

**RESEARCH METHODS**  
**Spring 2014**



**Instructor: Dr. Magda Giurcanu**

**Course Meetings:** T: 3-4 (9.35-11.30am) & Th 4 (10.40-11.30am) **TUR 2353**

**Office:** 210 Anderson Hall

**Office hours:** T 12.00-3.00pm & by appointment (210 Anderson)

**Email:** Use the Mail tool in SAKAI or [magiur@ufl.edu](mailto:magiur@ufl.edu)

**Course description**

This course is designed to familiarize students with the research methods most commonly used to study political phenomena. The course has two main objectives: 1) to aid students in understanding and evaluating quantitative and qualitative analyses and 2) to provide students with the necessary tools to design and conduct their own research projects in political science. While the examples used to illustrate the techniques and methodologies throughout the semester are pertinent to the political science discipline, it is important to mention that the various stages of the research process covered are suitable to research questions *across all* social science disciplines.

The course is structured around important aspects of the research process and will span over identifying and refining research questions, formulating hypotheses and assessing theories, writing literature reviews, and formulating original research projects. Methodologies covered will include experimental and non-experimental approaches to research design, 'large-N' quantitative analysis, survey analysis, content analysis, and 'small-N' qualitative reasoning.

**Course materials**

There is one textbook required and one recommended for this class. The books are available through the UF Bookstore.

1. Johnson, Janet D. and H. T. Reynolds. **Political Science Research Methods**, 2012, (7<sup>th</sup> ed.) (required)
2. Kirkpatrick, Lee and Quentin Kidd. **A Simple Guide to SPSS for Political Science**, 2013, Wadsworth CENGAGE Learning (recommended)

Additional readings will be available through 'e-Learning in Sakai'. They will consist of scholarly articles that will allow us to evaluate methodologies across different political science subfields-- American Politics, Comparative Politics, and International Relations.

Most importantly, some lectures will require the use of a laptop (or access to a computer lab), and that information will be forthcoming.

**STUDENTS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL MATERIALS COVERED IN LECTURES, READINGS, HANDOUTS, & POSTINGS ON THE COURSE WEBSITE.**

**E-Learning in SAKAI** You should become familiar with 'e-Learning in Sakai'. All electronic materials assigned as readings (articles and book chapters) will be posted here, as well as power point slides for the class. In addition, ALL GRADES will be posted here too.

**Course requirements and grading. This course is meant to be a hands-on approach to methods—to this aim, we have quite a number of in-class and take-home assignments to work on:**

- 1 midterm in-class test (20% each of the final grade)
- 1 statistics group project (16 % of the final grade)
- 1 research design project (15% of the final grade)
- 4 take-home assignments (20 % of the final grade)
- 3 in-class assignments (9 % of the final grade)

Choose one of the following, each worth 20% of the final grade:

- **20% of the grade --Research paper:** This assignment is particularly geared towards students writing (honor) theses this semester. You can use this opportunity and submit a first version of the thesis here. Or, you may work and improve a paper written for a different class. It's important to mention that you can also use the RDP and finish that project here. The paper will be due during the final evaluation week.
- **20% of the final grade—Take-home final exam:** A second option would be to take a 48- hour-final exam during the final examination week. The take-home test will be cumulative.

**1 midterm test 20%:** The midterm in-class test will focus mostly on concepts and methods discussed in the main textbook, *Political Science Research Methods*, class slides, and additional readings posted on SAKAI. Most importantly, the midterm test will be a mix of short and long answer questions.

**Research design project (RDP) 15%:** Each student is required to produce a research design developed throughout the semester. There are several deadlines that you need to follow to receive all points for this assignment. Only the final submission will be graded, but you can use the feedback from one submission to another to improve the final output.

1. Students are expected to come up with a research topic and introduction and have it approved by the instructor RDP1
2. Write a brief literature review that will allow you to advance a theoretical standpoint and hypotheses RDP2
3. Propose the necessary methodology to test the hypotheses RDP3

4. Last revisions and final submission RDP4

To prevent plagiarism, I will check the papers using Turnitin.com. More instructions on this assignment will be posted later in the semester.

**Statistics group project 16%:**

1. Students will participate in group projects where they will evaluate a research question with a data set provided to them. Groups will be formed during the **second** week of class, based on students’ interests.
2. This project will culminate in mock conference presentations towards the end of the semester. More instructions on this assignment will be posted later in the semester.

**Take-home assignments 20%:** Throughout the semester students will be assigned 4 short assignments. They will take the form of short responses to prompts issued at the end of class on Thursday.

**In-class assignments 9%:** There will be no regular attendance taken. Yet, regular class attendance is **assumed** – as you cannot simply review the required readings to prepare for the exam. In addition, attendance and participation will figure into the in-class assignments, which will be **unannounced**, and will test your knowledge on that day’s readings.

**Policies of the course**

1. **Assignments:**
  - a. All assignments must be submitted **BY THE DEADLINE** and following ALL instructions.
  - b. Extensions will be granted at my discretion and, if granted, they will require proper documentation. Make sure you ask for an extension only **PRIOR** (at least 24 hours) to the deadline date.
2. **Cheating/plagiarism:** DON’T. Any student caught violating the honor code will fail the class. For more information, read the Code of Student Conduct <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcode.php>
3. **Courtesy:** Don’t come late and turn off your cell-phones. Any disruptive behavior (reading newspapers or materials related to other courses, talking outside of class discussions) will not be tolerated and you will be asked to leave the class.
4. **Special Needs:** If you have a disability that requires special arrangements (e.g. note- and/or test-taking), please register with UF’s Office of Students with Disabilities and contact me **within the first week** of class. Every effort will be made to accommodate those with registered disabilities.

