

PSCI / GIA 5115 (94706 / 96790): RESEARCH METHODS I (Fall 2007)

Dr. Karen Hult

537 Major Williams: Hours: M 1-2, T 2:30-3:30, W 2-3:30, and by appt.

Thomas-Conner (CPAP) Annex: Th 2-3, and by appt.

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- ❖ Methods are not scientific or unscientific, they are improvable.
[Paul Diesing, *How Does Social Science Work?* (Pittsburgh, 1991), p. 90]
- ❖ Communities, including the communities of inquiry that we presumably inhabit, are communicatively constituted; they exist only insofar as their members continue to converse, in a civilized manner, within a context of differences. ...The proper attitude is less one of live and let live than of talking and listening.
[Terence Ball, "Introduction," *Idioms of Inquiry* (SUNY, 1987), p. 4]
- ❖ Members of our profession should take science seriously but respect alternate views and not demonize those who disagree. Underlying the essence of good science – however that is defined – is the belief that our work today can show that our work yesterday was wrong.
[Kristen Renwick Monroe, "Introduction," *Perestroika!: The Raucous Rebellion in Political Science*, ed. Renwick Monroe (Yale, 2005), p. 2]

The aim of this seminar is to explore the purposes, problems, and strategies of *empirical* political, policy, and public administration research. First, we will briefly reexamine the fundamental assumptions of, justifications for, and criticisms of the scientific study of politics and public affairs. This is done *not* to resolve the ongoing debates over the possibility and desirability of a political or a policy "science," but rather to raise these issues and to lay the groundwork for careful consideration of varying approaches to research questions. The bulk of the course will focus on ways of designing and doing empirical political study -- including discussion of conceptualization, the rules and problems of measurement, several "logics" for research designs, and a range of observational (data gathering) techniques. Along the way, careful attention will be paid to the advantages and pitfalls of particular research strategies. Although we will not discover the "one best way" to do empirical political, policy, and public administration study, we will work to distinguish among strategies that are better and worse for examining particular research questions.

The course's *objectives* are three-fold: 1) to provide an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of the research approaches most commonly adopted by U.S. political scientists and (many) policy, public administration, and international relations scholars, and hence of the contours and some of the outstanding issues in those fields; 2) to help students be more thoughtful and critical "consumers" of social science literature; and 3) to give students additional tools with which to explore their own research interests (in, for example, master's theses, doctoral dissertations, convention papers).

COURSE READINGS

The following books are required and are available for purchase at the University bookstore:

- Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 11th edition (Thomson Wadsworth, 2007)
- Marshall & Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 4th edition (Sage, 2006)
- Pollock, *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, 2nd edition (CQ, 2005)
- Pollock, *An SPSS Companion to Political Analysis*, 2nd edition (CQ Press, 2005)

Since royalty charges for copying journal articles and book chapters are so high, I have selected mostly journal articles that are available on-line through the University Library.¹ These readings are marked below with an asterisk (*). (NOTE: in what follows, *AJPS* refers to the *American Journal of Political Science*, *APSR* to the *American Political Science Review*, *ISQ* to the *International Studies Quarterly*, *JOP* to the *Journal of Politics*, *PAR* to the *Public Administration Review*, and *SSQ* to the *Social Science Quarterly*.)

In general, the weekly reading assignments below should be read **in the order** in which they are listed.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Exercises (20% of final seminar grade)

During the semester, students will be asked to do five short exercises on topics related to seminar readings and discussion. The assignments will be made in seminar one week and will be due in class the following week; due dates are indicated on the class schedule below.

2. Article Evaluations (20%)

Two assessments of articles in scholarly journals will be required over the course of the semester, one due October 17 and the other November 7. The first evaluation should be done on *any* of the readings marked below with a plus sign (+). The second may be an assessment *either* of one of these articles *or* of an article of the student's choosing. Each evaluation should be approximately five to seven double-spaced pages in length. It should briefly state the questions or hypotheses guiding the research, discuss how the author(s) examined them, report the major findings, and then, *most importantly*, evaluate the research. (Remember that assessment involves not only offering constructive criticism but also recognizing things you consider to have been done well or to have been contributions of the work.)

