

PSCI 3301: Research Methods in the Social Sciences (WIN), Fall 2010

TR 1:30–2:45 p.m., 219 Pellegrino Hall

Dr. Christopher N. Lawrence <christopher.lawrence@tamiu.edu>, <http://www.cnlawrence.com/teaching>

Office: 313 Lamar Bruni Vergara Science Center (LBVSC)

Hours: MTWR 12:15–1:20 p.m., MW 5:00–5:50 p.m., or by appointment.

The purpose of this course is to train students in how to analyze political and social phenomena in a rigorous and scientific manner. This knowledge requires an understanding of two different components: research design and statistics.

In the first component, students will learn how to discriminate between theories, pose proper research questions, construct a relevant hypothesis, make valid causal inferences, operationalize concepts, and test their hypotheses. The latter component offers the student a “statistical toolbox” to use as he or she pursues the scientific study of the social sciences. This component covers quantitative topics such as central tendency and dispersion, measures of association, and regression analysis, using both manual computation and computer software.

Above all else, it is my hope that this course will whet your appetite for the study of politics and sociology as a *science*, and thus prepare you to better understand the content of future classes in the social sciences and perform your own inquiries into political and social phenomena.

To be successful in this class, you should have already completed the college’s requirement of six hours in college-level mathematics, including at least one course in college algebra.

Finally, this course is designated by the university as a **writing intensive course**, with over 60% of your final grade being determined based on written assignments—homework, lab reports, the research design paper, and essay-based exams. To succeed in this course, you should have already completed English Composition I and II (ENGL 1301 and 1302 or their equivalents).

Student Learning Objectives: Ideally, at the conclusion of this course, you will have a greater understanding of

- ▷ the scientific foundations of social inquiry.
- ▷ the problems associated with measuring social phenomena.
- ▷ how to translate abstract concepts into measurable variables.
- ▷ how to test hypotheses about the relationships between variables.
- ▷ the appropriate tests for relationships among variables.
- ▷ how to read and understand existing social scientific research.
- ▷ how to select appropriate research topics.
- ▷ how to produce a written *literature review* of existing research.
- ▷ how to organize and write a research paper in the social sciences.

Required Materials: There are two required books for this course:

- ▷ Philip H. Pollock III. 2009. *The Essentials of Political Analysis*, 3rd ed. Washington: CQ Press. ISBN 978-0-87289-606-2.
- ▷ Philip H. Pollock III. 2009. *An SPSS Companion to Political Analysis*, 3rd ed. Washington: CQ Press. ISBN 978-0-87289-607-9.

These textbooks should be available, new and used, at the TAMIU Bookstore in the University Success Center; you may also be able to order them on-line at a discount. They are also available in a bundled package, ISBN 978-1-60426-507-1, which may be less expensive.

If you do not already own a guide to writing college-level papers (perhaps from another class), I also strongly recommend that you purchase or otherwise obtain a reference book on college-level writing. If you need guidance in selecting a book, feel free to ask for recommendations.

You should also expect to be provided with additional course materials being developed by Dr. Lawrence and professors at other universities as part of an ongoing NSF-funded project to develop “open content” materials for political science research methods courses. These materials will be distributed through ANGEL or in handout form.

You will also need a scientific, financial, or statistical calculator if you do not already have one—it will need to be capable of calculating square roots at a *minimum*. I would also recommend obtaining a **USB flash drive**, if you do not already have one, for use during the labs.

Grading: Your final grade in this course will be based on the following elements, weighted as specified below:

Research Design Paper	25%
Midterm Exam	25%
Final Exam	25%
Homework	10%
Lab Exercises	10%
Participation	5%
Attendance	(see below)

The following letter grades can be earned in this course:

Weighted Average	≥ 90.0	≥ 80.0	≥ 70.0	≥ 60.0	< 60.0
Grade	A	B	C	D	F

Exams: The midterm and final exams will be in-class examinations, consisting of short-answer questions and statistical problems. The midterm exam will cover topics covered up to that point in the course; per college policy, the final exam is *comprehensive*.

On the quantitative portions of both exams, you will be expected to show all of your work. If you do not show sufficient work to indicate how you arrived at your answer, **you will not receive any credit for that question**, even if your answer is mathematically “correct.”

