Macalester College
Department of Political Science

POLI 269.01
Empirical Research Methods
Fall 2010
Class Mtgs: MWF 9:40-10:40 am
Carnegie #206

Dr. Julie Dolan
Carnegie #203c
(651) 696-6483
Office Hours:
MW ~ 1-2pm
and by appt
dolan@macalester.edu

Course Description (from the Course Catalog)
This course investigates the strategies and tactics of designing empirical research, including observation, description, and measurement in contemporary political science research. Throughout the semester, we will thoroughly explore 5 steps of the scientific method: identifying a problem worthy of study and developing testable hypotheses, designing a research strategy, gathering data, analyzing data, and interpreting our results. Upon completion of the course, students should be able to both design and complete their own research as well as critique research done by others.

Required Texts and Materials


Additional readings (marked with an ‘*’ throughout syllabus and listed on last page). These are either available online through Moodle or will be distributed in class.

Course Requirements
1) Class participation (15%)
2) Homework Assignments (20%)
3) Group Project – Research Proposal (25%)
3) Midterm and Final exams (each worth 20%)

1) Participation (15%)  
The full participation of all students is expected. This means that students will be on time and well prepared for all class sessions. You should do the assigned readings and come to class prepared to discuss and question them. Your attendance matters a great deal. You cannot participate if you are not in class. I do take attendance daily and regularly monitor students’ participation. Tardiness is NOT acceptable. Being tardy for class three times will be treated as missing one entire class. If you have difficulty attending class regularly or arriving on time, you should NOT be enrolled in this class.

2) Homework Assignments (20%)
Throughout the course of the semester, you will be required to complete a variety of homework assignments geared toward applying concepts from the readings. A summary of all of the required homework assignments and their due dates is listed at the end of this syllabus. Any assignments which are late will be penalized 10 points for each day they are late.

3) Group Project (25%)
On the first day of class, we will discuss three research questions that will guide us through the semester. Many of the individual homework assignments (referenced above in #2) will prepare you to engage in this group project. This final project is a group research proposal (8-10 pages in length) that explains how your group will develop a scholarly research project to address the research question assigned to your group. In particular, you should reiterate the research question, draw on the existing scholarship to advance a particular theory and/or explanation to answer the research question, and explain how you would go about assembling and analyzing data to answer the question. A draft of this paper is due on November 17th for a peer review session. The final paper is due on xx.

4) Exams (40%)
The midterm exam (October 22nd) and the final exam (December 15th) are each worth 20% of your final grade. A student absent from a scheduled examination will receive a zero for the exam unless the absence has been approved by me AHEAD OF TIME.

Academic Integrity
Standards of academic integrity are set forth in the Macalester College Student Handbook. Students are strongly encouraged to familiarize themselves with the College Honor System as violations will be taken very seriously. Students who are uncertain as to what constitutes cheating should contact the Dean of Academic Programs.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
Reasonable accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please meet with the Associate Dean of Students, Lisa Landreman, who will serve as the coordinator for services for students with disabilities. It is important to meet with her at the beginning of the semester to ensure that your accommodations are approved and in place to begin the semester successfully. The Associate Dean can be reached in the Office of Student Affairs, 119 Weyerhaeuser, by phone at 651-696-6220, or email llandreman@macalester.edu

Change to weekly format?

September 8   Overview of Course
No reading assignments

September 10  Introduction to Research Methods
Reading: J&R, Chapter 1
Homework Due: #1

September 13  Studying Politics Scientifically
September 15  The Role of Theory in Scholarly Research
Reading: J&R, Chapter 2, pp. 35-40; Chapter 3, pp. 60-70
Homework: Drawing from the scholarly literature, identify at least one
theory used by scholars that sheds light on your group’s research question

September 17  Research Methods and Library Resources
**** Meet in DeWitt Library, 2nd Floor Bibliographic Instruction Room

September 20  Role of Theory, continued
Reading: TBA

September 22  Scientific Method
Reading: J&R, Chapter 2, pp. 40-55
Homework: Will be assigned in class, due at the beginning of class on
September 22nd

September 24-27  Designing Research: Logic of Analysis
Reading: J&R, Chapter 3, pp. 122-147

September 29  Designing Research: Nonexperimental Design
Reading: J&R, Chapter 3, pp. 147-181

Oct 1-4  Formulating Hypotheses
Reading: J&R, Chapter 3, pp. 70-76
Homework Due:

October 6  Measurement: Defining and Operationalizing Concepts
Reading: J&R, Chapter 3, pp. 81-87; Chapter 4, pp. 88-94
Homework Due:

