

POLS 465: Senior Seminar in Political Science and International Relations

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| Instructor: Andrew Konitzer Email Address and Telephone: ackonitz@samford.edu Ext. 4630 Website: Available on <i>Blackboard</i> | Meeting Time: TR 1:00-2:50 Class Location: DBH 307 Office Hours and Location: DBH 108 MW: 10:00-11:30 TR: 9:30-11:00 |
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Course Description and Objectives

This course is designed as a capstone of the knowledge that you have accumulated in the course of your political science or international relations major. The objective is to provide you with the opportunity to draw on and synthesize all of the skills and knowledge gained in the various courses and seminars that you have taken up until this point. During your time here at Samford, each of your instructors provided you with certain methodological and theoretical tools along with geographically or temporally-defined snapshots of empirical knowledge. This is your chance to take all of these resources and orient them towards the creation of your own piece of social scientific analysis.

In order to meet this admittedly broad objective, our entire semester will be dedicated to the achievement of one clearly-specified goal: The creation of a single academic journal style manuscript which presents an analysis of a topic of your choice. To help you achieve this goal, class meetings will focus on the discussion of the research design and implementation processes drawing heavily on academic journal articles to provide examples of specific features of the research process and to also better familiarize you with the structure and “feel” of an academic journal-quality article. At this juncture in your major, much of this should be review. However, this will probably be the first time that you’ve had the opportunity to tie different threads together into a single project. Furthermore, certain aspects of this course will also cover material that likely fell beyond the confines of any previous course that you’ve taken.

A danger facing many aspiring researchers is the lack of a clearly defined timetable with solid deadlines. In most instances, no one will stand over you demanding that you complete the project by X date. As a result, much research is never completed – or even started! In a departure from the reality of the “normal” research environment, I have removed this obstacle for you. Obviously, the project needs to be completed and handed in at the end of the semester. Nonetheless, the complexity of this project and the level of quality that I expect will not allow you to toss together a 25-30 page paper the night before the due date. Therefore, at various points in the semester, you will also be required to complete certain portions of the project and either hand them in or present them in some form or another. Each of these “checkpoints” will be strictly evaluated and counts for a significant portion of your grade. Please note that since the final research paper constitutes only 30% of your final grade, you cannot expect to pass this course if you severely underperform on seminar activities but still hand in the “perfect” final

paper. In any case, by completing each of these steps ahead of time, you'll have the opportunity to gain input from your professor and classmates and also avoid a last minute rush to complete the final paper.

Let's get started!

Class Format: Class sessions combine a mixture of quizzes, discussion, interactive lecturing on key topics and student presentations. Most class periods will begin with a short quiz over the reading materials for that day.

Prerequisites: This is a capstone seminar which you are expected to complete towards the end of your major

Readings: The following book is required and can be purchased at the Bookstore:

Jarol B. Manheim; Richard C. Rich; Lars Willnat; Craig Leonard Brians, *Empirical Political Analysis: Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods*, Seventh Edition, 2007.

The reading load will consist of readings from the required texts along with other readings posted on *Blackboard*. Expect to read between 100-200 pages of text per week.

Course Grade: Your grade is derived from your class attendance, participation, quiz grades and your performance on five separate research tasks. Grades are composed as follows:

| Grade Composition | Grading Scale | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Participation: 10% | 93.4% or greater: A | 73.4-76.6%: C |
| Individual Quizzes: 10% | 90.0-93.3%: A- | 70.0-73.3%: C- |
| Research topic: 10% | 86.7%-89.9%: B+ | 66.7%-69.9%: D+ |
| Literature review: 10% | 83.4%-86.6%: B | 63.4-66.6%: D |
| Individual meeting: 10% | 80.0-83.3%: B- | 60.0-63.3%: D- |
| In-class presentation: 20% | 76.7-79.9%: C+ | Below 60.0: F |
| Final manuscript: 30% | | |

Participation: This is a seminar course, and as such, you are expected to actively participate in all class activities and discussions. Your final participation grade will be determined by both the quality and quantity of your contributions. Therefore, come to class prepared and make every effort to stay engaged with the class. This is a relatively small group, so any free riders will be easy to identify! Your participation is worth 10% of your final grade.

Individual Quizzes: In order to provide additional incentives to stay on task with our readings some classes will begin with individual quizzes on the reading materials. The instructor also reserves the right to administer reading quizzes on *Blackboard* so as to preserve more class time for lecture/discussion. *Blackboard* quizzes will be announced at the end of the previous class period. Your quiz scores are worth 10% of your final grade.