**Grading scale:** (<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationgrades.html>):

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	E
94-100	90-93.9	87-89.9	83-86.9	80-82.9	77-79.9	73-76.9	70-72.9	67-69.9	63-66.9	60-62.9	< 59.9

### Course Schedule\*\*\*

\*\*\*I reserve the right to alter this schedule with prior notice—one week in advance.

#### Part I: Preliminaries of Scientific Research

##### Week 1: January 7-9

###### **T: Introduction and Course overview**

Clive Thompson, *Why We Should Learn the Language of Data* (SAKAI)

###### **Th: Studying politics scientifically**

- Johnson and Reynolds, Ch 2
- King, Keohane, and Verba, Ch 1 (available on SAKAI)

##### Week 2: January 14-16--The building blocks of social scientific research

T:

- Johnson and Reynolds, Ch 3 & 4

Th:

- King, Keohane, and Verba, Ch 4 (available on SAKAI)
- **Take-home Assignment 1** (due the following meeting)

\*\*Sometime during the weeks 2 or 3 we will have David Schwieder, the Political Science librarian, visit our class for a demo on how to navigate the UF databases. Once I know more about his time availability I will insert the visit in the syllabus.

##### Week 3: January 21-23-- Measurement

T:

- Johnson and Reynolds, Ch 5
- King, Keohane, and Verba, 150-161 (available on SAKAI)

Th:

- Munk and Verkuilne, 2002. "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: Evaluating Alternative Indices", *Comparative Political Studies*. 35: 5-34 (available on SAKAI)
- **Take-home Assignment 2** (due the following meeting)

#### Part II: Research Design

##### Week 4: January 28-30-- Research Design I Experiments

T:

- Johnson and Reynolds, Ch 6 (up to page 194)
- Morton and Williams. 2008. 'Experimentation in Political Science' in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (available on Sakai)
- Shanto Iyengar and Don Kinder. Ch 2 & 3 in *News That Matter* (available on SAKAI)

Th:

- An in-class experiment
- **Submit RDP1**

**Week 5: Feb. 4-6-- Research Design II Non-Experimental Approaches (Small-n & Large-N Approaches)**

T:

- Johnson and Reynolds, Ch 6 (start on page 195)
- Gerring. 2004. "What is a Case Study and what is it good for? *American Political Science Review*. 57: 45-56.
- One reading to be added on Large-N approaches

Th: Literature Review

- Knopf. 2006. "Doing a Literature Review". *PS—Political Science & Politics*. 39: 127-132
- **Submit RDP2**

**Week 6: Feb. 11-13**

T:

- Test –review
- In-class work on the lit review for RDP2

Th:

- **Midterm test**

**Part III: Data-collection, processing, and analysis**

**\*\*\* We reverse the actual order here and cover first the data analysis part mostly because this is the most challenging aspect of the course. Also, this section will be particularly useful for those of you writing honors thesis.**

**\*\*\* We will need either a computer lab or a laptop for some of these sessions. Also, the SPSS book will be particularly useful.**

**Week 7: Feb 18-20-- STATS 1**

T & Th

- Johnson and Reynolds, Ch 11

Th:

- **SPSS work & Take-home Assignment 3 (due the following meeting)**

**Week 8: Feb 25-27-- STATS 2**

T:

- Johnson and Reynolds, Ch 12

Th:

- SPSS work

**Week 9: March 4-6**

**Spring break**

**Week 10: March 11-13-- STATS 3**

T:

- Johnson and Reynolds, Ch 13

Th:

- SPSS work
- **Take-home Assignment 4 (due the following meeting)**

**Week 11: March 18-20-- STATS 4**

- Receive the data set for group projects (SPSS in class)
- Catch up on stats if needed
- Work on Statistics Group Projects

### **Week 12: March 25-27 --Sampling and Survey Research**

T:

- Johnson and Reynolds, Ch. 7 & 10 (up to page 341)

Th:

- Lupia and Philot. 2005. "Views from inside the Net: How Websites Affect Young Adults Political Interest", Journal of Politics, 67: 1122-1142 (available on SAKAI).
- **Submit RDP3**

### **Week13: April 1-3-- Content Analysis**

T:

- Johnson and Reynolds, Ch 9 (start on page 292)
- Reading to be added on Content Analysis

Th:

- In-class work on Content Analysis

### **Week 14: April 8-10-- Interviewing, Focus Groups, and Ethnographic Research**

T:

- Johnson and Reynolds, Ch 10 (start on page 341)
- Aberback and Rockman. 2002. Conducting and Coding Elite Interviews. PS- Political Science & Politics, 35: 673-676 (available on SAKAI)
- Kirk & Miller, Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research (pp 25-26, & pp 29-32) (available on SAKAI)
- **Submit the Research Design Project RDP4**

Th:

- John R. Hibbing, Elizabeth Theiss-Morse.1995. Congress as public enemy: public attitudes toward American political institutions. Cambridge University press (Chapter 5, "focus Groups and Perceptions of the Washington System, pp 84-105) (available on SAKAI)

### **Week 15: April 15-- Concluding thoughts**

T:

- Mahoney and Goertz. 2006. A Tale of two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research. Political Analysis 14: 227-249. (available on SAKAI)
- Fearon, James D. and David Laitin. 2008. Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods. In The Oxford Handbook of Political methodology, Eds. Box-Steffensmeier, Brady, Collier (available on SAKAI).

### **Week 15 & 16: April 17-22 **Statistics Group Research Project presentations.****

Th: (week 15) & Tuesday (week 16): hours scheduled for the Mock Student Conference

\*\*\*April 28, during the evaluation week:

- Submit the Research Paper by noon
- Or, take the final take-home examination, April 28 noon-April 30 noon.