Homework and Lab Assignments: The class will include regularly-scheduled homework assignments, designed to improve your understanding of the material presented in the lecture. An assignment will also be included as part of each lab.

Homework assignments and labs, unlike the exams, will primarily be graded on the basis of whether or not a reasonable effort was made to correctly answer the problems (correctness is a secondary consideration). It is in your best interest—both in terms of your grade on the homework, and your performance on the exams—to complete these assignments to the best of your ability.

Lab assignments will generally be due at the beginning of class at the next scheduled meeting after the lab. Homework assignments will generally be due 5–7 days after they are assigned.

Research Design Paper: The research design paper will be approximately 10–12 pages in length in which you will propose an empirical, quantitative research project in political science or sociology, broadly defined.

You will turn in a paper topic on **Tuesday, September 28th** at the beginning of class.

After selecting an appropriate topic, you will write a research design paper in which you:

1. explain the relevance of the topic;
2. conduct a **literature review** critiquing *at least ten* items of previous literature on (or directly related to) the topic, the majority of which must have appeared in academic journals or scholarly books; and
3. propose a hypothesis (or hypotheses) and explain how this hypothesis (or these hypotheses) will be tested.

Your paper must be an individual effort; you may consult with me, the TAMIU Writing Center, other faculty members, or other students, but the writing and research must be substantially your own work.

The body of your paper should be double-spaced and written using a proportional typeface (either 11 point or 12

point), with one-inch margins and including page numbers.¹ You should include a title page with the date, title, and appropriate identifying information.

The paper must consistently utilize the citation style of the [American Political Science Association](#) or [American Sociological Association](#), include a full *bibliography* listing the works cited in your paper, and be written in standard English using coherent prose and acceptable grammar. Please refer to *The Style Manual for Political Science* published by the APSA for a complete guide to the proper use of APSA style; similarly, the ASA has published the *ASA Style Guide*.

The paper will be completed in four stages. As noted above, the first stage will be to turn in a brief explanation of what political or social phenomenon you wish to study, which is due on **Tuesday, September 28th**. I will read each proposal, comment on it, and return it to you.

In the second stage, you will compile a *literature review* incorporating at least *ten* examples of existing research in support of your proposal. I will provide detailed guidance on how to compile a literature review during this portion of the course. This literature review is due on **Thursday, October 21st** at the beginning of class. I will read each literature review, make comments, and return it to you.

The third stage, a complete final draft of the paper (including all three elements: the explanation of your topic, the literature review, and the formal research design), incorporating revisions to the literature review in line with my feedback, is due on **Tuesday, November 16th** at the beginning of class. You will receive written feedback on the paper before the Thanksgiving break.

Finally, in the fourth stage, you should revise your paper in line with this feedback before turning in the final research design paper, which is due on **Thursday, December 2nd** at the beginning of class.

Each stage of the paper will be an element of the research design paper grade. The “new” material in each subsequent draft of a paper will generally be graded more leniently than material that was expected to be revised in the more complete draft. You should expect *substantially greater* grade reductions for problems that remain uncorrected after being pointed out to you in subsequent drafts of a paper, even if the penalties for those problems were relatively light in the initial draft where the problems appeared.

Each stage of the paper (except the topic statement) must be submitted **both** in paper (hard copy) format to the professor and in the appropriate TurnItIn.com “drop box” on the TAMIU Angel E-Learning website. In the event that the timeliness of an assignment is in question, the time submitted to Angel will be used as the definitive record of when the assignment was received, provided the hard copy is substantially identical. The professor will assign a grade of zero (0) for any portion not received in a reasonably timely fashion in *both* formats.

Students should expect that their draft and final papers will be graded using the TAMIU Writing Intensive course rubric; a copy of this rubric will be posted in ANGEL for your reference.

Participation and attendance: 5% of your grade will be based on your level of participation in class. This will be evaluated holistically by the professor.

In addition, every day that attendance is taken, you will receive points toward a daily attendance bonus awarded at the end of the semester. The maximum bonus is 4 percentage points (4/10 of a letter grade), and will be awarded on a *sliding scale* based on the number of classes you attend.

Students who have four (4) or more absences—the equivalent of *two weeks of class*—that are not *excused* should expect to receive a substantial reduction in their participation grade and no daily attendance bonus. The full definition of an excused absence, and acceptable documentation thereof, is below.

