

S360 Political Science Research Methods  
United States Military Academy  
Department of Social Sciences  
Spring 2020

## **INTRODUCTION**

This course is an introduction to the field of political science for Political Science majors. It is also an introduction to research design and the different methodologies employed by scholars as they engage in debates within the political science community. While the course will be geared towards political science, the skills learned are far more generalizable. Political science draws upon fields such as biomedical research, economics, anthropology and nearly all forms of social science. Should you have a research question come to you that isn't political, you will be equipped to start answering that question at the conclusion of this course.

The course will cover many aspects of research design with the constant focus on the ability to read and understand political science research, as well as the ability to formulate a research proposal. As such, this is a course that poses many questions, but provides few conclusive answers.

## **COURSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

SS360 is an introduction to the *study* of political science. There will be few conclusive answers to substantive questions; you have the rest of your time as a Political Science major to figure those out for yourself. Rather than provide specific answers, we will focus on understanding the various methods of, and logic behind, political science research. You should come away from this course with an understanding of research designs and with an ability to understand and critique political science research. The overarching goal of the course is for you to become a better scholar by enhancing both your critical and creative thinking skills. Specifically, by the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Critically evaluate scholarly work based on the merits of the research design
- Understand how scholarly work contributes to the literature in a given research area and how well it advances work in that area
- Understand the various approaches to the study of political science including qualitative, quantitative, and experimental methods
- Answer a research question in a way that reflects an understanding of the lesson material
- Apply political analysis to course material and demonstrate the ability to clearly and effectively communicate ideas and to provide a critical evaluation of arguments and scholarship.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

I will evaluate your performance based on the graded events listed below. The overarching goal is to assess your understanding of course material and your ability to apply what you learn.

### **Graded Requirements:**

<b>Requirement</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Points</b>
Assignments	20	200, each assignment weighted equally
WPR 1	15	150
City Pairs Policy Memo	15	150
City Pairs Write-Up (Paper)	15	150
Class Participation	10	100
TEE	25	250
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1000</b>

*Assignments:* Assignments serve as periodic checks of your understanding of recently presented material. Many, but not all, come from the Pollock text. Others I will create on my own. Unlike other political science courses, these will have correct answers. However, these will be difficult to challenge your knowledge of the concepts. Hard copies of all assignments are due at the start of the class in the box listed below.

*WPR:* This will test your foundational knowledge of how to conduct scientific research learned during the first half of the course.

*City Pairs Policy Memo:* You will write a summary memo to a meeting for the City Pairs program. If you have no idea what that means, don't worry, that is what you will learn about in the class. Details of the assignment will be released later in the course.

*Paper:* After learning the nature of the City Pairs program and some preliminary techniques for statistical analysis, you will be asked to answer a research question. We will talk about how to form a question in class, but ultimately I will provide that question to you. Best answers will incorporate both a deep understanding of the program but also empirical evidence to support your claims. Don't worry, I'll provide you with data to work with – it will just be a lot and you'll have to consolidate that information.

*Class Participation:* Success in this course depends on critical assessment of the assigned readings as well as full participation in class discussions. Class participation will be graded cumulatively, and posted as instructor points at the end of the course.

*TEE:* The TEE is an evaluation of your understanding of all the concepts covered throughout the semester. It is worth 25 percent of your grade. The time and date of the TEE will be released during the semester.

My grading and teaching philosophy might be slightly different than previous courses you have taken. The “points” you earn on the assignment will not necessarily correspond to the letter grade you earn. Rather, the subjective interpretation of how well you did on the assignment will map to a percentage and letter grade. How I reach that conclusion is going to be an assessment of the overall performance of the class on the assignment given. To differentiate students’ performances from one another, I need to make assignments that are tough. But if I go too far and make something that is too difficult, or I didn’t teach it well so no one got it right, I will not hold that against your overall grade in the course. So, the points correct on the assignment will not directly translate to the share of final grade points earned. As such, I will assign a letter grade that maps on the scale provided below for all the assignments. This will only serve to benefit you. If you have questions about this, don’t hesitate to ask me.

Grading Scale:

	<b><u>Letter Grade</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage</u></b>	<b><u>Subjective Interpretation</u></b>
Mastery	A+ A A-	97-100 93-96.9 90-92.9	Mastery of concepts. Can apply concepts to new situations.
Excellence	B+ B B-	87-89.9 83-86.9 80-82.9	Solid understanding of concepts. Strong foundation for future work.
Proficiency	C+ C	77-79.9 73-76.9	Acceptable understanding. Questionable foundation for future work.
Marginal Proficiency	C- D	70-72.9 67-69.9	Doubtful understanding. Weak foundation for future work.
Failure	F	< 67	Definitely failed to demonstrate understanding of course material.

