

Political Science Research Methods

POL: 295: Sections 1 &2

Spring 2017

Dr. Flavio Hickel Jr.

Hickelfr@jmu.edu

Class Time:

Tuesday/Thursday (3:30-4:45)

Miller 2170

Office Hours:

Tuesday/Thursday (2:00-3:30)

Wednesday (11:00-12:00)

Miller 2143

Section 1 Lab:

Wednesday (12:20-1:10)

Miller 2101

Section 2 Lab:

Wednesday (1:25-2:15)

Miller 2101

Course Description:

Political Science Research Methods offers skills that are central to the understanding, appreciation and critique of political science research. This course focuses on the empirical research process, through which a researcher develops a theoretical explanation of some social process and design tests to assess the extent to which that theoretical model is consistent with the empirical record. In short, the overarching goal for this course is to provide students with the skill set necessary to ask a theoretical question, develop a plausible explanation, and evaluate that explanation empirically.

The first section of the course will emphasize the setup of a research project. We will discuss forming research questions, reviewing existing literature, establishing causality, and developing a theory to explain some phenomenon. We will then focus on research design and hypothesis formation. This involves translating our theory into measurable components and testable questions. Finally, we will test our theories through data analysis conducted using SPSS, a widely-employed statistics program.

Required Text: J. Johnson, H. Reynolds, and J. Mycoff. 2016. *Political Science Research Methods* (8th Edition). ISBN 978-1-5063-0782-4. [Amazon Link](#).

- Additional Readings will be posted on Canvas

Course Requirements: Students are expected to have completed the required textbook reading (and any supplemental material) assigned before class.

Grading:

• Midterm Exam	15%
• Final Exam	20%
• Lab Exercises	15%
• Research Project	50%

Grading Scale:

93-100 = A	87-89 = B+	77-79 = C+	67-69 = D+	< 60 = F
90-92 = A-	83-86 = B	73-76 = C	63-66 = D	
	80-82 = B-	70-72 = C-	60-62 = D-	

Examinations: There are two exams (Midterm and Final). Exams include all material from lectures, required readings, and work done in the computer lab (using SPSS). The Midterm exam is worth 15% of your final grade while the Final exam is worth 20%.

Lab Exercises: This course includes a weekly lab in which students will gain hands-on experience with many aspects of the research process. A significant portion of the lab will be dedicated to working with the SPSS software package to analyze a variety of data regarding aspects of domestic and international affairs. Most weeks, the lab session will be accompanied by a graded exercise which combined account for 15% of your final grade. These exercises will be completed online using Canvas. Late assignments will be docked 5 points for each day late.

Research Project: The ultimate goal of this class is for students to be able to design and execute a theoretically-informed political inquiry of their choosing using quantitative statistical methodology. The project will be completed in stages throughout the semester but will collectively account for 50% of your final grade. More detailed instructions will be provided during the semester but rough outlines are provided below.

Notes for all Assignments: All assignments must be submitted through canvas and go through Turnitin.com to ensure there has been no plagiarism. Late submissions will be docked 5 points for each day they are late. More detailed instructions will be provided throughout the semester. I reserve the right to modify instructions and due dates as necessary (but will avoid doing so if possible). All assignments will be evaluated according to:

- Accuracy, Thoroughness, and Specificity of information presented
- Thoughtfulness of analysis and originality of ideas
- Clarity of the presentation and organization of the material
- Conformity to assignment requirements including grammar, spelling, citations, and format.

Stage 1 – Potential Research Questions: Students must identify three potential research topics/questions for their final projects. The purpose of this assignment is to ensure that each student selects a topic that is feasible given time and data restrictions. Comments and assessment of feasibility will be returned to the student to guide their final selection of a research question. This assignment is pass/fail and worth 2.5% of the final course grade. It is due on Thursday 1/19.

Stage 2 - Final Research Questions: Students must select their final research question. This must include some provisional ideas about their dependent and independent variables along with the relationship between them. I will either approve your topic or work with you to revise it into something acceptable. Once

your topic is approved, you are not allowed to change topics without permission from the instructor. This assignment is pass/fail and worth 2.5% of the final course grade. It is due on Thursday 2/2.

