POLS 568
Research Problems in International Relations
Fall 2008

Department of Political Science
Southern Illinois University

1 Instructor Information

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2 Course Description

This course is intended to provide students with the skills necessary to design and execute research projects on non-state, sub-national, national, and supra-national actors and processes that have transnational or world systemic consequence. We investigate different research approaches to International Relations and Comparative Politics and discuss the intersection of these two sub-disciplines of Political Science. The first portion of the course relates to identifying good research questions, using concepts in social sciences, and ultimately developing theories to explain social phenomena. We then explore different ways to generate and test hypotheses including qualitative methods, quantitative methods, formal models, simulation or agent-based models, and mixed methods. Each week, we discuss a set of readings and also discuss a portion of the research process with an eye towards developing an original research project. In the final two weeks of the course, we will have mock panels and simulate an academic conference experience. At these panels, students will present their research findings, receive feedback from a discussant, and field questions from the audience.

3 Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, I expect that you will be able to understand the strengths of weaknesses of the dominant research methodologies in International Relations. You should be familiar with some of the important literature that lies at the intersection of International Relations and Comparative Politics. Most importantly, you will develop a research project that will serve as a basis for a publishable article or prospectus.

4 Course Format

Each week we discuss a series of readings. You are responsible for each reading. For each one, you must write a one page paper that:

1. has a title with the article name, author, journal, and year
2. summarizes the author’s thesis (preferably in a sentence or two)
3. identify the hypotheses, what is the author proposing?

4. for formal paper or ABM: who are the actors? what are the assumptions? what is the counterintuitive finding of the model?

5. for an empirical paper (quant or qual) what are the key variables? What is the causal mechanism? What are the findings?

6. identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the article (one paragraph)

I will look over these papers each week and assign a grade. Save these papers and collect them in a single binder as they will be especially useful to you as you study for preliminary exams.

I firmly believe in democracy and will solicit your opinions regarding the course generally, and the success or failure of certain aspects of the course specifically. This course will require a great deal of reading and participation on your part. If you are not prepared each day and do not engage in the discussions, debates, and other activities, you will not be successful.

5 Requirements

Required Books


The book is available at the bookstore and online. You can find it on Amazon.com or Addall.com at a reduced price.

Many of the articles for the class will be on reserve. You can also find most of the journal articles on JSTOR (www.jstor.org). I will also place readings on blackboard that are not available on JSTOR.

Assessment

1. Attendance and Participation (10%)—I expect that you will be prepared to discuss all of the readings each week. I will assign a grade for the participation each week based on the following scale:

   A (outstanding) your comments were insightful and contributed to collective understanding of the material across the readings
   A- (strong) your comments were sometimes insightful and sometimes average but were not consistent across the readings
   B+ (good) your comments demonstrated that you understood the material but did not extend the discussion or offer new insights
   B (average) you participated but did not seem to fully grasp the material
   B- (poor) you spoke, but your comments were not germane to the material
   C (unacceptable) you didn’t say anything...
2. **Response Papers (30%)**—The response papers serve two purposes. First, they provide another way for me to evaluate your engagement with the material. Second, they serve as a way to summarize a large volume of material that can be used for future reference. Papers are scored based on a similar rubric as above. They should be mistake-free and a single page per reading.

3. **Conference Presentation (10%)**—At the end of the term, you will give a 10-15 minute presentation on your research. You will be on a panel of 3-4 papers with a chair and discussant. The presentation must include a powerpoint (or equivalent program) presentation. Later in the term, we will discuss how to present your research effectively. You will also be graded on how well you respond to questions from the discussant and audience.

4. **Research Paper (50%)**—The research paper must be 20-25 pages (including references, tables, graphs, etc). The quality of the paper, however, is more important than the quantity. The paper should have the format as outlined by Barry Weingast here:

http://www.stanford.edu/~weingast/caltech_rules.html

While this is not the only way to write a great paper in Political Science, it is a great way.

These paper also makes useful suggestions for writing a graduate paper that is potentially publishable:


6 **Course Policies**

**Late Assignments**

I DO NOT accept any late papers. The paper is due in hard copy on the date assigned by the time the class begins or you will earn a 0 for the assignment. Since you are presenting your research and receiving feedback from a discussant, you have to be ready by the date of the “conference.”

Response papers are due at the beginning of each class. I will not accept e-mail copies or papers placed under my door. If you miss a class, response papers serve as your participation grade and are due the next time you attend.

**Syllabus Change Policy**

This syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice.
7 Tentative Course Schedule

Building Blocks of Research in International Relations/Comparative Politics

Wed. Aug. 20—What is International Relations? What is Comparative Politics? What is a Theory?
- Pass out Syllabi
- Introductions
- Discussion

Wed. Aug. 27—Concepts in International Relations


- BRING SOME CONCEPTS—Bring a list of concepts that are of interest to you. For example, you may be interested in the relationship between democracy and terrorism or neoliberal reform, economic growth, and conservatism.

Wed. Sept. 3—Asking the Right Question


- BRING A RESEARCH QUESTION—We will discuss each person’s question and offer suggestions and potential readings.

Research Methods and International Relations

Wed. Sept. 10—Quantitative Methods and International Relations


Wed. Sept. 17—Qualitative Methods and International Relations

-Book: “Qualitative Methods in International Relations.” Jack S. Levy.

-BRING METHODS’ CHOICES—We will discuss each person’s project and help decide which methods would be appropriate for answering the question/puzzle.

Wed. Sept. 24—Game Theory and International Relations


Wed. Oct. 1—Agent Based Modeling (Simulation, Computational Modeling) and International Relations


-BRING DATA—Bring an outline of project along with data and/or a description of the data that you plan to use.
Wed. Oct. 8—Comparing and Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Methods


-Seawright, Jason and John Gerring. N.D. “Case-Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options.” forthcoming in Political Research Quarterly.


**Important Topics at the Intersection of International Relations and Comparative Politics**

Wed. Oct. 15—Human Rights


Wed. Oct. 22—Political Economy


Wed. Oct. 29—Violent Conflict I–Civil War


Wed. Nov. 5—Violent Conflict II–Terrorism and Transnational Violence


Wed. Nov. 12—Democratic Peace–External Peace?


- Skim Rudy Rummel’s Democratic Peace Site: http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/MIRACLE.HTM

Wed. Nov. 19—Democratic Peace—Internal Peace?


Nov. 24 – Nov. 28.—NO SCHOOL—THANKSGIVING BREAK

Wed. Dec. 3—Conference Panels #1 (Papers Due for Panel #1)

Mon. Dec. 8—FINAL EXAM—5:50-7:50 PM, Conference Panels #2 (Papers Due for Panel #2)