Late Submissions:

I will assess a 10% grade penalty each day that a cadet is late with a graded submission.

Absences:

Please notify me at least 48 hours in advance if you have a conflict that prevents you from attending class. Notify me at least 72 hours in advance if you have a conflict that prevents you from completing a graded requirement, in or out of class. I will make arrangements to complete the graded requirement at an agreed upon time.

Guest Lectures:

Guest lecturers will be announced as they are confirmed. It is imperative that you arrive on time and are prepared for the lecture. For all lectures, arrive with and use note-taking material.

### Lesson Preparation:

Participation is an essential component of this class. It will be impossible to do that if you are not prepared. Yet I fully understand that this information will be new and seem opaque. Taking a deep dive in to the readings prior to class might lead to more confusion than learning. As such, preparation for the course will come in the form of a quick read of the material prior to class. In doing so, write down questions or points of confusion that you want me to answer. I'm the value added beyond the text. The greatest value is that I am interactive and can respond to whatever you ask. Then, after the class, reread the material and ensure that what was covered in class makes sense to you. Most days the reading for the course is really minimal, so this routine is completely reasonable.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

#### **Books:**

Philip H. Pollock III and Barry C. Edwards, *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, 6<sup>th</sup> Ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2020)

Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. (Cornell University Press, 1997)

## LESSONS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Lesson #	Date	Topic	Assignment
1	8 JAN	No Class – SPSA	
2	10 JAN	No Class – SPSA	
3	15 JAN	What is social science?	<a href="http://www.sunjournal.com/study-we-orders-burgers-instead-of-salads-because-the-restaurant-music-is-too-loud/">http://www.sunjournal.com/study-we-orders-burgers-instead-of-salads-because-the-restaurant-music-is-too-loud/</a>  Pollock intro xxi-xxvi
4	17 JAN	“Theories” in social science	Read Van Evera 7-30, 43-48
5	23 JAN	Terms of the Social Scientist	Pollock Ch. 1
6	27 JAN	No Class – in DC	
7	29 JAN	Measurement/Error/Variables	Pollock Ch. 2
8	31 JAN	Reliability/Validity	Pollock Ch. 2
9	3 FEB	Hypotheses and Comparisons	<b>ASSIGNMENT 1 Due</b> Pollock Ch. 3
10	5 FEB	Displaying data	Pollock Ch. 3
11	7 FEB	Experimental Design	Pollock Ch. 4
12	11 FEB	Experimental Design/Types of relationships	<b>ASSIGNMENT 2 Due</b> Pollock Ch. 4
13	13 FEB	Types of relationships/WPR review	Pollock Ch. 4
14	18 FEB	<b>WPR</b>	
15	20 FEB	Intro to Formal Models	Monty Hall Game, Price is Right examples
16	24 FEB	Formal Models/Spatial Politics	Read Krehbiel (online)
17	28 FEB	Pivotal Politics	Read Krehbiel, (online)
18	2 MAR	Ethics/Notable Errors	Polling, Vaccinations (handout)
19	4 MAR	Ethics/Notable Errors	Milgram, Tuskegee, IRBs (handout) <b>ASSIGNMENT 3 Due</b>
20	6 MAR	No Class	
21	16 MAR	No Class	
22	20 MAR	Regroup Session	

23	23 MAR	Qualitative Research/City Pairs Program Intro	Van Evera Ch. 2 Visit GSA website for description of the City Pairs program
24	25 MAR	Qualitative Research	Johnson et al. Ch. 7 (online)
25	27 MAR	Qualitative Research	Johnson et al. Ch. 8 (online)
26	31 MAR	How to make comparisons	Pollock Ch. 5
27	2 APR	Cross tabulations, descriptive statistics, sampling, standard errors	Pollock Ch. 5
28	6 APR	Statistical Significance/inference	<b>Policy Memo Due</b> Pollock Ch. 6
29	9 APR	No Class	
30	13 APR	Statistical Significance/inference  Regression	Pollock Ch. 6-7
31	15 APR	Regression	Pollock Ch. 7
32	17 APR	Regression	Pollock Ch. 8
33	20 APR	Regression	Pollock Ch. 8
34	23 APR	Regression	Pollock Ch. 8 – 9
35	27 APR	How to Write Research Papers  Distribute City Pairs Data/Write Up	Pollock Ch. 10  <b>Assignment 4 Due</b>
36	29 APR	No Class	
37	1 MAY	No Class	
38	4 MAY	No Class	
39	6 MAY	No Class	
40	8 MAY	TEE Review/AAR	<b>Write-up Due NLT 1600 TODAY</b>