Stage 3 – Preliminary Theory Draft: Students will submit a preliminary draft which consists of the following: (a) Framing the research question in an introduction, (b) a scholarly literature review, and (c) provisional theoretical section in which the student develops a theoretical model to address their research question. This draft should be 6-8 pages (double-spaced with normal fonts and margins) not including references. You must have 10 scholarly sources. This assignment is worth 10% of your final course grade and is due on Thursday 2/23.

Stage 4 – Preliminary Research Design: Students must provide a brief summary of their research question and theoretical model. This should be no more than 1 page in length and essentially summarize what was discussed in the Preliminary Theory Draft (its purpose is primarily to remind me of what you have done before so that I can provide more meaningful comments). In a separate section, students will then discuss each variable that will be included in their analysis. This will include how the variable is measured and what the different values signify. Discussion of each independent variable must also include a theoretically informed hypothesis of how it relates to the dependent variable. This assignment is worth 10% of your final course grade and is due on Tuesday 3/28.

Stage 5 – Final Research Paper: Students will conduct and interpret statistical analysis of their hypotheses prior to drawing conclusions as to the efficacy of their theoretical argument. Whenever possible, substantive examples should be used to clarify the discussion of the statistical results. This section of the paper will be added to a thoroughly revised version of the previous drafts to produce a final product that is approximately 15 pages in length (with at least 10 scholarly sources). This assignment is worth 20% of your final course grade and is due on Thursday 4/20.

Stage 6 – Presentations: Students will do a 5-8 minute presentation on their research project before the class. This will cover the motivation for the project, a brief synopsis of the relevant literature, the argument being tested, the research design, the results, and conclusions that might be drawn. Students may use PowerPoint during their presentation but they must not read verbatim from the slides and may have no more than 5 total slides. Everyone must be prepared to present on the first day of presentations (Tuesday 4/25) and attendance is mandatory on all presentation days. I will determine the order of presentation. This assignment is worth 5% of your final course grade. If you are not ready to present on the day you are called, half of the points for the presentation assignment will be docked. If you are absent on a presentation day, you will be docked half the points for the presentation for each absence (this means that negative points are possible if multiple sessions are skipped).

Class Conduct: The classroom is a special environment in which students and faculty come together to promote learning and growth. It is essential to this learning environment that respect for the right of others seeking to learn, respect for the professionalism of the instructor, and the general goals of academic freedom are maintained. Student conduct, which disrupts the learning process, will not be tolerated and may lead to disciplinary action or removal from class per university policy. Disruptive behavior is inappropriate student behavior that a reasonable faculty member would view as interfering with the ability of instructors to teach and students to learn. It may constitute a violation of law, a violation of the student conduct code or a violation of an instructor's established rules of conduct for a particular class. Civil expression, disagreement or debate as permitted within the class by a faculty member is not disruptive behavior. Each student has a right to the freedom of thought and expression, including a right to reasoned dissent, in his or her classes. A student's right to exercise academic freedom carries with it concomitant responsibilities. These responsibilities are owed to other students, faculty members and the institution. Failure to live up to these responsibilities carries with it the possibility of sanctions, up to and including removal from a class, removal from a program and/or removal from the university. To view the full policy regarding class disruptions, go here (http://www.jmu.edu/academic-affairs/_documents/policies/aapolicy-12.pdf).

Behaviors that interfere with effective teaching and learning, such as late arrival, leaving for the bathroom, early departures without instructor permission, talking to each other during the lectures, sleeping, playing with cell-phones, etc. will not be tolerated.

Absences: Attendance is vital to success in this course and students are expected to attend all classes. If you expect to miss class for an extended period of time, you should email me, but you do not need to email me if you cannot attend a single lecture. Attendance will only directly factor into your grade at the margins: if you are close to a certain grade at the end of the course (e.g., suppose you have a high B but not quite a B+), then an excellent attendance record – together with other signs of professionalism, such as arriving to class on time, being attentive during class, etc. – will argue in favor of the B+, while a poor attendance record (and poor professionalism generally) will argue against such an adjustment.

If you fail to attend lectures during the first week of class, I reserve the right to administratively drop you from the course to make room for others who wish to enroll.

**Lecture Powerpoints will be posted on canvass, but you will need a password to access them. This password will be provided at the end of the lecture. This hopefully provides you with an incentive to attend class. DO NOT SHARE PASSWORDS!*

Make-Up Assignments: Excused absences from exams or assignments can only be obtained for two reasons: (1) Series personal or family emergencies (you must notify me of your emergency as soon as physically possible), and (2) university approved activities (as arranged in advance with me). A slip from the health center/doctor's office saying you had an appointment is not sufficient documentation of a serious illness – you must provide a note from your doctor saying you were too sick to attend class. **An unexcused absence from an exam/assignment will result in a grade of zero for that assignment.**

Religious Accommodations: All faculty are required to give reasonable and appropriate accommodations to students requesting them on grounds of religious observation. The faculty member determines what accommodations are appropriate for his/her course. Students should notify the faculty by no later than the end of the Drop-Add period the first week of the semester of potential scheduled absences and determine with the instructor if mutually acceptable alternative methods exist for completing the missed classroom time, lab or activity. Contact the [Office of Equal Opportunity](#) at (540) 568-6991 if you have additional questions.

Disability and Accessibility: James Madison University is committed to access, inclusion, and diversity. If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and, as a result need reasonable accommodations to participate in this class, complete course requirements, or benefit from the University's programs or services, contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) as soon as possible. To receive accommodations, you must be appropriately registered with ODS. The ODS works confidentially in partnership with students, faculty, and other University departments to ensure equal access through Universal Design and reasonable accommodations. The office is located in the Student Success Center, Suite 1202. You may contact them by phone at 540-568-6705 or through email at disability-svcs@jmu.edu.

Academic Integrity: If you have not done so already, please familiarize yourself with JMU's Honor Code: <http://www.jmu.edu/honorcode/code.shtml>. Cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism are serious offenses and will be dealt with according to the policy. I have zero tolerance! If you have any questions about the policy or what constitutes a violation, do not hesitate to ask me.

Canvass: Our class Canvass website will have a variety of resources to help you throughout the semester. You will find recommended readings, assigned readings that are not in the text book, and other useful information. The Canvass site also contains a discussion forum and chat room. Please use these areas to post materials you may find to be helpful to others as well as any questions you may have about the course. If you have a question, chances are that other people will as well, so please post them in the chat room so everyone can benefit from them. I check the chat room periodically and will answer any questions then. Please also scan through the chat room to see if others have already asked your question.

Syllabus

This syllabus and schedule are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances. *If you are absent from class, it's your responsibility to check on announcements made while you were absent.*

Week 1 - Introductions

Tuesday (1/10) – Introductions and Syllabus

- JRM – Chapter 1
- *Homework – Start reading periodicals to get ideas for research question*

Wednesday (1/11) – NO LAB

- *Homework – Take this day off to think about research questions*

Thursday (1/12) – Studying Politics Scientifically

- JRM – Chapter 2

Week 2 – Groundwork for Starting Research Projects

Tuesday (1/17) – Theories, Hypotheses, and Variables

- JRM – Chapter 4

Wednesday (1/18) - Introduction to SPSS, Datasets, Codebooks, and Hypotheses

- Work on Lab Exercise #1 – Codebooks and Hypotheses - due Wednesday (1/25)
 - *You will be able to finalize the Hypothesis aspect of this exercise after our next lecture*

Thursday (1/19) – Theories, Hypotheses, and Variables Part II

- JRM – Chapter 4
- Assignment Due – Submit 3 research topics/questions

Week 3 – Getting to Know Your Subject Matter

Tuesday (1/24) – Literature Review

- JRM – Chapter 3

Wednesday (1/25) – Howard Carrier – Presentation on Library Research?