Class Policies: I make it a general policy to treat all students as adults. While this affords you, the student, greater freedom than you may have had in high school, it also means that you must take a greater personal responsibility

¹Proportional typefaces include Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri, Garamond, etc. “Typewriter-style” (constant-width) typefaces such as Courier New are not acceptable.

for your performance in the course. I am always happy to meet with students to discuss their concerns about the course, but I will not necessarily assume that you are in difficulty simply because you perform poorly on a homework assignment or disappear from class for a few days.

Please provide a respectful learning environment for your fellow students. Repeated tardiness, cell phone disruptions, reading materials unrelated to the course (such as the student newspaper), abuse of communication technologies (e.g., web browsing/IMing/texting during class), or other disruptive behavior during class will adversely affect your grade. Per university policy, repeated disruptive behavior may result in your involuntary withdrawal from the course.

Please arrive at class *on time* and mute (or switch off) all pagers, cell phones, and alarms during class.

Make-up examinations must be scheduled two weeks in advance in the case of an **unavoidable** planned or reasonably-foreseeable absence; otherwise, make-ups will be given only in the case of an illness or emergency that is properly **documented**. Please refer to the [student absence policy](#) posted on the TAMIU website for examples of absences that will ordinarily be excused by the professor and types of documentation that will be acceptable; examples of acceptable documentation may include a doctor's note, accident report (from a federal, state, or local law enforcement agency), notification of travel dates from an athletics coach, or summons from a court. Should you have three final exams scheduled for one day, please consult with me to arrange an alternative time to take your final. Students who miss (or who are more than 15 minutes late for) an appointment for a make-up examination should not expect another make-up opportunity.

Any extra-credit opportunities offered by the professor will be offered to **all** students on an equal basis. Please do not ask the professor for individualized extra credit opportunities.

I do not provide lecture notes for students under any circumstances. You will have to rely on the generosity of a classmate or make use of any materials provided on the textbook website or the textbook's study guide, if applicable.²

This syllabus is subject to revision by the professor.

Late Work: A late penalty of up to **5 percentage points per day** will apply to work turned in after the deadline for **Grade Appeals:** If you wish to dispute a grade on a particular assignment for any reason other than an obvious arithmetic error on my part, you will need to type a one-page explanation of your position and turn it in, along with the original graded assignment, *at least one week after* the assignment is returned to you. I will then consider your appeal and make a determination. Appeals must be submitted in hard copy format; no appeals submitted via email will be considered.

For appeals regarding your final grade in the course, please consult the Student Handbook and Catalog for procedures.

University and College Policies: The following policies of the TAMIU College of Arts and Sciences and Texas A&M International University are reproduced here for your information; you may already be familiar with them from other courses, but please review them.

Classroom Behavior The College of Arts and Sciences encourages classroom discussion and academic debate as an essential intellectual activity. It is essential that students learn to express and defend their beliefs, but it is also essential that they learn to listen and respond respectfully to others whose beliefs they may not share. The College will always tolerate diverse, unorthodox, and unpopular points of view, but it will not tolerate condescending or insulting remarks. When students verbally abuse or ridicule and intimidate others whose views they do not agree with, they subvert the free exchange of ideas that should characterize a university classroom. If their actions are deemed by the professor to be disruptive, they will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, which may include being involuntarily withdrawn from the class.

²Students with disabilities who require notes or other learning environment accommodations should consult with the Student Disability Services office for assistance.

Plagiarism and Cheating Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's work as your own. 1) When you borrow someone else's facts, ideas, or opinions and put them entirely in your own words, you must acknowledge that these thoughts are not your own by immediately citing the source in your paper. Failure to do this is plagiarism. 2) When you also borrow someone else's words (short phrases, clauses, or sentences), you must enclose the copied words in quotation marks as well as citing the source. Failure to do this is plagiarism. 3) When you present someone else's paper or exam (stolen, borrowed, or bought) as your own, you have committed a clearly intentional form of intellectual theft and have put your academic future in jeopardy. This is the worst form of plagiarism.

Here is another explanation from the 2010, sixth edition of the Manual of The American Psychological Association (APA):

Plagiarism: Researchers do not claim the words and ideas of another as their own; they give credit where credit is due. Quotations marks should be used to indicate the exact words of another. Each time you paraphrase another author (i.e., summarize a passage or rearrange the order of a sentence and change some of the words), you need to credit the source in the text.

