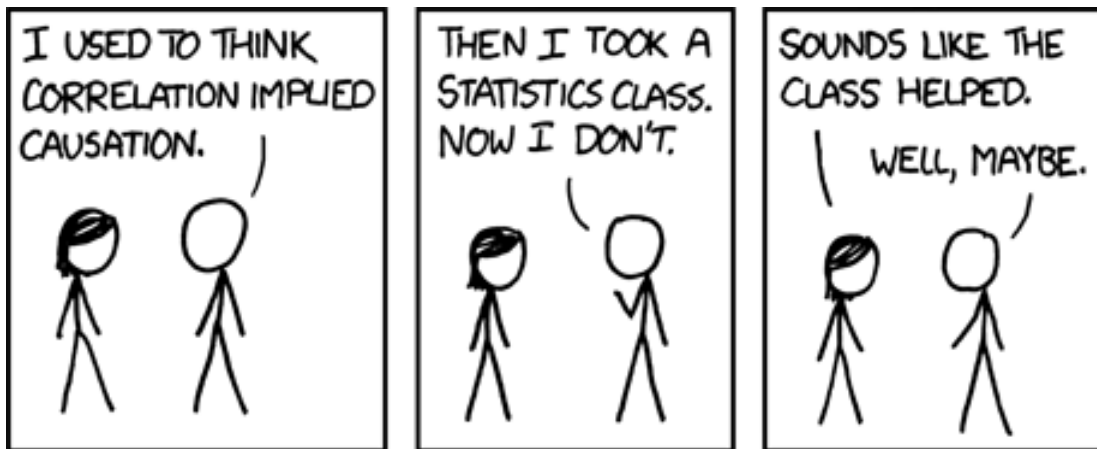


Independent Field Research in Political Science  
Political Science 4931, Section 101  
Fall 2011, T 4:00-6:30  
Email: [amber.wichowsky@marquette.edu](mailto:amber.wichowsky@marquette.edu)

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Office: 468 WWP  
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Office Hours: MW 2-4, TTh 9:00-10:00



<http://xkcd.com/552/>

*Doubt is the beginning, not the end, of wisdom.*  
~ Chinese proverb

*Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.*  
~ Zora Neale Hurston

## Course objectives

The primary objective of this course is for students to design an original research project based on field experience, such as an internship. This seminar explores the research strategies and methodological tools social scientists use to frame and answer empirical questions. Unlike other political science courses, the main focus will be on acquiring a particular set of analytical skills rather than on mastering substantive subject matter.

My hope is that when you finish this seminar, you will have developed mastery on three parallel tracks. Track 1 focuses on how to design a study that sheds new light onto a particular question or public policy problem. Track 2 focuses on the basic methodological approaches social scientists employ to make causal claims. Track 3 focuses on sharpening your analytic and writing skills such that you are better able to communicate your research findings to a broad audience.

In this course you will learn how to frame proper research questions and subsequent hypotheses, design an appropriate research plan, and collect and analyze data. This course does not exclusively focus on quantitative or qualitative approaches, but rather on being able to critique causal claims—an intellectual skill that engages a fundamentally philosophical question: “How do we know what we know?” It is also a skill that is increasingly applicable across a host of fields, including law, public policy, nonprofit management and marketing. My aim is to make you a better reader and critic of social science research. However, this course is also designed to make you a creative producer of new insights. When you finish this subject successfully, you will be able to design a research study, be able to communicate and evaluate empirical arguments, and have an employable skill.

## Course Materials

Pollack, Philip H., III. *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition.

## Course Policies

### *The Basics*

1. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Papers should be your own and you must cite sources appropriately. I expect familiarity with Marquette's policies on academic honesty. Plagiarism on any of the written assignments will result in an 'F' in the **course** (not just the assignment).
2. With the exception of a catastrophic event, I do not accept late work. I will deduct a half letter grade for each day that an assignment is late.
3. Proper email etiquette. A professional email to a professor should read "Hi Dr/Professor \_\_\_\_\_" and state one's business clearly and without text-speak. I will do my best to send you a prompt response.

### *Disability Accommodations*

Students requiring disability accommodations should register with the relevant campus office. I will be happy to accommodate in compliance with the ADA and Marquette University policy.

## Assignments

Grades will be determined based on small assignments, in-class quizzes, a written research design, and class attendance/participation.

