

# GOVT 300: Political Research Skills

New Mexico State University  
Department of Government

Spring 2012 Course Syllabus

Time: M W F 10:30 - 11:20 (Breland 175)

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Office Hours: M 1:30 - 3:00; R 4:00 - 5:30,  
and by appointment

TA: Brenda Alvarado balvarad@nmsu.edu

TA Office Hours: M W 11:30-1:30

## Course Description

This course provides an introduction to the methods of empirical research used within political science. Over the past few decades, the discipline of political science has moved more towards the direction of using quantitative research methods. Therefore, the course is largely divided into two sections. The first section focuses on how political scientists design their studies. We will cover topics like formulating theories and hypotheses, measuring concepts, experimentation and observation, and causal inference. The second section of the course focuses on the tools used to conduct research. Topics covered include content analysis, surveys, interviews, sampling, basic statistics, and regression. Throughout these sections, students will be introduced to actual studies in political science and how political scientists engaged in their research. Towards the end of the course, students will use SPSS to understand how to test quantitative research.

## Learning Objectives

- 1.) Students will understand the main components of research design to answer political questions, including an understanding of theory & hypothesis construction and measurement of concepts.
- 2.) Students will learn different research designs employed by political scientists and their application in political research by reading and discussing academic articles.
- 3.) Students will learn the basic qualitative and quantitative tests of hypotheses, with a focus on quantitative tests.
- 4.) Students will learn how to interpret statistical output.
- 5.) Students will develop greater critical thinking and analytical skills needed to evaluate political and research claims.
- 6.) Students will understand current issues in political research and the field of political science.

## Required Texts

Shively, W. Phillips. *The Craft of Political Research*. 7th ed. Pearson Prentice Hall.

Ethridge, Marcus E., ed. *The Political Research Experience: Readings and Analysis*. 3rd ed. M.E. Sharpe.

All readings, exams, and assignments will be based upon the indicated editions of these texts. There is no guarantee that older editions will contain the same information.

## Course Requirements

1. Homework (250 pts.): Homework assignments will be given periodically throughout the semester (5 assignments X 50 pts. per assignment). Assignments will be composed of short answer questions and calculations (where applicable). Homework will be available on Blackboard at least 7 days prior to the due date.

2. Exams (400 pts.): Four exams will be given throughout the semester. Each exam is worth 100 points (4 exams X 100 pts. per exam). Exams will be composed of multiple choice (bring scantron) and short answer questions. While the exams are not inherently cumulative, much of the material throughout the semester builds upon previous material.

3. Quizzes (50 pts.): To encourage reading and to enable you to know your comprehension of the material, quizzes will be given randomly throughout the semester. Twelve quizzes worth 5 pts. each will be administered. I will drop your two lowest scores. Quizzes will be multiple choice and/or short answer questions.

4. Team Presentation (100 pts.): To develop your oral presentation skills, you will give a team (2-3 students) presentation of an academic journal article of your choice on the day of the final. Presentations should be no more than 8 minutes. You should cover the theory, hypotheses tested, methods, results, and offer suggestions for improvement.

## Grade Components

Homework	250
Exams	400
Quizzes	50
Presentation	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>800</b>

## Grading Scale

A+	= 97% - 100%	(776-800)
A	= 93% - 96.99%	(744-775)
A-	= 90% - 92.99%	(720-743)
B+	= 87% - 89.99%	(696-719)

B	= 83% - 86.99%	(664-695)
B-	= 80% - 82.99%	(640-663)
C+	= 77% - 79.99%	(616-639)
C	= 73% - 76.99%	(584-615)
C-	= 70% - 72.99%	(560-583)
D+	= 67% - 69.99%	(536-559)
D	= 63% - 66.99%	(504-535)
D-	= 60% - 62.99%	(480-503)
F	= <60%	(<480)

Students taking the course with the S/U option must earn a C- to earn a Satisfactory grade.

## **Course Expectations & Policies**

### **Courtesy**

Comments and language in class should be professional and courteous. Cell phones are annoying and distracting. Please put them away or have them on vibrate for emergencies. Please arrive on time and refrain from leaving class early. These actions are distracting to the instructor and students.

### **Assignment Submissions**

All assignments and other course material must be turned in to me in hard-copy form or through Blackboard. I no longer accept emailed assignments and strongly prefer you to turn them in to me during class. If you are ill or cannot make the class on the date an assignment is due, you must make arrangements with a classmate to have the hard-copy delivered to me. I make no guarantees that assignments submitted to my office mailbox or assignments slid under my door are actually delivered to me. It is your responsibility to ensure that I receive your materials. Assignments turned in through Blackboard will not be given extensions or forgiveness for tardiness in the event of internet, Blackboard, and/or power outages. I strongly urge you to turn in the assignments in hard-copy form.

