

Spring 2014

PO 200.51: Introduction to Methods

Dr. Pam Mason

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Office hours: by appointment

Brief Course Description

PO 200 introduces ways of thinking and various approaches to evidence, explanation, and theory used in the study of politics and society. It focuses on the conceptual basics of social science research, including research design. The purpose of the course is not to advocate one method or approach over another, but to explore the advantages and disadvantages of using particular methods in particular circumstances. Topics include the basics of forming research questions and hypotheses, and how to go about reviewing the literature relevant to your research project.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will have:

- Mastered the basic vocabulary of social science research.
- Gained a basic working knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of different methods and approaches for different kinds of research questions
- Learned to critically evaluate research methods in published political sciences articles.
- Completed an individual research design proposal.

Readings

There is one required book for PO 200: Andrew Abbott, Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004).

In addition, we will read some well-researched scholarly articles, as noted in course calendar, below.

Course grades will be determined based upon the following:

Three in-class quizzes, each worth 10% of the course grade (30%)

Thesis statement (10%)

Draft research design (20%)

Final Research design proposal (30%)

Attendance, preparation, and participation (10%)

The grading scale used in this course: 100-93 = A; 92-90 = A-; 89-87 = B+; 86-83 = B; 82-80 = B-; 79-77 = C+; 76-73 = C; 72-70 = C-; 69-67 = D+; 66-63 = D; 62-60 = D-; below 60 = F.

Policy on Attendance:

Each student is expected to attend all the scheduled class periods and to support their classmates with their presence, preparation, and participation. I reserve the right to lower the final course grade for what I consider to be excessive absence or lack of preparation.

Policy on Documentation and Accommodation of Disabilities:

In accordance with federal law, if you have a documented disability (learning, psychological, sensory, physical, or medical) you may be eligible to request accommodations from the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). To make a request for accommodations, please contact SSD Director Allison West at (216) 397-4967 or visit the SSD office, located in Room 7A, on the garden (lower) level of the Administration Building. Please keep in mind that accommodations are not retroactive so it is best to register with SSD at the beginning of each semester. Only those accommodations approved by SSD will be recognized by your instructors. Please contact SSD if you have further questions.

Policy on Mutual Respect:

At John Carroll University, we are committed to fostering a respectful and inclusive campus community. Incidents of bias, whether intentional or unintentional, against someone on the basis of an actual or perceived aspect of their identity, including actions that occur in classrooms, can and should be reported on the Bias Incident Reporting Form, accessible at <http://sites.jcu.edu/bias/>. Questions about bias can be directed to members of the Bias Response Team: Lauren Bowen, Associate Academic Vice President (bowen@jcu.edu), Bud Stuppy, Director of Human Resources (cstuppy@jcu.edu), or Danielle Carter, Director of the Center for Student Diversity and Inclusion (dcarter@jcu.edu).

Policy on Academic Honesty:

For the purposes of this course, academic honesty means do your own work and do not cheat. If I determine that you have cheated on a test or not done your own work, you will fail the course. If you have any questions about what constitutes cheating or not doing your own work, please ask me. For the full JCU policy on academic honesty, please see the 2013-2015 Undergraduate Bulletin, pp. 110-112.

Course Calendar

Week 1 **Thinking like a social scientist**

1/14 Thinking like a social scientist: issues, problems, questions, quests

1/16 Representation, naming, and power; weighing and measuring
Abbott, "To the Reader," (xi-xii)

Week 2 **The Idea of Heuristics**

1/21 The research process and revolutions in research. Abbott, chapter 3 (80-92)

1/23 Abbott, chapter 3 (92-109) lists: making big things smaller; cutting your topic down to size. Think about possible topics.

Week 3 **Assumptions and Approaches I**

1/28 Basic methods and debates about them: Positivism and Interpretivism: Abbott, chapter 2.I (1-53) and Wendy D. Roth and Jal D. Mehta, The Rashomon Effect: Combining Positivist and Interpretivist Approaches in the Analysis of Contested Events. [Sociological Methods & Research](#) 2002 31: 131. Available online at: DOI: 10.1177/0049124102031002002.