- Small Assignments: There are 3 assignments due throughout the semester (specific due dates listed below). They are worth 10% each. (30%)
- Quizzes: there will be short, unannounced quizzes in class. You may use your notes, but not your texts. If you've done the readings in advance, you should have no trouble doing well on these quizzes. (10%)
- Research proposal: A 2-3 page proposal is due October 11<sup>th</sup>. Your proposal should identify the research question you want to study and why it is worth studying. Then start digging into the literature on your topic. What have others said about your topic? What theories address it? Are the findings in previous studies consistent or is there disagreement? Your proposal should have a logical flow: what is the question, why is it important, what do we know, what don't we know. At this stage I do not expect you to know the particulars of your research design. The key here is that you have identified a suitable research question and have a path to move forward. (10%)
- Research Design: The primary assignment of the course is a research design, which includes a research question, theory and literature review, hypotheses, variable operationalization, and what your expected findings would be if you were to actually conduct the research. You will present your research design at our last class meeting. Each presenter will be assigned a discussant, who will be responsible for constructively critiquing the research design. Papers should be made available to the discussant ahead of time. Your role as a discussant will count towards your participation grade. Presenters may wish to incorporate the suggestions of the discussant and the rest of the audience into their final research design. (30%)

- Class attendance/participation: The success of this course depends upon your regular contributions to classroom discussion. Attendance is mandatory and I expect you to come ready to discuss the readings. Unexcused absences will result in a reduction of five percentage points per absence from your participation grade (20%)

### Grading scale

94-100 A  
 88-93 AB  
 82-87 B  
 77-81 BC  
 72-76 C  
 66-71 CD  
 62-65 D  
 62 and below F

### Class Meetings

8/30: Introduction and course overview

*Questions for Discussion:*

1. What do you expect to get out of this course?
2. How might you connect your internship experience to this class?

9/6: The Scientific Study of Politics

Pollack, Chapter 3, pp. 48-76.

Janet Buttolph Johnson and H.T. Reynolds (eds). 2008. *Political Science Research Methods*. Washington, DC: CQ Press, pp. 27-49.

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb and Joseph M. Williams. 2008. *The Craft of Research* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 35-45.

*Questions for Discussion:*

1. What makes knowledge “scientific?”
2. How do we develop a good political science question?
3. What is a research design? What are its purposes?
4. What distinguishes an acceptable explanation from an unacceptable explanation?

9/13: The Search for Explanations

Pollack, Chapter 4

Odell, Kathleen. 2010. “Measuring the Impact of Microfinance.” Grameen Foundation Publication Series.

Janet Buttolph Johnson and H.T. Reynolds (eds). 2008. *Political Science Research Methods*. Washington, DC: CQ Press, pp. 182-207.

*Questions for Discussion:*

1. How many different research designs did you count in studies discussed in Odell? How do they differ? What are they all trying to explain? What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the different research designs?
2. What are rival explanations? Why is it important to take them into account?
3. What is a literature review? What tips would you give if someone asked you how to do one?

9/20: Research design I: Experimental Logic and Causal Inference

Massachusetts General Hospital. 2011. "Mindfulness meditation training changes brain structure in 8 weeks." Press Release. Available at:

<http://www.massgeneral.org/about/pressrelease.aspx?id=1329#>

Gerber, Alan S. and Donald P. Green. 2000. "The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment." *American Political Science Review* 94(3): 653-663. [JSTOR]

DUE: Theory Assignment

*Questions for Discussion:*

1. Why do Gerber and Green argue that they need to conduct an experiment to answer their research question? What are the limits to nonexperimental studies of voter mobilization?
2. What is the logic of control?
3. What do we mean by "external validity" and "internal validity"?
4. What are the steps to conducting an experiment?

9/27: Research design II: Non-Experimental Large-N Designs

James Fowler. 2008. "The Colbert Bump in Campaign Donations: More Truthful than Truthy," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41: 533-539. [JSTOR]

Bartels, Larry. 2005. "Homer Gets a Tax Cut: Inequality and Public Policy in the American Mind." *Perspectives on Politics* 3:1, 15-31. [JSTOR]

Lupia et al. 2007. "Were Bush Tax Cut Supporters 'Simply Ignorant?' A Second Look at Conservatives and Liberals in 'Homer Gets a Tax Cut.'" [JSTOR]

\*NOTE: Be sure to read this one AFTER reading Bartels (2005)

Questions of Discussion?

1. What are selection effects? How did Fowler construct his sample to avoid this problem?
2. What evidence does Bartels give for his hypothesis that public opinion on the Bush tax cuts was unconnected to voters' economic self-interest?
3. On what grounds do Lupia et al. critique Bartels?

10/4: Research design III: Small-N Designs, Case Selection and Inference

Gerring, John 2004. "What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?" *American Political Science Review* 98 (2): 341-354. [JSTOR]

Barbara Geddes. 1991. "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics," *Political Analysis* 2: 131-150. [JSTOR]

Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen. 1989. "China and India" in *Hunger and Public Action*, Oxford University Press, pp. 204-225.

Gamson, William. 1996. "Media Discourse as a Framing Resource." In Ann N. Crigler (ed). *The Psychology of Political Communication*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 111-132.

*Questions for Discussion:*

1. What is case-study research?
2. What were Dreze and Sen trying to explain? What evidence does their comparative case study provide?
3. What was Gamson trying to explain? What evidence does he present?