### **Late Work Policy & Make-Up Exams and Assignments**

Since you have ample notice of the due dates of the assignments and their requirements, no extensions will be given for assignments, regardless of excuse. Materials turned in after the indicated due date and time will automatically receive a 20% deduction. Late work will receive an additional 20% deduction for each additional 24 hours that pass in which the assignment is not turned in. I make no guarantees that late work submitted to my office mailbox or assignments slid under my door are actually delivered to me. It is your responsibility to ensure that I receive your materials.

Make-up exams will only be given for the most extenuating circumstances (severe illness, death in immediate family, official university business, jury duty, etc.). I must be informed within 24 hours of the exam date/time for you to be allowed to have a make-up exam. You must provide documentation of the circumstance, and you will not be allowed to take the make-up exam until you have provided documentation that clearly indicates that you were unable to be in class on the exam's date and time.

The date and time of the final exam has been set in accordance with the guidelines stipulated by the university. You should make your travel plans so that they do not conflict with your final exam schedule for your courses. Students will not be allowed to take the exam early or late because they have booked travel plans.

No make-up quizzes will be given.

### **Extra Credit**

Extra credit will be given based upon attendance. You must be in class when attendance is taken, no exceptions. If you leave class early, you will be counted as absent. Extra credit will be awarded based upon classes missed:

0-1 = 25 pts.

2 = 20 pts.

3 = 15 pts.

4 = 10 pts.

5 = 5 pts.

### **Incompletes**

Incomplete grades will not be given except for the most extenuating circumstances. I reserve the right to determine what constitutes an extenuating circumstance in determining whether or not to grant an Incomplete grade.

### **Student Privacy**

Per regulations outlined in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), I will not discuss your grades, class performance, or any issues dealing with your personal circumstances as they relate to this course with another party that cannot legally access your your collegiate records or legally obtain such information. I will not field phone calls from your parents concerning your performance or circumstances related to this course. Your performance may be discussed with other members of the faculty as it pertains to your progress in the program, consideration for awards/funding, and as it is relevant to other university and department-related considerations.

### **Academic Misconduct**

These excerpts are taken from the NMSU Student Handbook:

*Any student found guilty of academic misconduct shall be subject to disciplinary action. Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, the following actions:*

*1. Cheating or knowingly assisting another student in committing an act of cheating or other forms of academic dishonesty.*

*2. Plagiarism is using another person's work without acknowledgment, making it appear to be one's own. Any ideas, words, pictures, or other source must be acknowledged in a citation that gives credit to the source. This is true no matter where the material comes from, including the internet, other student's work, unpublished materials, or oral sources. Intentional and unintentional instances of plagiarism are considered instances of academic misconduct. It is the responsibility of the student submitting the work in question to know, understand, and comply with this policy. If no citation is given, then borrowing any of the following would be an example of plagiarism: a) An idea or opinion, even when put into one's own words (paraphrase); b) A few well-said words, if these are a unique insight; c) Many words, even if one changes most of them; d) Materials assembled by others, for instance quotes or a bibliography; e) An argument; f) A pattern of idea; g) Graphs,*

*pictures, or other illustrations; h) Facts; i) All or part of an existing paper or other resource.*

*This list is not meant to include all possible examples of plagiarism. See the University Library's web page on plagiarism for further examples. It is your responsibility as a student to understand the university's guidelines concerning plagiarism. I reserve the right to use plagiarism-detection software with any of your submitted work..*

3. Unauthorized possession of examinations, reserve library materials, laboratory materials, or other course-related materials.

4. Unauthorized changing of grades on an examination, in an instructor's grade book, or on a grade report; or unauthorized access to academic computer records.

5. Nondisclosure or misrepresentation in filling out applications or other University records in, or for, academic departments or colleges.

The current Student Code of Conduct definition of plagiarism can be found at:  
<http://www.nmsu.edu/vpsa/SCOC/misconduct.html>

### **Student Disability Services**

If you have, or believe you have a disability, you may contact the Student Accessibility Services (SAS) Office located in Corbett Center, Room 244, 575-646-6840, or email [sas@nmsu.edu](mailto:sas@nmsu.edu). Appropriate accommodations may then be provided for you. All medical information will be treated confidentially. If you have a condition which may affect your ability to exit safely from the premises in an emergency during class, you are encouraged to discuss this in confidence with the instructor and/or the Director of University Disability Services/ADA Coordinator, Diana Quintana, at the SAS Office. Questions regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the American with Disabilities Amendment Act and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 should be directed to the SAS Office.