October 8  Measurement: Reliability and Validity
Reading: J&R, Chapter 4, pp. 94-104

October 11  Measurement: Levels of Measurement, Multi-Item Measures
Reading: J&R, Chapter 4, pp. 104-121
Homework Due: #

October 13  Reviewing the Literature
Reading: J&R, Chapter 6, pp. 182-200

October 15  Writing Literature Reviews and Properly Citing Sources
Reading: J&R, Chapter 6, pp. 200-208
Earl Babbie, "Plagiarism"*
Homework: work in groups, compare and contrast findings across articles.
Answer the following questions: what do authors find? How persuasive are their findings?
Methods?

**October 18**

**Social Science Experiments and Research Ethics**
Reading: Babbie, "The Ethics and Politics of Social Research"*
J&R, Chapter 8, pp. 247-248
Macalester Social Science Institutional Review Board materials

**October 20**

*Film: Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Experiment*

**October 22**

**Midterm Exam**

**October 24-27**

**Sampling**
Reading: Chapter 7

**October 29**

**No Class – Fall Break**

**November 1**

**Survey Research and Interviewing**
Reading: J&R, Chapter 10, pp. 297-317

**November 3**

**Survey Research – Formulating Questions**
Reading: J&R, Chapter 10, pp. 317-331

**November 5**

**Survey Research – Using Archived Surveys**
Reading: J&R, Chapter 10, pp. 331-338
MEET IN HUMANITIES LAB / ECONOMETRICS LAB

**November 8**

**Semi-Structured Interviews / Elite Interviews**
Reading: J&R, Chapter 10, pp. 338-344
Peabody, et al., "Interviewing Political Elites"

**November 10**

**Document Analysis – Using the Written Record**
Reading: J&R, Chapter 9, pp. 266-282

**November 12**

**Document Analysis – Content Analysis**
Reading: J&R, Chapter 9, pp. 282-296

**November 15**

**Historical Analysis**
Reading: TBD

**November 17**

**Peer Review Session**
DRAFT OF GROUP PROJECT PAPER DUE
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 19</td>
<td>Univariate Data Analysis</td>
<td>J&amp;R, Chapter 11, pp. 351-368</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 22</td>
<td>Univariate Data Analysis</td>
<td>J&amp;R, Chapter 11, pp. 368-393</td>
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<td>November 26</td>
<td>No class – Thanksgiving Break</td>
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<td>November 29</td>
<td>Statistical Inference</td>
<td>J&amp;R, Chapter 11, pp. 393-420</td>
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<td>December 1-6</td>
<td>Bivariate Data Analysis / Hypothesis Testing</td>
<td>J&amp;R, Chapter 12</td>
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<td>December 8</td>
<td>Group Work</td>
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<td>December 10</td>
<td>Group Work</td>
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<td>December 13</td>
<td>Last Day of Class – Wrap up and Final Thoughts</td>
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<td>December 15</td>
<td>Final Exam (8am-10am)</td>
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Homework and Written Assignments:

Assignment:  

1) Make a xeroxed copy of your student id and write an essay about yourself. Please also include your phone number and preferred e-mail at the top of the essay.  

2) Write up 2 research questions that can be studied scientifically.  

3) Propose an explanation for each of the research questions above, written in the form of a hypothesis (2 separate hypotheses).  

4) For each of the hypotheses developed, identify the unit of analysis.  

5) For each of the hypotheses you crafted in Homework #3, create operational definitions for both the independent and dependent variables.  

6) For one of the hypotheses crafted in Homework #3, develop measures for both the dependent and independent variables.  

6) In your groups, develop 6 survey questions that can be used on the entrance poll (in your assigned area).  

7) Create SPSS-friendly variable names, variable labels, value names and value labels for all of your group’s survey questions.  

8) By the end of our class session, be prepared to hand in an SPSS file, complete with all of your group’s data contained within.  

9) Using our entrance poll data set, devise three plausible hypotheses to test in class (write these up before arriving for class). In addition, be sure to specify the level of measurement for each variable.  

10) Test one of the hypotheses you posed in homework #9. How strong is the relationship between the 2 variables? Is the relationship statistically significant? From this information, what can you conclude about the hypothesis?  

Date Due:  

Sept. 9th  

Sept. 14th  

Sept. 19th  

Sept. 19th  

Sept. 23rd  

Sept. 28th  

Oct. 21st  

Nov. 18th  

Nov. 21st  

Dec. 2nd  

Dec. 5th
Additional Required Readings:


