

Political Science 285  
Political Science as a Social Science:  
Building Research Skills in Political Science

University of Washington  
Spring 2019

Professor Mark Alan Smith

Office: Gowen 29; Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:15-3:15; and by appointment  
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**Overview of Class:**

Most classes focus on the theories, concepts, and findings that have emerged from the research in a particular area, rather than the research process itself. Our class will reverse that emphasis. We'll get "under the hood" of research in political science to understand how to design and interpret a research study. The topics to be covered include identifying questions to investigate, developing theories, collecting data, finding reliable and valid measures, and analyzing results, along with the ethics of research. We'll also examine the tools and methods of social science research such as surveys, experiments, case studies, historical research, textual analysis, and statistical analysis. Students will emerge from the class better equipped to conduct research of their own and assess the credibility of other people's research. The class does not presume any prior knowledge of or experience with research.

**Learning Objectives:**

The course has the following goals for students:

- to learn how to think like a social scientist
- to gain experience with a variety of research methods used by political scientists
- to see how evidence and data can yield insights into political phenomena

**Required Book:**

Jeffrey Dixon, Royce Singleton, and Bruce Straits, *The Process of Social Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition

**Course Requirements:**

The grading is based on two exams, a short paper, and weekly homework assignments.

**Grading:**

First exam: 30%

Final exam: 45%

Short paper: 10%

Weekly homework assignments: 15%

**Schedule of Topics:**

**April 1** Introduction

**April 3** How can we study politics scientifically? Read: *The Process of Social Research*, chapter 1

**April 8** Theories, hypotheses, and causation. Read: *The Process of Social Research*, chapter 2

**April 10** Introduction to research design

**April 15** Conceptualization and measurement, part 1. Read: *The Process of Social Research*, chapter 5

**April 17** Conceptualization and measurement, part 2

**April 22** Sampling. Read: *The Process of Social Research*, chapter 6

**April 24** Surveys and survey research. Read: *The Process of Social Research*, chapter 8

**April 29** Field research and in-depth interviews. Read: *The Process of Social Research*, chapter 9

**May 1** First exam

**May 6** Experiments, part 1. Read: *The Process of Social Research*, chapter 7

**May 8** Experiments, part 2

**May 13** Natural experiments, comparative method, and case studies, part 1. Read: *The Process of Social Research*, chapter 13

**May 15** Natural experiments, comparative method, and case studies, part 2. Read: *The Process of Social Research*, chapter 12

**May 20** Descriptive and inferential statistics

**May 22** Statistical analysis of observational data, part 1

**May 27** no class (Memorial Day)

**May 29** Statistical analysis of observational data, part 2

**June 3** Statistical analysis of observational data, part 3

**June 5** What can go wrong in published research. Read: *The Process of Social Research*, chapter 3

**June 13** Final exam, 2:30-4:20