Questions regarding NMSU's Non-discrimination Policy and discrimination complaints should be referred to Gerard Nevarez, Office of Institutional Equity, 575-646-3635

### **Syllabus Change Policy**

The contents of this course syllabus are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances.

## Course Schedule

**Jan. 20: Introduction to Course**

**Jan. 23: Introduction: Is Political Science a Science?**

-Ethridge: Ch. 1. pp. 3-11.

**Jan. 25: Introduction: Political Science as a Science**

-Shively: Ch. 1. pp. 1-8; 10.

**Jan. 27: Theory Building**

-Shively: Ch. 2. pp. 13-22.

**Jan. 30: Theory Building**

-Shively: Ch. 2. pp. 23-31.

**Feb. 1: Theory Building**

-No Reading.

**Feb. 3: Concepts and Measurement: Accuracy  
Homework 1 Due**

-Shively: Ch. 4. pp. 41-55.

**Feb. 6: Concepts and Measurement: Precision**

-Shively: Ch. 5: pp. 57-64.

**Feb. 8: Concepts and Measurement: Precision & Examples**

-Shively: Ch. 5: pp. 64-73.

**Feb. 10: Aggregate Level Measurement**

-Ethridge: Ch. 3: 58-73; 76-79.

**Feb. 13: Individual Level Measurement**

-Ethridge: Ch. 4. pp. 99-115; 119-120.

**Feb. 15: Measurement Review**

**Homework 2 Due**

-Ethridge: Ch. 4. pp. 120-135; 150-152.

**Feb. 17: Catch-Up**

**Feb. 20: Exam 1**

**Feb 22: Causality**

-Shively: Ch. 6. pp. 74-79.

**Feb. 24: Sampling**

-Shively: Ch. 7. pp. 97-110.

**Feb. 27: Experiments**

-Shively: Ch. 6. pp. 79-84.

-Ethridge: Ch. 2. pp. 20-28.

**Feb. 29: Experiments**

-Ethridge: Ch. 2. pp. 28-36; 39-41.

**Mar. 2: Experiments**

-Ethridge: Ch. 2. pp. 41-52; 56-57.

**Mar. 5: Experiments**

-No Readings

**Mar. 7: Surveys**

-Ethridge: Ch. 5. pp. 153-160.

**Mar. 9: Surveys**

**Homework 3 Due**

-Ethridge: Ch. 5. pp. 160-176; 185-186.

**Mar. 12: Surveys**

-Ethridge: Ch. 5. pp. 186-198; 204.

**Mar. 14: Review**

**Mar. 16: Exam 2**

**Mar. 19-23: Spring Break - No Class**

**Mar. 26: Central Tendency & Dispersion**

-Ethridge: Ch. 10. pp. 285-287.

**Mar. 28: Central Tendency & Dispersion**

-Ethridge: Ch. 10. pp. 287-305.

**Mar. 30: Sampling & Inference**

-Ethridge: Ch. 8. pp. 244-260; 262-264.

**Apr. 2: Basic Statistics: Hypothesis Testing**

-Shively: Ch. 10. pp. 148-158.

**Apr. 4: Basic Statistics: Hypothesis Testing**

-No Reading.

**Apr. 6: No Class**

**Apr. 9: Basic Statistics: Hypothesis Testing**

-Ethridge: Ch. 11. pp. 306-317; 319-320.

**Apr. 11: Hypothesis Testing with SPSS**

**Homework 4 Due**

-No Reading.

**Apr. 13: Conducting Interviews**

-No Reading.

**Apr. 16: Review**

-No Reading.

**Apr. 18: Exam 3**

**Apr. 20: Content Analysis**

-Ethridge: Ch. 7. pp. 223-238; 242-243.

Urban Affairs Conference - TA class.



**Apr. 23: Regression**

- Shively: Ch. 8. pp. 111-118.
- Ethridge: Ch. 12. pp. 321-325.

**Apr. 25: Regression**

- Shively: Ch. 8. pp. 122-124; 127-131.

**Apr. 27: Regression with SPSS**

- Shively: Ch. 9. pp. 136-138.

**Apr. 30: Regression with SPSS**

**Homework 5 Due**

- Ethridge: Ch. 12. pp. 326-332; 335-337.

**May 2: Catch-Up & Review**

**May 4: Exam 4**

**May 7: Presentations**

**Important Dates**

- Feb. 3: Homework 1 Due; Last day to Drop
- Feb. 15: Homework 2 Due
- Feb. 20: Exam 1
- Mar. 9: Homework 3 Due
- Mar. 12: Last day to Drop with a W
- Mar. 16: Exam 2
- Apr. 11: Homework 4 Due
- Apr. 18: Exam 3
- Apr. 30: Homework 5 Due
- May 4: Exam 4
- May 7: Presentations