Research Projects: As mentioned in description above, in the course of completing your final research paper you will be asked to submit or present certain portions of the project. As part of the seminar, I also require that you share your entire project with your classmates at the end of the semester through an academic conference style presentation. Each of these activities are described as follows:

- 1) *Research topic:* At the end of the first month of class (see the course schedule below), you will be required to submit a one page summary of your selected research topic. This summary must include a concise research question, sufficient background to demonstrate why this is a relevant and interesting topic and a general research plan. In addition to presenting this to your instructor in written form, you will then be expected to briefly describe and discuss your topic with your classmates. Both the written assignment and your classroom presentation will make up 10% of your final grade.
- 2) *Literature review:* Several weeks after the research topic assignment (see the course schedule below), you will be asked to submit a literature review on your topic. The format for this review will be discussed in class and you will also have various readings to assist you with this project. At this point you will also be required to submit a detailed preliminary outline of your manuscript. This assignment will constitute 10% of your final grade
- 3) *Individual meeting with your instructor:* Individual meetings with your instructor will be scheduled during a week of class times specified in the course schedule below. For this meeting you are expected to present your research design, along with your preliminary attempts to address your research question. This offers an opportunity for you to ask questions and make adjustments to your research project prior to the final class presentations and write-up. It also will constitute 10% of your final grade.
- 4) *Class presentation:* Just prior to submitting your final manuscripts you will make a 15 minute presentation of your assignment to your classmates. The general format is an academic conference style PowerPoint presentation. Various reading materials and class discussions will help you complete this activity. In practical terms, this means that you should complete your research projects (minus the write-up) by the time you make these presentations. This activity constitutes 20% of your final grade.
- 5) *Final manuscript submission:* As indicated in the course description, the final product of this seminar consists of a 25-30 page academic journal style manuscript presenting the results of your research. Throughout the term you will be presented with materials which will familiarize you with the general structure and style of this manuscript. This assignment is worth 30% of your final grade. 5% of this 30% is derived from the quality of your first draft. The remaining 25% is based on the quality of your final draft.

Attendance, Missed Tests, and Late Assignments: Attendance is mandatory and low attendance **will** affect your grade. Each student is permitted a total of 6 absences per semester, after which the student's **final course grade** will be reduced by 5 percentage points. Late assignments will be docked 5 percentage points for each day past the deadline. Quizzes can only be made up if the student is away on a university-related event (athletes and other club members) or has otherwise informed me of his or her absence *before* the date that they miss class.

Special Accommodations: Samford University complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students with disabilities who seek accommodations must make their requests by contacting Disability Support Services located in Counseling Services on the lower level of Pittman Hall, or call 726-4078 or 726-2105. I will grant reasonable accommodations only upon written notification from Disability Support Services.

Course Website on Blackboard: This site contains readings, notes and other important course information. Be sure to visit frequently!

Readings and Topics

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| August 26 | Syllabus and Course Overview The Evolution of a Research Idea | |
| August 28 | The research process | EPA Chapter 1, Chapter 1 supplementary readings |
| September 2 | Theory building | EPA Chapter 2, Chapter 2 supplementary readings |
| September 4 | The bibliographic search | EPA chapters 3-4, Chapter 3 supplementary readings |
| September 9 | Operationalization | EPA Chapter 5, Chapter 5 supplementary readings |
| September 11 | Research design and sampling | EPA Chapter 6, Chapter 6 supplementary readings |
| September 16 | Research design and sampling | EPA Chapter 7, Chapter 7 supplementary readings |
| September 18 | <i>DEADLINE: Research topics due</i> | No readings |
| September 23 | Survey research | EPA Chapter 8, Chapter 8 supplementary readings |
| September 25 | Scaling techniques | EPA Chapter 9, Chapter 9 supplementary readings |

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| September 30 | Content Analysis | EPA Chapter 10, Chapter 10 supplementary readings |
| October 2 | Aggregate Data | EPA Chapter 11, Chapter 11 supplementary readings |
| October 7 | Comparative Research | EPA Chapter 12, Chapter 12 supplementary readings |
| October 9 | Data preparation and description | EPA Chapter 14-15, Chapter 14-15 supplementary readings |
| October 14 | Summarizing distributions on one variable | EPA Chapter 16, Chapter 16 supplementary readings |
| October 16 | DEADLINE: Literature reviews and preliminary paper outlines due | EPA Chapter 22 |
| October 21 | No Classes, Fall Break | |
| October 23 | Examining relationships between two or several variables | EPA Chapter 17, Chapter 17 supplementary readings |
| October 28 | Examining relationships between two or several variables | EPA Chapter 18, Chapter 18 supplementary readings |
| October 30 | Introduction to qualitative methods and direct observation | EPA Introduction and Chapter 19, Introduction and Chapter 19 supplementary readings |
| November 4 | Focus groups and elite interviews | EPA Chapters 20-21, Chapters 20-21 supplementary readings |
| November 6 | Individual Meetings in Dr. Konitzer's Office | No Readings |
| November 11 | Individual Meetings in Dr. Konitzer's Office | No Readings |
| November 13 | DEADLINE: Draft of manuscripts Workshop on research presentations | No Readings |
| November 18 | Presentations | No Readings |
| November 20 | Presentations | No Readings |
| November 25 | Presentations | No Readings |
| November 27 | No Classes, Thanksgiving Break | |
| December 2 | Office hours | No Readings |

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| December 4 | Office hours | No Readings |
| Final Exam Day December 8 | <i>DEADLINE: Final draft of manuscripts due</i> | |