10/11: Conceptualization and Measurement

Pollack, Chapters 1 and 2

Gladwell, Malcolm. 2004. "Personality Plus." *The New Yorker*. [September 20].

Gladwell, Malcolm. 2011. "The Order of Things." *The New Yorker* [February 14].

Questions for discussion:

1. What is measurement error?
2. What do we mean by "measurement validity" and "measurement reliability?"
3. What measurement problems are raised in the personality tests discussed in Gladwell's article?
4. What sorts of problems are raised in Gladwell's article on college rankings?

DUE: Research proposal

10/18: No class – Fall Break

10/25: Making Controlled Comparisons

Pollack, Chapter 5

Cooper, Christopher A. and Marc Schwerdt. 2001. "Depictions of Public Service in Children's Literature: Revisiting an Understudied Aspect of Political Socialization." *Social Science Quarterly* 82 (3): 616-632.

*Questions for Discussion:*

1. What is a "spurious relationship?"
2. What was Cooper and Schwerdt's research question? What data did they use? What was their sample? How did they test their hypotheses?

11/1: Foundations of Statistical Inference

Pollack, Chapter 6

Squire, Peverill. 1988. "Why the 1936 *Literary Digest* Poll Failed." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 52: 125-133.

Gawande, Atul. 2004. "The Bell Curve." *The New Yorker* (Dec. 6).

*Questions for Discussion:*

1. What were the problems with the 1936 poll?
2. What is a sample?
3. How do we calculate the mean and standard deviation of a sample?
4. How can we use the normal curve to make inferences about the information in a sample?

11/8: Tests of Significance and Measures of Association

Pollack, Chapter 7

Bennett, Stephen Earl, and David Resnick. 1990. "The Implications of Nonvoting for Democracy in the United States." *American Journal of Political Science* 34 (3): 771-802.

*Questions for Discussion:*

1. How can we gauge the strength of an empirical relationship?
2. What relationships did Bennett and Resnick test in their article? How can we interpret their results?

DUE: Descriptive Statistics Assignment

11/15: Correlation and Linear Regression

Pollack, Chapter 8

Caiazza, Amy 2002 "[Does Women's Representation in Elected Office Lead to Women-Friendly Policy?](#)" Washington: Institute for Women's Policy Research, IWPR Publication #I910.

*Questions for Discussion:*

1. What is "correlation?"
2. How did Caiazza assess the relationship between women-friendly policy and women's representation in elected office? What did she find?

11/22: Public Opinion Polls

Asher, Herbert. 2004. "Wording and Context of Questions," "Interviewing and Data Collection Procedures," and "the Media and the Polls" In *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press. Pp. 63-89, 117-161.

*Questions for Discussion:*

1. What are some of the pitfalls of public opinion polling? What kinds of mistakes can skew poll results?
2. Do you think journalists do an OK job reporting poll results? Why or why not?

DUE: Regression Assignment

11/29: Participant Observation and Focus Groups

Pinderhughes, Howard. 1993. "The Anatomy of Racially Motivated Violence in New York City: A Case Study of Youth in Southern Brooklyn". *Social Forces* 40: 478-92.

Richard F. Fenno, Jr. 1986. "Observation, Context, and Sequence in the Study of Politics," *American Political Science Review* 80: 3-15.

Glaser, James M. 1996. "The Challenge of Campaign-Watching: Seven Lessons of Participant Observation Research," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 29(3): 533-537.

*Questions for Discussion:*

1. Why did Pinderhughes choose to conduct focus groups? How did they give him leverage on his research question?
2. Pinderhughes concludes that "the process of racial conflict can only be understood by examining how a number of factors *combine* to produce ethnic and racial conflict." How does this research logic differ from the "logic of control" we discussed earlier in the semester?
3. What is participant observation? How can it guide and inform theories of politics?
4. What does Fenno mean by: "the observation of politicians brings with it a sharpened sensitivity to sequence as a variable in political analysis"?
5. What are Glaser's seven lessons of participant-observation research?

12/6: Student research design presentations  
 \*\*\*Class will go until 7:00, Pizza will be provided\*\*\*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Assignment</b>
8/30	Introduction	
9/6	Framing Research Questions and Building Theories	
9/13	The Search for Causal Explanations	
9/20	Research design I: Experimental Logic and Causal Inference	Theory Assignment
9/27	Research design II: Non-Experimental Large-N Designs	
10/4	Research design III: Small-N Designs, Case Selection and Inference	
10/11	Conceptualization and Measurement	Research Proposal
10/16	No Class – Fall Break	
10/25	Sampling and Inference	
11/1	Foundations of Statistical Inference	
11/8	Tests of Significance and Measures of Association	Descriptive Statistics Assignment
11/15	Correlation and Linear Regression	
11/22	Public Opinion Polls	Regression Assignment
11/29	Participant and Ethnographic Observation	
12/6	Student research design presentations	
12/13		Final Research Design Due, no later than 5:30 pm.