

# DESIGNING SOCIAL INQUIRY

POLS BC 3222 - Fall 2012

Class: Tuesdays and Thursday 11:40am-12:55pm (325 Milbank Hall)

Lab: Mondays 1:00pm-2:00pm (18 Lehman)

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Office Hours:

Mondays 2:15pm-3:30pm

Thursdays 1:15pm-3:150pm

Meetings also available by appointment

## I. COURSE OVERVIEW

“According to my method, what characterizes the empirical method is its manner of exposing to falsification, in every conceivable way, the system to be tested. Its aim is not save the lives of untenable systems but, on the contrary, to select the one which is by comparison the fittest, by exposing them all to the fiercest struggle for survival.”

- Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, 1935

“Social science research, whether quantitative or qualitative, involves the dual goals of describing and explaining. Some scholars set out to describe the world; others to explain it. Each is essential. We cannot construct meaningful causal explanations without good description; description, in turn, loses most of its interest unless linked to some causal relationships.”

- King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, 1994

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the systematic study of political phenomena with the goal of preparing you to conduct research in both academic and professional settings. The course meets twice per week for lecture and once per week in a computer lab.

The course begins with a unit on developing research questions and research designs in political science (as well as other social sciences). In doing so, we focus on foundational concepts such as causality, theory, inference, falsifiability, and evidence and consider some basic epistemological questions such as: How can we know what we know? And, what does it mean to prove something? The remainder (and majority) of the term is devoted to a survey of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The section on quantitative research comes first and assumes only basic mathematical knowledge (addition, subtraction, division, averages). We will begin by learning basic descriptive statistics and slowly work our way up to more advanced concepts such as linear regression. Throughout the course we will rely on

computer software (Stata) for calculating statistics. About two-thirds of the way through the semester we will transition away from quantitative analysis in lecture and turn our attention to qualitative analysis. In this section of the course we focus primarily on case studies. Note, however, that instruction on quantitative analysis and certain qualitative research techniques will continue in our computer lab meetings. Throughout all of the sections of the course, we will be addressing data collection, organization, and presentation techniques.

Assessment in this course is based on a midterm exam, a final exam, regular, *graded* assignments (some short, some longer), and your course participation. Assignments and exams serve three purposes: (1) To get you to practice what we are covering in class, (2) To evaluate you how well you are understanding course material, and (3) To indicate to me what material needs to be reinforced. Because this course involves learning new technical skills, *students are encouraged to have an open mind about their own abilities!* Your education to this point has prepared you for this class; however, all students should be willing to seek help from me when they need it.

The learning objectives of the course are as follows:

- Students should develop an understanding of the basic tenets of social science including causality, theory, inference, falsifiability, and evidence.
- Students should develop an understanding of what data are and how data can be used to answer research questions.
- Students should develop basic statistical research skills including descriptive statistics and basic regression techniques.
- Students should develop an understanding of how to conduct basic qualitative research with an emphasis on case studies.
- Students should develop an understanding of how to collect, organize, and present data of varying kinds.

## II. BOOKS

Students are required to purchase the following book. Other readings will be provided via New CourseWorks.

KW: Kellstedt, P.M., and G.D. Whitten. 2009. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The following book is recommended, but not required:

Hamilton, L.C. 2008. *Statistics with Stata: Updated for Version 10*. Duxbury Press.

### III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**Examinations (Midterm: 20%; Final: 20%):** Details about the midterm and final exam will be presented as the exam dates approach.

**Assignments (50%):** Assignments are a major component of your grade. Early assignments call on you to explain concepts and critique existing research. Assignments during the quantitative section of the course are in the form of problem sets. To complete the problem sets, students will need to spend time in the computer lab working with Stata. Assignments during the qualitative section of the course require you to critique existing research and develop your research strategy. All assignments are graded. For some assignments, students will have the opportunity to correct their mistakes and resubmit for a new grade.

**Participation (10%):** Students are strongly encouraged to ask questions in class and in office hours (some of which will be held in the computer lab). The participation grade is particularly important for students who are struggling with the course material; these students can improve their grade by demonstrating that they are actively engaging course concepts and trying to improve.

### IV. GRADING

Exams, assignments, and participation will be graded on the following scale:

|    |   |      |    |   |      |
|----|---|------|----|---|------|
| A  | = | 98.5 | C+ | = | 78.5 |
| A  | = | 95.0 | C  | = | 75.0 |
| A- | = | 91.5 | C- | = | 71.5 |
| B+ | = | 88.5 | D+ | = | 68.5 |
| B  | = | 85.0 | D  | = | 65.0 |
| B- | = | 81.5 | F  | = | 50.0 |

### V. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

In this course there will be opportunities for students to work together. Those opportunities will be clearly communicated to you by me. Even in situations where students are permitted to work together, the expectation is that students will hand in their own work. Unless it is explicitly indicated, students should assume that all their work should be done individually. Please note that I take issues of academic integrity very seriously. Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. In keeping with the Barnard College Honor Code, all work is expected to be original and not previously or simultaneously turned in for credit in another course. All forms of academic dishonesty will result in an F for the course and referral to the Barnard College Honor Board. For more information on the Honor Code and Honor Board, students can visit: <http://barnard.edu/dos/honor-code>

**Designing Social Inquiry | POLS BC 3222 - Fall 2012**  
**Preliminary Class and Lab Schedule**

| Week | Day | Date     | Lab | Topic  | Reading (To Be Completed For that Day's Class)   | Assignment Distributed                 |
|------|-----|----------|-----|--|--|--|
| 1    | T   | 9/4/12   |     | Introduction to the Course                           |  |  |
| 1    | R   | 9/6/12   |     | Introduction to the Course                           | Noah, Timothy. 2010. "The Great Divergence." <i>Slate</i> .  |  |
| 2    | M   | 9/10/12  | ✓   | Excel #1   |  | Excel Assignment                       |
| 2    | T   | 9/11/12  |     | Scientific Study of Politics                         | KW 1: All<br>Taleb, Nassim Nicholas. 2007. <i>The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbably</i> . Excerpt. |  |
| 2    | R   | 9/13/12  |     | Previous Research and Theory Development             | KW 2: All  | Variables and Relationships Assignment |
| 3    | M   | 9/17/12  | ✓   | Excel #2   |  |  |
| 3    | T   | 9/18/12  |     | Causality  | KW 3: All  |  |
| 3    | R   | 9/20/12  |     | Causality/Research Design                            | KW 4: All  | Theory, Causality, Research Design     |
| 4    | M   | 9/24/12  | ✓   | Knowing Your Data, Finding Your Data, Intro to Stata |  | Stata Experimentation                  |
| 4    | T   | 9/25/12  |     | Research Design                                      |  |  |
| 4    | R   | 9/27/12  |     | Quantitative Measurement                             | KW 5: All  |  |
| 5    | M   | 10/1/12  | ✓   | Coding in Stata                                      |  | Measurement Concepts, Coding in Stata  |
| 5    | T   | 10/2/12  |     | Descriptive Statistics                               | KW 6: 104-114  |  |
| 5    | R   | 10/4/12  |     | Descriptive Statistics                               | KW 6: 114-118  |  |
| 6    | M   | 10/8/12  | ✓   | Descriptive Statistics in Stata                      |  | Descriptive Statistics                 |
| 6    | T   | 10/9/12  |     | Statistical Inference                                | KW 7: All  |  |
| 6    | R   | 10/11/12 |     | Bivariate Hypothesis Tests                           | KW 8: 134-150  |  |
| 7    | M   | 10/15/12 | ✓   | Crosstabs and t-tests in Stata                       |  | Crosstabs and t-Tests in Stata         |
| 7    | T   | 10/16/12 |     | <b>Review, Midterm Distributed</b>                   |  |  |
| 7    | R   | 10/18/12 |     | <b>Midterm Due</b>                                   |  |  |
| 8    | M   | 10/22/12 | ✓   | Correlation in Stata                                 |  |  |

