Class information:
Tuesdays 8:30am-11:20am
KTH-709

Instructor information:
Dr. Karen Bird
Email: kbird@mcmaster.ca
Office: KTH-527
Phone: ext. 23124
Office hours: Mon 9-11am or by appointment

Course description:
Designed to explore philosophical assumptions in political science, theory, and matters of evidence and judgment, this course presents an introduction to variations in research design, empirical methods, and the execution of research. The primary aims are to make you a more sophisticated consumer of diverse empirical research, to heighten your attention to the need for methodological rigour, and expose you to a variety of strategies and methods for conducting your own original, independent research. The course will not cover every method or every approach. There is simply not time. However, it is expected that by the end of the course, you will be a better reader of research, and will have a better understanding of how to design and conduct original, independent research. This is not a course in data analysis. Rather, it is a course on how to approach political science research. Students looking for coverage of quantitative research methods and analysis should consider taking POL 784 as a complement to this course.

Note: One’s choice of approach, method and analysis can be controversial. Many supporters of specific methods are unsympathetic to others. This course endeavours to present an overview of the various perspectives and approaches toward empirical research in political science. However, no method is perfect, thus this course will encourage thoughtful critiques of all methods. Students are expected to come with an open mind and be prepared to think, analyze and challenge their own preconceptions about how research is conducted by political scientists and what makes for good research. As one aim of this course is to help students to advance their own research projects, it is expected that you will approach discussions in the spirit of genuine respect and mutual support for each other and our various projects.

Learning objectives:
The course will help you to:
• assess and understand whether political science is a “science,” and why political scientists either agree with or object to that characterization;
• build capacity in selecting research topics, identifying research problems, formulating research proposals and research programs, and developing research designs that bring evidence to bear on causal or descriptive/conceptual propositions;
• through the topics covered, gain an appreciation of major issues related to research design, and demonstrate your ability to navigate through them.
Course materials:
Required texts are available for sale at the Campus Store and on reserve loan at Mills Library:


Readings not drawn from these books can be accessed via Scholars Portal, or made available on AvenueToLearn (http://avenue.mcmaster.ca/).

Assignments and evaluation:

- **Participation (20%)**
  Your attendance and active and constructive participation in seminar are central to succeeding in this course. You are expected to complete all reading assignments for each week. You should think about the readings and have at least 1-2 questions or critical reflections ready to advance the discussion.

- **Book review (10%) – due date: Fri. Oct. 6**
  You will choose a book from the list below (or one agreed upon by the instructor) and prepare a book review in which the author’s central research question, analytical approach, research design, methodological choices, and major findings/conclusions are identified and critiqued. You are expected to comment on how the author’s approach to the research shaped and/or influenced the conclusions reached. This paper should be approximately 3-5 pages and no more than 1,500 words (1.5 line spacing preferred).

Books:

- **Research design comment paper (2 x 10%) – due dates: Tue. Oct. 24 & Nov. 14**
  There are six weeks in which we read about and discuss specific elements of research design. You are to submit two papers over this period, in which you reflect and comment on how issues raised in the readings apply to your own research project. Your comment papers are intended to help you to work through aspects of research design and methodology as they apply to your own research design proposal. The work you do here should help you to advance your final term paper. Each paper should be approximately 3-5 pages and no more than 1,500 words (1.5 line spacing preferred).

- **Qualitative methods presentation & handout (10%) – Tues. Nov. 21 & 28**
  Each student will choose a qualitative research method (e.g., elite interviewing, focus groups, participant observation, content or discourse analysis, archival methods, etc.), and present a 15-minute overview of that method in class. A detailed handout of methods and associated readings will be available on ATL. You are to look this over carefully, and come to class on Week 6 prepared to sign up for a selected method (please have a first and second choice ready). Once you have your assigned topic, you will read 4 or 5 related readings, and then present an overview addressing: i)
the nuts and bolts of how the method is done; ii) the kinds of research problems to which it can be usefully applied; iii) its strengths and weaknesses; iv) tips and traps for applying it effectively. If possible, choose a method that you anticipate using for your own research, and discuss v) advantages and challenges of using it in that context. Please provide a short handout that can be shared with the other members of the class to help build a personal resource library. You are also welcome to use power-point slides. The final two weeks of regular seminar will be given over to these presentations.

- **Research design paper, workshop & peer critique (40%)** – Fri. Dec. 8, MUSC-311/313
  - **Peer critique (10%)** – due: Fri. Dec. 1
  - **Final paper (30%)** – due: Fri. Dec. 15

The major assignment for the course is a research design proposal, in which you will present your research question and initial plans for empirical research to answer that question. Hopefully, this can form the basis of a tentative dissertation idea. Your paper should be approximately 4,000–5,000 words (12-16 pages, 1.5 line spacing preferred), and should apply relevant knowledge you have gained throughout the course. The proposal should identify the topic and provide a concise literature review that serves to frame your research question, problem, or testable hypothesis. You should develop the concepts, and outline the procedure (case selection, operationalization, measurement, data) to be used. Specific data gathering techniques (i.e., details of interview or survey questions, etc.) are not expected, but a clear discussion of the type(s) of data required to address the research question should be developed. You are also expected to demonstrate some awareness of concrete opportunities and/or challenges regarding data collection and overall project feasibility – for example, ethical, language, trust or safety problems you will need to confront in fieldwork; or availability of existing data, expert reports, or networks of key actors related to your specific topic. As you would in a grant proposal, you should write for an informed but non-specialist reader who wants to know why your research question is a novel and important one, how your research will help to answer it, what are the concrete steps that will be involved in the research process, and what is the overall feasibility of your project.

