

# POLS 390: Political Research

MWF 12:00–12:50 p.m.

407 Ford Hall

**Professor:** Adam Enders

**Office:** 105 Ford Hall

**Office Hours:** Monday 1:30–3:00 p.m. (or by appointment)

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## Course Description

In this course students will learn what science is – particularly *political* science – and how to do it. The course will begin with an exploration of the psychological biases that cause errors in scientific reasoning and how the scientific method is designed to combat the effects of these biases. Next, we will consider the individual elements of the scientific process and how they combine to form a tool for understanding the world and reasoning to the truth. Along the way we will consider different types of scientific methodologies – such as survey research, experiments, and content analysis – and how and when they are used. Finally, students will learn the basics of statistical inference and data analysis. These tools will make students better consumers of information, enable them to evaluate evidence and empirical claims made by anyone from conspiracy theorists to sports statisticians, and empower them to produce reliable knowledge on their own.

## Course Materials

We will primarily be using the two books listed below. These are the only texts that students are required to have regular access to.

*Political Science Research Methods (8<sup>th</sup> edition)*. Johnson, Janet Buttolph and H.T. Reynolds and Jason D. Mycoff. 2015. CQ Press. ISBN: 1506307825.

*Don't Believe Everything You Think: The 6 Basic Mistakes We Make in Thinking*. Kida, Thomas. 2006. Prometheus Books. ISBN: 1591024080.

Note that some weeks the textbook information will be supplemented by additional journal articles or book chapters. All of this supplementary is available via the course Blackboard page.

## Course Requirements

**Participation:** Since the class is a relatively small one, regular participation will be important in ensuring lively and productive meetings. Students are expected to regularly contribute to class discussions, in-class simulations and exercises, and attend class. While attendance will not be formally recorded, systematic absences and lack of participation will be obvious in such a small class, and those absences will be reflected in the participation component of the student's final grade.

**Assignments and Quizzes:** Quizzes designed to test students' comprehension of the material assigned for that class meeting will occasionally be administered at the very beginning of class. Quizzes will not be announced prior to class, and absent students or those arriving to class late will not be allowed to make them up. Students will also complete assignments related to the components of research papers, survey design and administration, and statistics. More details about the nature and due dates of these assignments will be provided after the course has begun.

**Midterm Exam:** The midterm exam will consist of both multiple choice and short answer/essay questions. The final exam is cumulative. That is, it will cover material from the entire semester, not just the second half of the course.

**Final Report:** Students will use the skills they have learned throughout the course, particularly with respect to statistics and data analysis, to test a theory about public opinion. More details will be revealed as the course progresses.

## Grades

### Distribution

Participation	10%
Assignments & Quizzes	40%
Midterm Exam	25%
Final Report	25%

### Scale

94-100 = A	75-78 = C+
90-93 = A-	71-74 = C
86-89 = B+	68-70 = C-
82-85 = B	60-67 = D
79-81 = B-	60 and below = F

# Class Schedule

All of the following reading assignments are to be completed *before* attending class on the associated date/week. The material not included in the main text (journal articles and book chapters) are available for download on the course Blackboard page.

## Week 1: Intro and Scientific Reasoning

Kida Chapters 1-3

(Skim) JRM Chapter 1

## Week 2: Psychological Biases

**No class on Friday, September 1**

Kida Chapters 5, 6 & 8

## Week 3: The Scientific Process

**No class on Monday, September 4**

JRM Chapters 2-3

## Week 4: Building Blocks

JRM Chapter 4

## Week 5: Measurement

JRM Chapter 5

Jacoby, William. 1999. "Levels of Measurement and Political Research: An Optimistic View," *American Journal of Political Science* (43): 271-301. **Only read 271-280**

## Week 6: Experiments and Causal Inference

JRM Chapter 6

## Week 7: Sampling

JRM Chapter 7

The 'Cellphone Challenge'

**Midterm Exam: Friday, October 6**

**Week 8: Observation and Ethics**

No class on Monday, October 9

JRM Chapter 8

Watch: The Stanford Prison Experiment

**Week 9: Content Analysis & Survey Research**

JRM Chapters 9 and 10

**Week 10: More Survey & Data**

JRM Chapter 11

**Week 11: Descriptive Statistics**

No class on Friday, November 3

**Week 12: Statistical Inference**

JRM Chapter 12

*Meet in Rm. 102 Ekstrom Library on Monday, November 6*

**Week 13: Bivariate Analysis**

JRM Chapter 13

*Meet in Rm. 102 Ekstrom Library on Friday, November 17*

**Week 14: Bivariate Analysis, cont'd**

No class on Wednesday (11/22) or Friday (11/24)

*Meet in Rm. 102 Ekstrom Library on Monday, November 20*

**Week 15: Multivariate Analysis**

JRM Chapter 14

*Meet in Rm. 102 Ekstrom Library on Wednesday, November 29*

*Meet in Rm. 102 Ekstrom Library on Friday, December 1*

**Week 16: Final Exam Review**

Final exam review

## FINAL EXAM

Friday, December 8 from 11:30 a.m.–2:00 p.m.

## Course Policies

**Title IX/Clery Act Notification:** Sexual misconduct (including sexual harassment, sexual assault, and any other nonconsensual behavior of a sexual nature) and sex discrimination violate University policies. Students experiencing such behavior may obtain **confidential** support from the PEACC Program (852-2663), Counseling Center (852-6585), and Campus Health Services (852-6479). To report sexual misconduct or sex discrimination, contact the Dean of Students (852-5787) or University of Louisville Police (852-6111).

Disclosure to **University faculty or instructors** of sexual misconduct, domestic violence, dating violence, or sex discrimination occurring on campus, in a University-sponsored program, or involving a campus visitor or University student or employee (whether current or former) is **not confidential** under Title IX. Faculty and instructors must forward such reports, including names and circumstances, to the University's Title IX officer.

For more information, see the **Sexual Misconduct Resource Guide**.

**Academic Integrity:** Academic dishonesty is prohibited at the University of Louisville. It is a serious offense because it diminishes the quality of scholarship, makes accurate evaluation of student progress impossible, and defrauds those in society who must ultimately depend upon the knowledge and integrity of the institution and its students and faculty. For more information, see the **Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities**.

**Disabilities Accommodation:** The University of Louisville is committed to providing access to programs and services for qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student with a disability and require accommodation to participate and complete requirements for this class, notify me immediately and contact the Disability Resource Center (Stevenson Hall, 502-852-6938) for verification of eligibility and determination of specific accommodations. For more information, visit the **Disability Resource Center**.

**Religious Observation Policy:** Federal law and university policy prohibit discrimination on the basis of religious belief. It is the policy of the University of Louisville to accommodate students, faculty, and staff who observe religious work-restricted holy days. Students who need to alter a quiz/exam deadline due to religious observations must, however, bring the matter to the attention of the instructor during the first week of the semester.

**Final Caveat:** While this course has been devised carefully, the instructor does reserve the right to amend the assignments or schedule as presented above.