 to 31: How to Approach Research and the Importance of the Literature Review**
 - Howard, Chapter 1, Who Cares?
 - Amelia Hoover Green, “How to Read Political Science”
 - Jeffrey Knopf, “Doing a Literature Review”
 - Iain McMenamin, “Teaching Students to Review the Literature”
 - **Week 3, Feb. 1 to 7: How to Define Concepts for Measurement**
 - Howard, Chpt. 2, What Happened? Part 1 (pages 36-49)
 - Salkind and Frey, Chpt. 2, Computing and Understanding Averages
 - **Week 4, Feb. 8 to 14: Validity and Describing Relationships**
 - Howard, Chpt. 2, What Happened? Part 2 (pages 49-63)
 - Salkind and Frey, Chpt. 3, Understanding Variability
 - **Week 5, Feb. 15 to 21: Creating Causal Theories and Hypotheses, Sequencing and Time**
 - Howard, Chapter 3, Why? Part 1 (pages 65-81)
 - Salkind and Frey, Chpt. 4, Creating Graphs
 - Salkind and Frey, Chpt. 5, Computing Correlation Coefficients
 - **Week 6, Feb. 22 to 28: Testing Causal Hypotheses and Complexity**
 - Howard, Chapter 3, Why? Part 2
 - Salkind and Frey, Chpt. 6, Understanding Reliability and Validity
- **Part 2: Generating Good Answers**
 - **Week 7, March 1 to 7: Designing Your Research**

- Howard, Chpt. 4, Choosing a Research Design, Part 1
- Salkind and Frey, Chpt. 7, Hypotheticals and You
- **Week 8, March 8 to 14: Types of Designs**
 - Howard, Chpt. 4, Choosing a Research Design, Part 2
 - Salkind and Frey, Chpt. 8, Probability and Why it Counts
- **Week 9, March 15 to 21: How to Select Cases to Research**
 - Howard, Chpt. 5, Choosing Cases
 - Salkind and Frey, Chpt. 9, Significantly Significant
- **Week 10, March 22 to 28: Words and Qualitative Analysis**
 - Howard, Chpt. 6, Using Documents as Evidence
- **Week 11, March 29 to April 4: Using Words as Evidence**
 - Oct. 23: John Gerring, "What is a Case Study and What Is It Good For? *American Political Science Review* 2004, 98/2: 341-354.
- **Week 12, April 5 to 11: Quantitative Research Analysis**
 - Howard, Chpt. 7, Using Numbers as Evidence Part 1 - Review
 - Salkind and Frey, Chpt. 10, One-Sample z-test
 - Salkind and Frey, Chpt. 11, t(ea) for Two
 - Salkind and Frey, Chpt. 12, t(ea) for Two Again
- **Week 13, April 12 to 18: Comparing Two or More Variables**
 - Howard, Chpt. 7, Using Numbers as Evidence Part 2
 - Salkind and Frey, Chpt. 13, Two Groups Too Many?
 - Salkind and Frey, Chpt. 14, Two Too Many Factors
- **Week 14, April 19 to 25: Relationships and Predicting the Future**
 - Salkind and Frey, Chpt. 15, Testing Relationships Using Correlation Coefficient
 - Salkind and Frey, Chpt. 16, Using Linear Regression
- **Week 15, April 26 to May 5: Final Papers Due – [Get it done and be done](#)**

APPENDIX A

Criteria for Assignments

☺ Discussion Posts

- Specific instructions for each discussion post will be given in D2L in the weeks in which they are assigned. In general, each discussion post will be based on a topic from the Howard book or a reading that will be detailed in the assignment, perhaps occasionally from the Salkind and Frey book. You will write a minimum of 500 words for your own original post, and you will provide substantive commentary on a minimum of 2 of your colleagues' posts. Substantive commentary means that you are engaging in a conversation with your colleague in the material and ideas under discussion. You can agree or disagree, but you must provide reasoning and evidence as to why, and remember, we practice civil discourse.

☺ Response Papers

- Specific instructions for each response paper will be given in D2L in the weeks in which they are assigned. In general, Response Papers are designed to have you critically think about and analyze an idea or concept from the course, along with providing real world examples to support your position in the paper. These papers are designed to have you grapple with ideas and demonstrate an understanding of the course material and your ability to apply theories and analyze a situation.
 - Standard formatting on Response Papers will be as follows:
 - Approximately 1000 words
 - Double-spaced
 - Standard font and margins
 - You must use in-text citations and provide a bibliography at the end. You must use a standard citation style of either APA, MLA, or Chicago. If you are unfamiliar with citation styles, [go to the Woodward Library which has guides on each.](#)

☺ Research Design Papers

- There will be several of these papers throughout the semester, for which you will have several weeks to work on each. These papers will have you put into practice what we will be discussing the course. Each of these papers represents what would be a section of an original research paper if you were to write one, based on a topic of your choosing. Each of these papers will focus on a specific research skill to demonstrate your understanding of the why and how of conducting your own research. More specific instructions will be provided in D2L.
 - Standard formatting on Response Papers will be as follows:
 - Approximately 1500 words
 - Double-spaced
 - Standard font and margins
 - You must use in-text citations and provide a bibliography at the end. You must use a standard citation style of either APA, MLA, or Chicago. If you are unfamiliar with citation styles, [go to the Woodward Library which has guides on each](#).

😊 Homework

- Homework assignments will occur most weeks in order to have you practice the lessons from the week. These assignments will generally come from the Howard or the Salkind and Frey books. More specific instructions will be provided in D2L.

APPENDIX B:

General Grading Criteria for Written Papers

Your grade for any written work or papers will be based on the following evaluation spectrum. Overall, writing assignments will test how well you understand the material from the course, how you can analyze ideas and concepts while placing them into context. Utilization of and applying real world examples are useful in demonstrating your understanding of the material. When grading these assignments, I base my assessments of your work on these approximations. This is NOT an exact rubric but offers a general assessment guide.

- **Directions and Organization:** How well you follow the assignment directions, provide each section, and organize the paper so it fits together as explained. The paper should be structured in a clear and rational/logical manner. This also includes timeliness on making sure your assignments are submitted on time. (20 points total)
- **Analysis and Argument:** Your ability to demonstrate an understanding of the material covered in the paper. You should demonstrate an understanding of the purpose of the material, how to use it, and to offer well-reasoned arguments, originality, and clarity of thought. Your work should provide sound analysis based on scientific reasoning and evidence. (40 points total)
- **Literature and Citations:** Your ability to demonstrate proper use of citations. First to show that you understand the literature and can integrate other researchers work into your own, citing their work where appropriate. Demonstrate your mastery of a citation style – APA, MLA or Chicago – and use it clearly and consistently throughout the paper. (20 points total)
- **Writing:** Beyond the organization and clarity of the paper organization, how well the paper is written, which includes spelling and grammar, sentence structure, paragraph structure, organization of ideas, clarity of writing. All papers should be proofread multiple times and revised as needed prior to submission. (20 points total)