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|------|-----|----------|-----|---|---|--|
| 8    | T   | 10/23/12 |     | Bivariate Hypothesis Tests                        | KW 8: 150-156   |  |
| 8    | R   | 10/25/12 |     | Regression  | KW 9: 159-176   |  |
| 9    | M   | 10/29/12 | ✓   | Bivariate Regression in Stata                     |   | Correlations and Bivariate Regression in Stata |
| 9    | T   | 10/30/12 |     | Regression  | KW 10: 183-193  |  |
| 9    | R   | 11/1/12  |     | Regression  | KW 10: 193-201  |  |
| 10   | M   | 11/5/12  | ✓   | Multiple Regression in Stata                      |   | Multiple Regression in Stata                   |
| 10   | T   | 11/6/12  |     | No Class  |   |  |
| 10   | R   | 11/8/12  |     | Regression  | KW 11: 202-220  |  |
| 11   | M   | 11/12/12 | ✓   | Multiple Regression in Stata with Dummy Variables |   | Dummy Variable Regression in Stata             |
| 11   | T   | 11/13/12 |     | Survey Design                                     | Cargan, Leonard. 2007. "Collecting the Data: Utilizing the Survey." <i>Doing Social Research</i> . Pgs 89-139.<br><br>Rea, L. M., & Parker, R. A. (1997). <i>Designing and Conducting Survey Research</i> . Jossey-Bass Publishers: San Francisco, CA. Chapters 2 & 3.  |  |
| 11   | R   | 11/15/12 |     | Interviews  | Leech, B. L. (2002). "Interview methods in political science." <i>Political Science &amp; Politics</i> , 35(04), 663-664.<br><br>Leech, B. L. (2002). "Asking Questions: Techniques for semi-structured interviews." <i>Political Science &amp; Politics</i> , 35(04), 665-668.<br><br>Aberbach, J. D., & Rockman, B. A. (2002). "Conducting and coding elite interviews." <i>PS: Political Science and Politics</i> , 35(4), 673-676.<br><br>Stroh, Matt. 2000. "Qualitative Interviewing." In <i>Research Training for Social Scientists</i> edited by Dawn Burton, Sage. Pgs. 196-217. |  |
| 12   | M   | 11/19/12 | ✓   | Qualtrics   |   | Design a Survey in Qualtrics                   |

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|------|-----|----------|-----|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 12   | T   | 11/20/12 |     | Case Studies                       | Gerring, J. (2004). What is a case study and what is it good for? <i>American Political Science Review</i> , 98(2), 341-354.<br><br>George, A. L., & Bennett, A. (2005). <i>Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences</i> . Boston: The MIT Press. Chapter 3 (Phase 1: Designing Case Study Research).<br><br>Sample Case-Study           |                                |
| 12   | R   | 11/22/12 |     | No Classes - Thanksgiving          |  |                                |
| 13   | M   | 11/26/12 | ✓   | Regression Catch-Up                |  |                                |
| 13   | T   | 11/27/12 |     | Case Studies                       | George, A. L., & Bennett, A. (2005). <i>Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences</i> . Boston: The MIT Press. Chapter 4 (Phase 2: Carrying Out the Case Studies)<br><br>Yin, R.K. 2009. <i>Case Study Research: Design and Methods</i> . Vol. 5. Sage Publications. Chapter 4 (Collective Case Study Evidence).<br><br>Sample Case Study | Case-Study Design and Critique |
| 13   | R   | 11/29/12 |     | Case Studies                       | Yin, R.K. 2009. <i>Case Study Research: Design and Methods</i> . Vol. 5. Sage Publications. Chapter 5.<br><br>Sample Case Study  |                                |
| 14   | M   | 12/3/12  | ✓   | TBD                                |  |                                |
| 14   | T   | 12/4/12  |     | TBD                                | TBD  |                                |
| 14   | R   | 12/6/12  |     | TBD                                | TBD  |                                |
| 15   | M   | 12/10/12 | ✓   | <b>Review: Midterm Distributed</b> |  |                                |