The key element of this principle is that authors do not present the work of another as if it were their own words. This can extend to ideas as well as written words. If authors model a study after one done by someone else, the originating author should be given credit. If the rationale for a study was suggested in the Discussion section of someone else's article, the person should be given credit. Given the free exchange of ideas, which is very important for the health of intellectual discourse, authors may not know where an idea for a study originated. If authors do know, however, they should acknowledge the source; this includes personal communications. (pp. 15-16)

Consult the Writing Center or a recommended guide to documentation and research such as the Manual of the APA or the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers for guidance on proper documentation. If you still have doubts concerning proper documentation, seek advice from your instructor prior to submitting a final draft.

Penalties for Plagiarism Should a faculty member discover that a student has committed plagiarism, the student will receive a grade of "F" in that course and the matter will be referred to the Honor Council for possible disciplinary action.

Penalties for Cheating Should a faculty member discover a student cheating on an exam or quiz or other class project, the student will receive a "zero" for the assignment and not be allowed to make the assignment up. The incident must be reported to the chair of the department and to the Honor Council. If the cheating is extensive, however, or if the assignment constitutes a major grade for the course (e.g., a final exam), or if the student has cheated in the past, the student should receive an "F" in the course, and the matter should be referred to the Honor Council. Under no circumstances should a student who deserves an "F" in the course be allowed to withdraw from the course with a "W."

Student Right of Appeal Faculty will notify students immediately via the student's TAMIU e-mail account that they have submitted plagiarized work. Students have the right to appeal a faculty member's charge of academic dishonesty by notifying the TAMIU Honor Council of their intent to appeal as long as the notification of appeal comes within 3 business days of the faculty member's e-mail message to the student. The Student Handbook provides details.

UConnect, TAMIU E-Mail, and Dusty Alert Personal Announcements sent to students through TAMIU's UConnect Portal and TAMIU E-mail are the official means of communicating course and university business with students and faculty—not the U.S. Mail and not other e-mail addresses. Students and faculty must check UConnect and their TAMIU e-mail accounts regularly, if not daily. Not having seen an important TAMIU e-mail or UConnect message from a faculty member, chair, or dean is not accepted as an excuse for failure to take important action. Students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to sign-up for Dusty Alert (see www.tamtu.edu). Dusty Alert is an instant cell phone text-messaging system allowing the university to communicate immediately with you if there is an on-campus emergency, something of immediate danger to you, or a campus closing.

Copyright Restrictions The Copyright Act of 1976 grants to copyright owners the exclusive right to reproduce their works and distribute copies of their work. Works that receive copyright protection include published works such as a textbook. Copying a textbook without permission from the owner of the copyright may constitute copyright infringement. Civil and criminal penalties may be assessed for copyright infringement. Civil penalties include damages up to \$100,000; criminal penalties include a fine up to \$250,000 and imprisonment.

Students with Disabilities Texas A&M International University seeks to provide reasonable accommodations for all qualified persons with disabilities. This University will adhere to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations as required to afford equal education opportunity. It is the

student's responsibility to register with the Director of Student Counseling and to contact the faculty member in a timely fashion to arrange for suitable accommodations.

Incompletes Students who are unable to complete a course should withdraw from the course before the final date for withdrawal and receive a "W." To qualify for an "incomplete" and thus have the opportunity to complete the course at a later date, a student must meet the following criteria:

1. The student must have completed 90% of the course work assigned before the final date for withdrawing from a course with a "W", and the student must be passing the course;
2. The student cannot complete the course because an accident, an illness, or a traumatic personal or family event occurred after the final date for withdrawal from a course;
3. The student must sign an "Incomplete Grade Contract" and secure signatures of approval from the professor and the college dean.
4. The student must agree to complete the missing course work before the end of the next long semester; failure to meet this deadline will cause the "I" to automatically be converted to a "F"; extensions to this deadline may be granted by the dean of the college.

Student Responsibility for Dropping a Course It is the responsibility of the **student** to drop the course before the final date for withdrawal from a course. Faculty members, in fact, may not drop a student from a course.

Independent Study Course Independent Study (IS) courses are offered only under exceptional circumstances. Required courses intended to build academic skills may not be taken as IS (e.g., clinical supervision and internships). No student will take more than one IS course per semester. Moreover, IS courses are limited to seniors and graduate students. Summer IS courses must continue through both summer sessions.

