

**POLITICAL SCIENCE 391  
HONORS SEMINAR, FALL 218  
COURSE OUTLINE**

**Overview.** The Honors Seminar is a yearlong course intended to teach you how to do original research. Most importantly, this is a class about how to think, ask questions, and find and weigh evidence. By the end of the course, you will be more sophisticated consumers of social science research and will have produced and presented your own work. You will also have become part of a scholarly community.

**Primary Learning Objectives**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>
#1 Substantive Knowledge	Gain familiarity with the basics of research design, causal inference, and the operationalization of concepts and questions + a field of social science related to your research
#2 Critical thinking	Promote skills in (a) assessing social science arguments including the identification of theoretical assumptions and the limits of supporting data; (b) probing competing arguments by considering their observable implications and collecting relevant data; and (c) assessing the trade-offs and limits that are inevitable in designing and implementing original research
#3 Analytic Skills	Promote incisive, theoretically driven, reading, writing and oral communication skills

**Course Format and Instructional Methods**

The class will be both didactic and interactive, combining traditional lectures and class discussions with hands-on exercise and student-centered activities.

**Required Texts**

The course readings are divided into two categories: (a) project-related readings and (b) seminar-related readings. **YOU MUST RESEARCH YOUR TOPIC EXTENSIVELY THROUGHOUT THE FIRST SEMESTER.** The importance of the project-related readings cannot be overstated; it is the foundation of your thesis. You should expect to do at least 100+ pages of project-related reading a week.

In addition, there will be readings for each seminar, which will relate to exercises and class discussions. Throughout the semester, you'll be asked to connect these general materials to your project. The seminar-related materials will be posted on Blackboard or are available online. These readings are dense. Please take the time to read them thoughtfully.

**Requirements**

Grades for this semester will be based on the following:

- **Reading logs (0 to -10%)** . Throughout the semester, you will hand in logs that track your project-related reading. The logs will not be graded, but failure to hand in a log will result in an automatic 3 1/3 point deduction of your final grade. The reason is simple: if you don't start reading now, you will not be able to complete a worthy thesis.
- **Annotated Bibliography (30%)**. You will produce a detailed annotated bibliography that summarizes and organizes the key project-related literature you have read by mid-semester.
- **Topic Presentation Panel (20%)**. At the end of the semester, you will present a rough draft of your research design to the class and serve as discussant for the research design of one or two classmates (depending on the final numbers in the class).
- **Research Design (40%)**. Your final paper will be a detailed “road map” for completing your thesis in the Spring.
- **Class Attendance and Participation (10%)**. You have to come and participate to create a scholarly community. Period.

## Grading

The following grading rubric sets forth the basic expectations for the class:

Grade	General Expectations
<b>A</b>	In addressing the assignment the student (1) demonstrates mastery of the material; (2) applies concepts accurately and with sophistication; and, where appropriate, (3) articulates the best counter-arguments and why these are not compelling; and (4) recognizes the theoretical and data limitations of the underlying arguments
<b>B</b>	In addressing the assignment the student (1) demonstrates a thorough understanding of the material; (2) applies concepts accurately; and, where appropriate, (3) articulates the plausible counter-arguments; and (4) recognizes the main theoretical and data limitations of the underlying arguments
<b>C</b>	In addressing the assignment the student (1) demonstrates a basic understanding of the material; (2) applies relevant concepts (although not always accurately); and, where appropriate, (3) articulates some counter-arguments; and (4) avoids making unsupported claims or illogical arguments
<b>D</b>	In addressing the assignment the student <i>fails</i> to (1) demonstrate a basic understanding of the material; (2) apply relevant concepts; and, where appropriate, (3) articulate counter-arguments; and (4) avoid making unsupported claims or illogical arguments OR simply fails to address the assignment

**General Expectations for Class Meetings:** Throughout the semester, I expect you to be *prompt, prepared*, and, most importantly, *respectful of one another*. In short, take this class as seriously as I do and actively participate in building a productive and supportive learning environment. If you would rather read the paper, listen to music, talk to your friends, check your e-mail, or sleep, please do so outside the classroom.

**Deadlines:** All deadlines are firm. Late papers will be marked down by one-third of a grade. For each additional day a paper is late, the final grade will be lowered an additional one-third. So, the final grade of a paper due on Wednesday, but handed in on Thursday, would be reduced two-thirds of a grade (e.g., a “B” paper would receive a “C+”). (Weekends count as one day.) Extensions will be granted only for good cause – such as a documented medical problem or family emergency – and, whenever possible must be arranged with *prior* to the due date.

**HAVING AN AIRPLANE RESERVATION ON AN EXAM DATE OR PAPER DUE DATE DOES NOT CONSTITUTE A VALID EXCUSE FOR AN EXTENSION OR ACCOMODATION.**

**Office Hours:** Office hours offer a chance to raise any questions or concerns you may have about the course. Believe me, there is no such thing as a “dumb” question, so feel free to ask.

**Academic Accommodations:** Any student requesting academic accommodation based on a disability must register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP). A letter of verification for approval of accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or your teaching assistant) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

**Several Comments on the Readings:** Grappling with the readings is essential to excelling in this class. I have spent considerable time and care in choosing them, and I expect you to read each selection carefully *prior to class*.

**A Final Caveat:** Please, please, please keep up with the weekly assignments. This course is not too burdensome if you come to class and stay current with the assignments. If you fall behind, however, and try to play catch-up at the last minute, you will easily become overwhelmed. If you are not prepared to devote at least 10+ hours a week to this course, drop it now.

