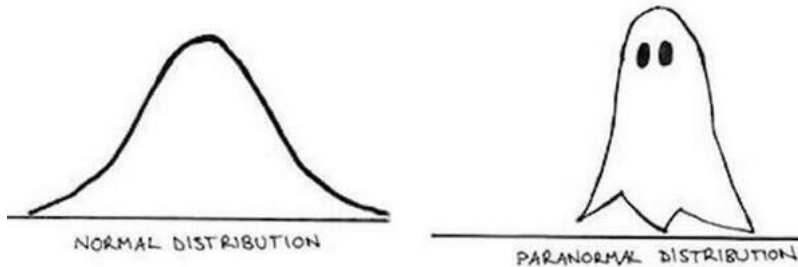


# Political Science 239: Research Methods

Dickinson College  
Fall 2018  
TF 1:30 – 2:45  
Denny 112 (lab) / Denny 104 (classroom)

**Professor:** Kathleen Marchetti  
**Email:** [marchetk@dickinson.edu](mailto:marchetk@dickinson.edu)  
**Office:** Denny Hall Room 12  
**Office Hours:** 11:00 – 12:00 Tuesday  
1:30 – 3:30 Thursday (and by appointment)  
Doodle Poll for Office Hours: <https://doodle.com/poll/3nxetdZXqz8nd96h>



Source: [https://twitter.com/grave\\_matters/status/480705820041433088](https://twitter.com/grave_matters/status/480705820041433088) )

## Course Description

How do we know what we know about political, social, and economic events? How can we conduct research to expand the frontiers of our knowledge, understand the forces that drive outcomes, and contribute to theoretical understanding and public policy debates? How can we answer questions, resolve puzzles, and explain political phenomena?

This course provides an introduction to research design, research methodologies, and data analysis in political science. It will introduce an empirical approach to studying politics, the basics of causal inference, and many of the major methods and approaches used in scholarly social science research. Students will develop the tools necessary to ask interesting and important questions, generate and test theories and hypotheses, choose cases and measure concepts, collect and analyze data, and present results.

Learning to conduct research is a hands-on process, and requires active engagement. Everything we do in this course is structured around developing your ability to understand approaches to research. The assignments are designed so that you can apply the course material to your own

research topics. My goal is for you to use your projects from this course as a launching point for your own independent research projects in social science disciplines.

### General Learning Objectives

1. Students will use the language of empirical social science research to develop their own causal research questions and conduct literature reviews on topics of their choosing.
2. Students will consider the multiple social scientific ways they might begin to answer the question they posed, thinking specifically about strengths and weaknesses of these multiple approaches.
3. Students will analyze and present quantitative information in a compelling and accessible way using the computer software program Stata.

### Methods Designated Learning Objectives

POSC 239 fulfills the political science department's research methods requirement, ensuring that all political science majors have exposure to both substantive issues in political science and the methods used in political science research. POSC 239: Research Methods will address all four of the political science research methods learning objectives below:

1. Identify and understand the method or methods employed by authors of key texts used in the course (among a wide range of possibilities). That is, the student will understand not only what an author is presenting as argument and evidence, but also how the method or methods used inform and structure the result.
2. Understand how one or more of the methods used in the study of politics might be put to the task of answering research questions germane to the subject matter being explored in a course.
3. Understand broad aspects of research design, including how different methodological approaches are better suited for answering particular research questions and how likely research projects logically unfold.
4. Demonstrate the ability to apply a research method (or research methods) in an assignment for the course.

### Course Materials

There are two required books for the course (available at the bookstore):

1. Halperin, Sandra and Oliver Heath. 2017. *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills*, Second Edition. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
2. Powner, Leanne. 2015. *Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student's Practical Guide*. Sage/CQ Press.

Additional readings are available either on Moodle or through the library's online databases.

## Requirements and Grading

Active participation in course discussion is an essential element of the course, and will be critical to successfully learning the material. Students will learn the methods of political research by directly engaging with these methods and thinking about (and discussing) the importance of different elements, the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches, and the way knowledge about political topics can be created. I expect students to answer questions that are posed, ask questions about concepts that are not clear, (respectfully) challenge viewpoints that are presented, and think critically. Note that attendance alone with little or no contribution or engagement will only earn you approximately a C in participation.<sup>1</sup> Attendance for the class is required though students can miss up to two class sessions without penalty (equal to a week of class) over the course of the semester. Extended absences for extenuating circumstances can be discussed with Professor Marchetti on an individual basis. Beyond participation, several writing assignments and two problem sets comprise the grade for the course. The relative weight and due date of each component is as follows:

Assignment	Percent of Overall Grade	Due Date(s)
Attendance and Participation	11%	
Research Question	5%	September 18
Literature Review	15%	October 26
Methodological Approach Papers	24% (6% each)	October 5 October 16 November 2 November 9
Problem Sets	20% (10% each)	December 4 December 14
Final Paper	25%	December 21 @ 5:00 p.m.

The *Research Question* assignment will ask you to develop your own empirically-testable causal research question and think about its substantive importance to political science (or a closely-related field). The *Literature Review* will ask you to examine the current status of the scholarly field with respect to the question you have raised - What have other scholars found? How have they gone about studying their questions? How could you imagine adding to that scholarly conversation? The *Methodological Approach* papers will ask you to think through how you might use multiple methods to address your question. How would you conduct your study? What variables would you need to measure? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach as it pertains to your question? We will use social scientific data to learn how to perform analysis of quantitative data using statistical software (Stata). The *Problem Sets* will assess your ability to do this type of analysis. Finally, your *Final Paper* will be an extension of your literature review and methodological approach papers as connected to your research question. If you are interested in a qualitative study, you should plan on reading Chapter 6 of *Empirical Research and Writing* to inform your work. Likewise, if you are interested in a

---

<sup>1</sup> I recognize that some students are hesitant to speak in front of the class. If this is the case, please come talk with me during office hours early in the semester.

quantitative study, you should plan on reading Chapter 7 of *Empirical Research and Writing* to inform your work.