¹Exceptions are available in "Course Documents" in Blackboard.

3. Group Project: Survey Construction and Data Analysis² (20%)

With the class divided into multiple groups, each group will be asked to design a survey to be administered to an introductory U.S. politics class (PSCI 1014). Work on the surveys will begin in seminar in September. After administering the surveys the week of October 29, each group will code the responses and enter them into a computer data file to be statistically analyzed using SPSS. At the end of the semester, each student will be asked to turn in a report that both offers an initial analysis of the actual results of his or her group's survey and assesses the questionnaire design and administration. These data also may be analyzed next semester in PSCI 5116. A computer lab (Shanks 180) has been reserved for the class from 9:05 – 9:55 a.m.; we will meet there on some Wednesdays through the semester for instruction and work using SPSS.

4. Research Proposal (25%)

Each student will be asked to focus on a particular question (or hypothesis or problem) of interest to her or him and to prepare a research proposal for exploring that issue. Throughout the semester, students will be asked to discuss their ideas in seminar and to submit work showing their progress on the project. The final draft of the written research proposal (15-20 pages in length) will be due at the end of the semester. Political science students will continue to do work based on these proposals next semester in PSCI 5116 as they move toward developing a defensible master's thesis proposal.

Proposals should: a) clearly state the research question or the purpose of the proposed research; b) *explain* its significance (for, e.g., advancing scholarship, heightening understanding, informing policy prescriptions); c) provide an overview of the scholarly literature (and, if relevant, the policy or administrative practice) in which the proposed study is grounded or that it seeks to extend or challenge; d) discuss the more specific questions or hypotheses that the proposed study will examine; e) describe *how* these questions or hypotheses will be explored; and f) outline likely limitations of the proposed research. Parts c) and e) may well be the longest sections of the proposal. Among the topics that should be addressed in part e) are, *for example*, research design, sampling strategies (including case selection), data sources, and observational techniques. Relevant works from this seminar, from other seminars, or from additional reading or relevant practice should be consulted and appropriately cited. (On writing proposals, see, e.g., the discussion throughout Marshall & Rossman, including Tables 2.1, 2.2, 7.1, and 7.2.)

5. Human Participants Training (5%)

By the end of the semester, each student should provide evidence that they have successfully completed training for doing research with human participants. The most straightforward way of doing that is by completing the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board's Human Research Participant Protections Tutorial and providing a copy of the certificate of completion [see <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/training.htm>].

² Doctoral students need not do this assignment. If they choose not to, they should meet individually with me to determine a reasonable substitute.

6. Participation (10%)

Since this is a seminar, class participation is critical. Students should come to seminar having already done the week's readings, and be ready both to ask questions about and to critically discuss the readings.

If a student must miss a seminar meeting, please let me know *in advance* (in person, or by phone, e-mail, or voice-mail) whenever possible. If the University is closed due to weather, class will *not* be held. We will decide on ways to make up the missed seminar either via e-mail or at the next seminar meeting. (To check on possible closings, look for messages on VT Alert, call 231-6668, check the University website, or listen to WVTF public radio.)

The Virginia Tech Graduate Honor Code is in effect throughout the course. Any student with special needs or circumstances should feel free to meet with me to discuss their situation.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

Course Introduction (August 22)

****Exercise #1 DUE August 29.**

I. POLITICS & SCIENCE (August 29)

- Babbie, chs. 1-3
- Marshall & Rossman, Preface, pp. xv-xvi; ch. 1
- *Gould, "Sex, Drugs, Disasters, and the Extinction of Dinosaurs," *The Flamingo's Smile*, ch. 28 [on Blackboard]
- *King, Keohane, & Verba,³ *Designing Social Inquiry*, ch. 1 [on Blackboard]
- *Shapiro, "Problems, Methods, and Theories in the Study of Politics, or What's Wrong with Political Science and What to Do About It," *Political Theory* 30 (August 2002): 596-619

³For those interested in others' reactions to this book, see "Review Symposium: The Qualitative-Quantitative Disputation," *APSR* 89 (June 1995): 454-81. Collier, Seawright, & Munck also provide a useful overview and summary of the book in Brady & Collier, ch. 2.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN LOGICS

Tentative topic areas/hypotheses for surveys **DUE Sept 5.