**COURSE OUTLINE**

**Part I. Introduction**

**August 21. Course Introduction.** We’ll discuss the class, do an in-class exercise, and check in on everyone’s topic. You should begin identifying your project-related readings immediately.

**Part II. Foundations of Building a Research Design.**

Part II of the class seeks to give you the basic skills to frame a research question and begin designing your research. This is the intellectual spinach of the class—you may not like it, but it will make you stronger. So, dig in!

**August 28. Overview and Threats to Validity**

Much of social science aims at understanding complex relationships. Do policies work? What’s the effect of race on the distribution of wealth? How does framing of media stories shape public opinion? Does oil wealth undermine democracy? The key word is *complex*. How do we know if X “causes” Y? This simple question turns out to be vexing and will cast a long shadow over

our exploration of research design and your projects. In this class, we'll begin to introduce a vocabulary for thinking about these issues.

Johnson and Reynolds, Chapters 1-3

Campbell and Ross," Connecticut Crackdown on Speeding: Time Series Data in Quasi-Experimental Analysis," 3(1) *Law & Society Review* 33 (1968)

## **FIRST READING LOG DUE**

### **September 4. Concepts, Variables and Hypotheses.**

It is one thing to have a question; it is another to translate it into research. How do we translate our instincts about a complex social phenomenon onto something more concrete and testable? In this class, we'll begin to consider this process.

Johnson and Reynolds, Chapters 4-5

Spatial Model Exercises → Using Models to Generate Hypotheses about Judicial Appointments and Activism

We'll decide who will serve as discussants at the end of class today.

### **September 11. Research Design Overview.**

We'll try to pull some of the pieces together and review the elements of an effective research design.

Johnson and Reynolds, Chapter 6

Review Research Design Handout

### **September 18. Review**

We'll review what we've learned by watching and analyzing the film *Supersize Me!* After our discussion, we'll roundtable your projects.

## **SECOND READING LOG DUE**

### **Part III. Building Your Toolkit**

Part III aims to build your skills as your project takes shape.

### **September 25. Observable Implications/Operationalization.**

Every project has concepts that are hard to measure and translate into data. This class will look at this process, which is related to (but distinct from) generating testable hypotheses.

Wheelchair access project discussion and coding exercises

## **October 2 and 9. Basic Numeracy I & II**

For some, numbers are intimidating, but they are just another language that you can use to tell stories. In the next two classes, we'll get some comfort with numbers and data, getting a sense of how we can use numbers to describe trends, variation and make inferences. Our focus will not be on the math but rather how numbers can be used as part of a narrative about complex relationships in the world.

Johnson and Reynolds, Chapters 11-12.

Data description and interpretation exercises

## **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES DUE OCTOBER 2 AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS**

### **October 16. Student Workshop**

By this point, you'll have done some reading and learned the basics of research design. Now is a good time to take stock of your projects. You'll be asked to make a brief presentation and we'll give you some early feedback.

### **October 23. Document Analysis.**

We often think of text as text and data as numbers on a spreadsheet. Wrong! Text is data. The trick is converting language into useful data. We'll take a closer look at this process, which most (if not all) of you will be doing in your project.

Johnson and Reynolds, Chapter 9.

Newspaper Coding Exercises

### **October 30. Mixed Methods and Process Tracing.**

Most scholars use different types of methods in their studies, combining qualitative and quantitative methods in support of a single argument. This class provides an overview of these techniques, which many of you will use at least to some degree. If time, we'll discuss possible applications of these techniques to your projects.

Jeb Barnes and Nicholas Weller, "Case Studies and Analytic Transparency in Causal-Oriented Mixed-Methods Research," 50(4) *PS: Political Science & Politics* 1019 (October 2017)

David Collier, Understanding Process Tracing, 44(4) *PS: Political Science & Politics* 832 (2011)

Michael L. Ross, What Do We Know About Natural Resources and Civil War?, 41(3) *Journal of Peace Research* 337 (2004) (JSTOR)

Mixed Methods Exercises

→ from simple regression to case selection for process tracing.

→Revisiting the wheelchair access project and using case studies to explore the association between litigation and wheelchair access (the story of Tommy's Restaurant)

**November 6. Class Cancelled. I'll be in Texas for a conference. This is a good week to do a lot of project-related reading!**

**November 13. Application.**

This week we'll discuss one of my current projects in light of what we've learned with an eye towards (a) identifying the core assumptions and concepts of the project; (b) describing and assessing the research design; and (c) analyzing the inherent limitations of the project and possible next steps.

Jeb Barnes and Parker Hevron, Framed? Judicialization and Negative Episodic Media Coverage, *Law & Social Inquiry* (forthcoming)

**THIRD READING LOG DUE**

**Part IV. Student Presentations and Workshops**

**November 20. Student Presentation Panels Round 1**

**November 27. Student Presentation Panels Round 2**

**RESEARCH DESIGN DUE DECEMBER 6 AT NOON. HARD COPIES IN MY BOX IN 327 VKC.**

## STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC CONDUCT AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

### Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism—presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words—is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” (<https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>).

Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

### Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS)-(213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call.

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/6>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline -1-800-273-8255. Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) -(213) 740-4900 -24/7 on call  
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center. For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX compliance –(213) 740-5086 Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support Incidents of bias, hate crimes and micro aggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response  
<https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

Student Support and Advocacy –(213) 821-4710 Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

USC Emergency Information Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>

USC Department of Public Safety –213-740-4321 (UPC) and 323-442-1000 (HSC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime

Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>

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