- **Lab Exercise #1 Due – Codebooks and Hypotheses**
- Work on Lab Exercise #2 due Wednesday (2/1)

Thursday (1/26) – Literature Review Part II

- “Critically reading journal articles”
- “Guide to reading statistical articles”
- “What is Plagiarism”

Week 4

Tuesday (1/31) – Operationalization, Reliability and Validity

- JRM – Chapter 5

Wednesday (2/1) – Measurement

- **Lab Exercise #2 Due – Literature Review**
- Work on Lab Exercise #3 due Wednesday (2/8)

Thursday (2/2) – Levels of Measurement

- JRM – Chapter 5
- Assignment Due – Final Research Question

Week 5

Tuesday (2/7) – NO CLASS (Assessment Day)

Wednesday (2/8) – Ethics in Research

- **Lab Exercise #3 Due – Measurement**
- Work on Lab Exercise #4 due Wednesday (2/15)

Thursday (2/9) – Index and Scales

- JRM – Chapter 5

Week 6

Tuesday (2/14) – Causality

- JRM – Chapter 6

Wednesday (2/15) – Lab

- **Lab Exercise #4 Due – Ethics in Research**

Thursday (2/16) – Causality II

- JRM – Chapter 6

Week 7

Tuesday (2/21) – Sampling

- JRM – Chapter 7

Wednesday (2/22) – No Lab – Consultations with Instructor

Thursday (2/23) – Survey Research

- JRM – Chapter 10
- Assignment Due – Preliminary Theory Draft

Week 8

Tuesday (2/28) – Review and Catch-up Day

Wednesday (3/1) – Lab Catch-up Day

Thursday (3/2) – Midterm Exam

Tuesday (3/7) – SPRING BREAK

Wednesday (3/8) – SPRING BREAK

Thursday (3/9) – SPRING BREAK

Week 9 – Getting to Know Your Data

Tuesday (3/14) –

Wednesday (3/15) – Descriptive Statistics and SPSS

- Work on Lab Exercise #5 due Wednesday (3/22)

Thursday (3/16) – Descriptive Statistics

- JRM – Chapter 11

Week 10 – Hypothesis Testing

Tuesday (3/21) –

Wednesday (3/22) – Work on Research Design Project

- **Lab Exercise #5 Due – Descriptive Statistics**

Thursday (3/23) – Hypothesis Testing I

- JRM – Chapter 12

Week 11 – Bivariate Regression

Tuesday (3/28) – Work on Lab Exercise #6 due Wednesday (4/5)

Wednesday (3/29) – Work on Preliminary Research Design

- Assignment Due – Preliminary Research Design

Thursday (3/30) – Describing and Measuring Bivariate Relationships

- JRM – Chapter 13

Week 12 – Bivariate Regression

Tuesday (4/4) –

Wednesday (4/5) – Measures of Association

- **Lab Exercise #6 Due – Statistical Significance**
- Work on Lab Exercise #7 due Wednesday (4/12)

Thursday (4/6) – Comparing Means and ANOVAs

- JRM – Chapter 13

Week 13 – Bivariate Regression

Tuesday (4/11) – Bivariate Regression

- JRM – Chapter 13

Wednesday (4/12) – Controlling for other variables

- **Lab Exercise #7 Due – Measures of Association**
- Work on Lab Exercise #8 due Wednesday (4/19)

Thursday (4/13) – Multivariate Regression

- JRM – Chapter 14

Week 14 – Multivariate Analysis

Tuesday (4/18) – Multivariate Regression – Dummy Coding and Interactions

- JRM – Chapter 14

Wednesday (4/19) – Work on Papers during Lab

- **Lab Exercise #8 Due – Multivariate Regression**

Thursday (4/20) – No Class

Week 15

Tuesday (4/25) – Office Hours (1pm – 5pm)

- Final Draft Due Today

Wednesday (4/26) – No Class

Thursday (4/27) – Exam Review Session

Final Exam – Monday (5/1) from 3:30-5:30pm