A. Elements of Research Design: Units and Levels of Analysis, Concepts and Relationships (Sept 5)

- Babbie, ch. 4, ch. 5 to p. 133, "Operationalization Choices"
- Marshall & Rossman, ch. 2
- Pollock, *Essentials*, chs. 1-2; *Companion*, chs. 1-2
- +*Kalywas, "'New' and 'Old' Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?", *World Politics* 54 (Oct 2001): 99-118
- +*Scheufele, "Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing Revisited: Another Look at Cognitive Effects of Political Communication," *Mass Communication & Society* 3 (2000, nos. 2&3): 297-316

Exercise #2 **DUE Sept 12.

B. Measurement: Operationalization, Validity and Reliability (Sept 12)

- Babbie, ch. 5, pp. 133-151; ch. 6
- Pollock, *Essentials*, ch. 3
- *Berry, "Validity and Reliability Issues in Elite Interviewing," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 35 (Dec 2002): 679-82
- +*Elkins, "Gradations of Democracy?: Empirical Tests of Alternative Conceptions," *AJPS* 44 (April 2000): 287-44
- +*Sullivan, Pierson, & Marcus, "An Alternative Conceptualization of Political Tolerance," *APSR* 73 (Sept 1979): 781-94

Exercise #3 **DUE Sept 19.

C. Thinking in Design Terms, I: The Logic of Experimentation (Sept 19)

- Babbie, chs. 8, 12
- +*Berinsky & Kinder, "Making Sense of Issues through Media Frames: Understanding the Kosovo Crisis," *JOP*, 68 (Aug 2006): 640-56
- +*Brashear Tiede, "Delegating Discretion: Quasi-Experiments on District Court Decision Making," *American Politics Research* 35 (Sept 2007): 595-620

Written statement of question/topic for research proposal **DUE Sept 26.

D. Thinking in Design Terms, II: Elaboration and Comparison (Sept 26)

- Babbie, ch. 15
- Pollock, *Essentials*, ch. 4
- +*Davenport, "The Promise of Democratic Pacification: An Empirical Assessment," *ISQ* 48 (2004): 539-60
- +*Cox, "The Social Construction of an Imperative: Why Welfare Reform Happened in Denmark and the Netherlands, but Not in Germany," *World Politics* 53 (April 2001): 463-98

Exercise #4 **DUE Oct 3.

E. Thinking in Design Terms, III: Process and Case Study Approaches (Oct 3)

- Marshall & Rossman, ch. 3
- +*Yee, "The Causal Effects of Ideas on Policies," *International Organization* 50 (Winter 1996): 69-108
- *Bennett & Elman, "Complex Causal Relations and Case Study Methods: The Example of Path Dependence," *Political Analysis* 14 (Summer 2006): 250-67
- +*Firmin-Sellers, "The Politics of Property Rights," *APSR* 89 (Dec 1995):867-81

Reformulated research question **DUE Oct 10.

Draft survey questions **DUE Oct 10.

F. Sampling (Oct 10)

- Babbie, ch. 7
- Pollock, *Essentials*, ch. 5
- Marshall & Rossman, ch. 3, pp. 64-71
- *Goldstein, "Getting in the Door: Sampling and Completing Elite Interviews," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 35 (Dec 2002): 669-72

III. OBSERVATIONAL TECHNIQUES

First article evaluation **DUE Oct 17.