Final Examination The final examination must be comprehensive and must contain a written component. The written component should comprise 20% of the final exam grade. Exceptions to this policy must receive the approval of the department chair and the dean at the beginning of the semester.

Grade Changes & Appeals Faculty are authorized to change final grades only when they have committed a computational error, and they must receive the approval of their department chairs and the dean to change the grade. As part of that approval, they must attach a detailed explanation of the reason for the mistake. Only in rare cases would another reason be entertained as legitimate for a grade change. A student who is unhappy with his or her grade on an assignment must discuss the situation with the faculty member teaching the course. If students believe that they have been graded unfairly, they have the right to appeal the grade using a grade appeal process in the Student Handbook and the Faculty Handbook.

Withdrawal Deadlines: The last day to drop the course without it appearing on your transcript is Tuesday, September 7. The withdrawal deadline (last day for a "W") is Friday, November 5.

Course Outline: Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class and will be posted to the course calendar and in Angel. We will not necessarily read books in the order they appear on the syllabus; please be sure you read the correct chapters *in advance* of the designated class dates.

While the professor may periodically remind students of upcoming scheduled events, it is **your responsibility** to be familiar with this schedule and any changes to it.

Aug 24: What is Social Research? Introduction to the course; paths to knowledge in the social sciences.

Aug 26, 31: The Problem of Measurement Defining, measuring and operationalizing concepts; reliability and validity.
Readings: *Essentials* Chapter 1.

Sep 2 No Class: APSA Conference.

Sep 7: Describing Variables Levels of measurement; descriptive statistics.
Reading: *Essentials* Chapter 2.

Sep 9: Lab 1 Introducing SPSS.
Readings: *Companion* Chapters 1–2.

Sep 14, 16: Explanations and Hypotheses Developing explanations, hypotheses, and hypothesis tests; selecting research topics.
Readings: *Essentials* Chapter 3; *Companion* Chapter 11.

- Sep 21: Research Designs** Experimental, quasi-experimental, and controlled-comparison designs.
Reading: *Essentials* Chapter 4.
- Sep 23: Lab 2** Transforming Variables and Simple Comparisons.
Readings: *Companion* Chapters 3–4.
- Sep 28: Controlled Comparisons** Types of relationships among three (or more) variables and the concept of *control*; how to make controlled comparisons.
Reading: *Essentials* Chapter 5.
Research topic due.
- Sep 30: Lab 3** Controlled Comparisons.
Reading: *Companion* Chapter 5.
- Oct 5 Midterm Exam.**
- Oct 7 (part)** Writing a research paper, including the literature review.
Readings: *Companion* Chapter 11; handouts on plagiarism and literature reviews.
- Oct 7 (part), 12, 14: Sampling and Inference** Random samples; the central limit theorem; inference using the normal and *t* distributions; inference based on sample percentages and proportions.
Reading: *Essentials* Chapter 6.
- Oct 19, 21: Hypothesis Testing** Statistical significance; independent-samples tests for differences of means and proportions.
Readings: *Essentials* Chapter 7, pp. 145–54.
- Oct 21 Literature review due.**
- Oct 26: Lab 4** Inference using the Mean.
Reading: *Companion* Chapter 6.
- Oct 28; Nov 2: Measures of Association** Chi-square, lambda, and ordinal measures of association between variables.
Readings: *Essentials* Chapter 7, pp. 154–66.
- Nov 4: Lab 5** Chi-Square and Measures of Association.
Reading: *Companion* Chapter 7.
- Nov 9, 11: Linear Regression** Correlation; bivariate regression.
Reading: *Essentials* Chapter 8, pp. 170–84.
- Nov 16: Lab 6** Linear Regression and Correlation.
Reading: *Companion* Chapter 8.
Complete draft of research design paper due.
- Nov 18, 23: Multiple Regression** Dummy variables; multiple regression; interaction effects.
Reading: *Essentials* Chapter 8, pp. 184–94.
- Nov 25 No Class: Thanksgiving break.**
- Nov 30: Lab 7** Dummy Variables and Interaction Effects.
Reading: *Companion* Chapter 9.
- Dec 2** Review for final exam.
Final research design paper due.
- Thursday, December 9, 11:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m. Final Exam.**