The **first draft of your research design is due on Fri. Dec. 1**. Each student will sign up as a discussant, and drafts will be distributed so that peer critiques can be prepared for the Proposal Workshop on Fri. Dec. 8. Your **written peer critique should be approximately 2-3 pages, and is to be submitted to the instructor at the Workshop**.

The **Proposal Workshop** is a collaborative exercise at which each student will present his/her research proposal, and discussants will follow with their critiques. Time will also be set aside for general discussion and feedback on each proposal. Note that faculty will be invited to attend, so that they can learn more about the research that first-year PhD and MA-thesis students intend to undertake. To strengthen the collaborative ethos of our graduate program, the department will host all participants to lunch. A detailed Workshop itinerary will be distributed one to two weeks prior, so that everyone knows their role and allotted time for presentation. You should plan on reserving the full day for this exercise.

You will have the opportunity to revise your paper in light of comments and discussion at the Workshop. A hard copy of the **final paper is due on Fri. Dec. 15**.
**Course Policies:**
This syllabus is tentative and subject to change. Students are responsible for finding out about announced changes if they miss class.

- **MA and PhD students**
Both MA and PhD students are welcome to enrol in this course. However, the course is intended to prepare students to design and conduct thesis research and much of the discussion will focus on the relative value of certain approaches or methods for MA or PhD thesis-length studies.

- **General evaluation policies**
Assignments are to be submitted in hard copy. They can be handed in during class, or to my mailbox no later than 4pm on the due dates, unless otherwise specified. Assignments handed in after the deadline will lose 5% per day (i.e., half a point on a 10-point assignment), including weekend days. If you anticipate having problems meeting these deadlines, please contact me before the assignment is due to discuss your situation. To avoid late penalties and ensure fairness, written documentation of your emergency may be required. Finally, I reserve the right to use my judgement in calculating the final grade. If you choose especially challenging assignments for yourself, or tend to go the easy route, I will take that into account.

- **Missed classes**
Regular attendance is expected of all graduate students. No 'make-up' assignments will be provided in the event of missed classes; rather students should double their effort in subsequent classes and assignments.

**McMaster Policies:**

**Academic Dishonesty**
You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”) and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3, located at [http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/](http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/)

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:
1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

**Statement on Electronic Resources**
In this course we will be using Email and/or AvenueToLearn (ATL). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become
apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the
technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have
any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

**Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy**
Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail
communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must
originate from the student’s own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects
confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure
that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes
aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at
his or her discretion.

**Course Modification Statement**
The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term.
The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances.
If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the
students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the
responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the
term and to note any changes.

**Students with Disabilities**
Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS)
to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged
for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext.
28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University’s Policy
for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignments due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION and PERSPECTIVES ON POLITICAL SCIENCE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sept. 5</td>
<td>No class meeting</td>
<td>Review syllabus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sept. 12</td>
<td>So, you’re thinking of becoming a political scientist?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sept. 19</td>
<td>What is science? Is political science a science?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sept. 26</td>
<td>Unity, plurality, praxis: US and Canadian political science</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>ELEMENTS OF RESEARCH DESIGN</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Oct. 3</td>
<td>Research ethics</td>
<td>Book review due Fri. Oct. 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>MID-TERM BREAK</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Oct. 17</td>
<td>Choosing topics and building arguments</td>
<td>Sign-up for qualitative method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Oct. 24</td>
<td>Conceptualization, description and measurement</td>
<td>Research design comment paper 1 (wks 5,6,7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Oct. 31</td>
<td>Construing causation and explanation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Nov. 7</td>
<td>Comparative and case study approaches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Nov. 14</td>
<td>Experimental approaches</td>
<td>Research design comment paper 2 (wks 8,9,10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SURVEY OF QUALITATIVE METHODS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Nov. 21</td>
<td>Roundtable I</td>
<td>Qualitative methods oral presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Nov. 28</td>
<td>Roundtable II</td>
<td>Qualitative methods oral presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>COURSE WRAP-UP</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Fri. Dec. 8</td>
<td>Research Proposal Workshop</td>
<td>Submit draft research proposal Fri. Dec. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Submit peer critique at Workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fri. Dec. 15</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Final paper due</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Detailed Topics and Readings

**WK 1 – Sept. 5**
No meeting

**WK 2 – Sept. 12**
So, you’re thinking of becoming a political scientist?

**WK 3 – Sept. 19**
What is Science? Is Political Science a Science?
- Chalmers, ch. 1, 5-9.

Additional recommended readings:
**WK 4 – Sept. 26**

**Unity, Plurality, Praxis: US and Canadian Political Science**

- Gerring, ch. 1, 13, 14, and “Postscript: Justifications” (pp 394-401).

**Additional recommended readings:**

**WK 5 – Oct. 3**

**Research Ethics**

Additional recommended readings:


**WK 6 – Oct. 17**  
**Choosing Topics and Building Arguments**

- Maxwell, ch. 1, 2, 4
- Gerring, ch. 2-4

Additional recommended readings:

Conceptualization, Description and Measurement

- Maxwell, ch. 3
- Gerring, ch. 5-7

Additional suggested readings:

Construing Causation and Explanation

- Gerring, ch. 8, 9, and pp 321-33.


**Additional suggested readings:**

**WK 9 – Nov. 7 Comparative and Case Study Approaches**


**Additional suggested readings:**


**WK 10 – Nov. 14** Experimental Approaches

- Gerring, ch. 10

Additional suggested readings:

- Gerber, Alan and Donald Green (2012). Field Experiment: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation (W.W. Norton & Company)

**WK 11 – Nov. 21** Qualitative Methods Roundtable I

**WK 12 – Nov. 28** Qualitative Methods Roundtable II

**WK 13– Dec. 8** Research Proposal Workshop