A. Surveys (Oct 17)

- Babbie, ch. 9
- +*Kuran & McCaffery, "Expanding Discrimination Research: Beyond Ethnicity and to the Web," *SSQ* 85 (Sept 2004): 713-30
- +*Bischoping & Schuman, "Pens and Polls in Nicaragua: An Analysis of the 1990 Pre-Election Surveys," *AJPS* 36 (May 1992): 331-504
- +*Mondak, "Developing Valid Knowledge Scales," *AJPS* 45 (Jan 2001): 224-38
- +*Callahan, Dubnick, & Olshfski, "War Narratives: Framing Our Understanding of the War on Terror," *PAR* 66 (July/Aug 2006): 554-568

Redrafted survey questions **DUE Oct 24.

B. Field Research, I: Overview and Participant Observation (Oct 24)

- Babbie, ch. 10
- Marshall & Rossman, ch. 3, pp. 72-96; ch. 4
- +*Fenno, *Homestyle*, Appendix [on Blackboard]
- *Clark, "Field Research Methods in the Middle East," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 39 (July 2006): 417-23
- *Schwedler, "The Third Gender: Western Female Researchers in the Middle East," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 39 (July 2006): 425-28
- *Carapico, "No Easy Answers: The Ethics of Field Research in the Arab World," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 39 (July 2006): 429-31

⁴ Recommended: Anderson comment on and response by Bischoping & Schuman, *AJPS* 38 (May 1994): 486-99.

Draft research question, significance, and overview of scholarly literature for research proposal **DUE October 31.

C. Field Research, II: Interviews and Focus Groups (Oct 31)

- *”Interview Methods in Political Science”: selections by Leech (665-68);Aberbach & Rockman (673-76); Woliver (677-78); Werning Rivera, Kozyreva, & Sarovski (683-88), *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 35 (Dec 2002)
- +*Conover, Searing, & Crewe, “The Elusive Ideal of Equal Citizenship: Political Theory and Political Psychology in the United States and Great Britain,” *JOP* 66 (Nov 2004): 1036-68
- +*Kraft & Bush, “Accountable Welfare Reform: What Consumers Think,” *PAR* 58 (Sept/Oct 1998): 406-16

Second article evaluation **DUE Nov 7.

A Break in the Action: Secondary Analysis of Quantitative Data (Nov 7)

Pollock, *Essentials*, chs. 6, 7, 9; *Companion*, chs. 5, 7-9

Exercise #5 **DUE Nov 14.

D. Unobtrusive Research: Textual Analysis, Analysis of Existing Documents and Data (Nov 14)

- Babbie, ch. 11
- +*Lockett John, Domke, Coe, & Graham, “Going Public, Crisis after Crisis: The Bush Administration and the Press from September 11 to Saddam,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 10 (Summer 2007): 195-220
- *Lustick, "History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias," *APSR* 90 (Sept 1996): 605-18
- +*Williams & Johnson, “Race, Social Welfare, and the Decline of Postwar Liberalism,” *PAR* 60 (Nov/Dec 2000): 560-72
- +*Finnegan, “What Is This a Picture Of?: Some Thoughts on Images and Archives,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6 (Spring 2006): 116-23

Nov 21 Thanksgiving “break”

****Rough draft of research proposal DUE Nov 28.**

IV. DATA ANALYSIS (Nov 28)

- Babbie, chs. 13-14
- Marshall & Rossman, ch. 5
- *Kritzer, "The Data Puzzle: The Nature of Interpretation in Quantitative Research," *AJPS* 40 (Feb 1996): 1-32

V. QUESTIONS & CONCLUSIONS (Dec 5)

- Marshall & Rossman, ch. 6, pp. 187-97; ch. 7

****Analysis of surveys DUE NO LATER THAN Dec 7, 5 p.m.**

****Research proposals DUE NO LATER THAN Dec 13, 5 p.m.**

Some closing caveats:

"Too much attention to epistemology induces hallucinations of negativism."
(V.O. Key, Jr.)

"In science, as in love, concentration on technique is quite likely to lead to impotence."
(Peter Berger)