Prompts and further instructions for each of the assignments will be distributed and discussed in class at least a week before each assignment is due.

Final letter grades will be assigned in the following way (note that all fractional percentage points are rounded up to the nearest full point if 0.5 or above e.g., 93.5 rounds up to 94).

A = 94 – 100	B- = 80 – 82	D = 60 – 69
A- = 90 – 93	C+ = 77 – 79	F = 0 – 59
B+ = 87 – 89	C = 73 – 76	
B = 83 – 86	C- = 70 – 72	

### Quantitative Reasoning Center

Dickinson College provides additional support for students taking quantitative reasoning courses through the Quantitative Reasoning (QR) Center. The QR tutors assist students with quantitative reasoning across the curriculum and, sometimes, for specific courses.

The general quantitative areas that all of the QR tutors can assist students with are:

- organizing an Excel spreadsheet;
- making graphs in Excel;
- using a scientific calculator;
- computing statistics with or without a graphing calculator;
- analyzing data sets;
- calculating unit conversions;
- understanding the order of operations;
- and reviewing for the quantitative portion of the GRE.

You can make an appointment with a QR tutor online by visiting WCONLINE:

<https://dickinson.mywconline.com/> If you'd like to search for a QR tutor specific to POSC 239, use the drop-down menu under "limit to" at the top of the scheduler and select POSC 239. This will restrict the tutor list and schedule to only those tutors approved for this course. If no tutor appears for POSC 239, tutors in the following disciplines will likely be able to help: economics, psychology, international business and management, and mathematics.

The QR Center is located on the Main Floor of the Waidner-Spahr Library, directly across from the Norman M. Eberly Multilingual Writing Center. For more information or if you have any questions, please visit the QR Center webpage:

[http://www.dickinson.edu/info/20525/quantitative\\_reasoning\\_center/2962/quantitative\\_reasoning\\_center](http://www.dickinson.edu/info/20525/quantitative_reasoning_center/2962/quantitative_reasoning_center)

## Academic Integrity

From Dickinson College's Community Standards... "Respect for ideas — our own and others' — is a hallmark of academic integrity. We show respect by acknowledging when we have used another's words or ideas in our work. We expect others to acknowledge when they use our ideas or words in their work. Students are expected to do their own work on quizzes, papers, examinations, class assignments, etc. Normally, a paper may be submitted in fulfillment of an assignment in only one course. Exceptions require permission from the instructors. Collaboration must be noted in writing and requires the consent of all instructors."

([http://www.dickinson.edu/info/20273/dean\\_of\\_students/867/community\\_standards/2](http://www.dickinson.edu/info/20273/dean_of_students/867/community_standards/2))

With respect to the research question, literature review, and methodological approach papers, you will need to cite all of your sources. Learning how to do this is one of the goals of the course, and as such, we will discuss ways of doing this before your first assignment is due. If you have any questions about what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, please feel free to ask.

## Accommodating Students with Disabilities

Dickinson values diverse types of learners and is committed to ensuring that each student is afforded an equal opportunity to participate in all learning experiences. If you have (or think you may have) a learning difference or a disability – including a mental health, medical, or physical impairment– that would impact your educational experience in this class, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) to schedule a meeting with Director Marni Jones. She will confidentially discuss your needs, review your documentation, and determine your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. To learn more about available supports, go to [www.dickinson.edu/ODS](http://www.dickinson.edu/ODS), email [DisabilityServices@dickinson.edu](mailto:DisabilityServices@dickinson.edu), call (717) 245-1734, or go to ODS in 106 Dana Hall. If you've already been granted accommodations at Dickinson, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can meet to review your Accommodation Letter and complete your Access Plan. If you will need test proctoring from ODS, remember that you will need to provide them with at least one week's notice.

## Technology in the Classroom

For some portions of this class, we will be meeting in a regular classroom and for others, we will be meeting in a computer lab. Lab computers have specific software loaded on them that we will need in order to conduct some of our data analysis. For this class, I strongly suggest taking notes by hand and *the use of laptops for note-taking is by permission only*. A recent study conducted by psychologists Pam Mueller and Daniel Oppenheimer shows that students process and retain information better when taking notes by hand vs. typing on a laptop (<http://www.vox.com/2014/6/4/5776804/note-taking-by-hand-versus-laptop>). However, if taking notes on a computer helps your learning, please consult with Professor Marchetti at the beginning of the semester. Cell phones are distracting to your peers and to the professor, so please refrain from using them in class. If you need to send a text or make a call under special circumstances, please step outside the room.

## Classroom Recording

With respect to audio recording, Pennsylvania is a “two-party consent” state, meaning that it is a crime to “intercept or record a telephone call or conversation **unless all parties to the conversation consent**” (<http://www.dmlp.org/legal-guide/pennsylvania/pennsylvania-recording-law>). Practically, what this means is that you should not be using any device to record class lectures or discussions. If a student with an accommodation from ODS is permitted to record class, all members of the class will be informed, but the student doing the recording will not be identified; students with ODS accommodations agree to strict guidelines with respect to how they use class recordings.