Quiz #1: glossary (10% of course grade)

1/30 TBA

Week 4 **Assumptions and Approaches II: quantitative and qualitative**

2/4 Guest and guest paper. Plus Abbott, chapter 2.II (53-60)

2/6 Debates: Both/And, not Either/Or: Abbott, chapter 2.III (60-79) and Christian List and Kai Spiekermann, "Methodological Individualism and Holism in Political Science: A Reconciliation." [American Political Science Review](#) 107, 4 (November 2013),629-643. Available online at: DOI: 10.1017/S0003055413000373. And also the Constitute Project:

Week 5 **Correlation and Causation:**

2/11 What is an inference? Fooling around with Gapminder. And a cautionary note: Chimamanda Adichie, "The danger of a single story," on Youtube at: http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.html

2/13 Analogies and Assumptions. Abbott, chapter 4 (110-136)

Quiz #2; glossary (10% of course grade).

Week 6 Assumptions and Analogies, continued

2/18 In-class exercise: late-developing/early-developing state

2/20 Sizing your study: Abbott, chapter 5 (137-161)

Week 7 Finding your Research Question

2/25 Máire Ní Bhrolcháin, "'Divorce Effects' and Causality in the Social Sciences," European Sociological Review , Vol. 17, No. 1, (Mar., 2001) , pp. 33-57. Article Stable URL:

<http://0-www.jstor.org.library.jcu.edu/stable/522624>

2/27 Paying your respects: the literature review

Quiz #3 glossary (10% of course grade)

Week 8

3/4 Spring Break

3/6 Spring Break

Week 9: Designing your research study

3/11 What is a research design? Download and bring to class the rubric located at: <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/bkg/methods/005847ch1.pdf>

3/13 Discussion and in-class exercise

Week 10**Big Data**

- 3/18 Big Data! Sendhi Mullainathan, "What Big Data means for Social Science," at:
<http://www.edge.org/panel/headcon-13-part-i>
- 3/20 Statistics and Big Data: Diane Lambert, "What Use Is Statistics for Massive Data?"
Lecture Notes-Monograph Series , Vol. 43, Crossing Boundaries: Statistical Essays in Honor of Jack Hall (2003) , pp. 217-228. Published by: Institute of Mathematical Statistics. Article Stable URL: <http://0-www.jstor.org.library.jcu.edu/stable/4356276>

Thesis statement due (10% of course grade)

Week 11**Comparative Methods**

- 3/25 Large-N? Small-N? Readings TBA.
- 3/27 Reading TBA.

Draft Research Design due (20% of course grade)

Week 12**Topics: society and austerity: paying particular attention to method**

- 4/1 David Stuckler, "The Body Economic: why austerity kills," public lecture, London School of Economics and Political Science, 11/27,2013. Podcast.
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/newsAndMedia/videoAndAudio/channels/publicLecturesAndEvents/player.aspx?id=2136>
- 4/3 Barrington Moore, Jr., "Austerity and Unintended Riches," Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Oct., 1987) , pp. 787-810
Article Stable URL: <http://0-www.jstor.org.library.jcu.edu/stable/178826>

Week 13**Reflections**

- 4/8 John S.Dryzek, "Revolutions without Enemies: Key Transformations in Political Science," The American Political Science Review , Vol. 100, No. 4, Thematic Issue on the Evolution of Political Science, in Recognition of the Centennial of the Review (Nov., 2006) , pp. 487-492. Article Stable URL: <http://0-www.jstor.org.library.jcu.edu/stable/27644374>
- 4/10 David Wearing, "How Political is Political Science?" The Guardian online 3/8/2010.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/mar/08/political-science-moral-ethical/print>

Week 14

4/15 Presentations

4/17 **Easter Break**

Week 15

4/22 Easter Break

4/24 **Presentations**

Week 16

4/29 **Presentations**

5/1 Reflections and Conclusions. Abbott, chapter 7 (211-248)

5/8 10 a.m. (Final Exam Period) **Class meeting and final research design proposal due (30% of course grade)**