

## Political Science 450 | Research in Biology, Psychology, and Politics

University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
Spring Semester 2014 | Section 001  
TR 9:30-10:45am | Oldfather Hall 304

Dr. Ingrid Haas

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**Office hours:** Tuesdays & Thursdays 11-12 (and by appointment)

**Course website:** Accessible through <http://blackboard.unl.edu>

### INTRODUCTION

This course acts as the capstone for the “Biology, Psychology, and Politics” area of emphasis in the Political Science Department. The goals of the course are two-fold: expose students to current research on the psychological and biological underpinnings of political behavior, and train students to design, conduct, and analyze research in this interdisciplinary area. We will divide our time between reading contemporary theory and research from psychology and political science, discussing research design and methods, and preparing for and conducting original research projects over the course of the semester. Projects will be conducted in small groups of students. The course format will be a mix of lectures, student presentations, and group workshops. In this course all student projects are developed around a focused area of investigation. The topic for research for this course changes with each instructor. This semester, the topic will be “Political Attitudes.”

Note: This course is open to political science majors and minors, as well as any other interested student. The only prerequisite for the course is POLS 286 (Political Analysis), but I am waiving it this term.

This course has been approved for ACE Learning Outcome #6 (Use knowledge, theories, methods, and historical perspectives appropriate to the social sciences to understand and evaluate human behavior).

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- Identify and apply the scientific methods that are used by researchers in political psychology.
- Understand the steps involved in good research: beginning with asking good questions and ending with dissemination of results.
- Gain confidence in your ability to conduct research.
- Improve your ability to think critically about the research that you encounter in day-to-day life.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

#### Discussion Leading

Discussion is a major component of the research process. Many ideas are generated and developed in discussion with others. On each Article Discussion Day, we will discuss two journal articles. Pairs (or trios) of students will lead discussions of each article. By the end of the first week of class you will submit preference sheets ranking your top choices of articles to lead discussion of. You will be

notified via email of the article you will lead discussion of and whom you will lead with. It will be your responsibility to meet with your discussion-leading partner outside of class time to prepare for leading the discussion.

### **Discussion Questions**

On the days that you do not lead discussion, you will be assigned to read ONE of the two papers for that particular day. You will be asked to write discussion questions relating to this reading.

**Discussion questions must be uploaded to Blackboard and emailed to the discussion leaders (to be announced) by NOON the day before the discussion occurs (see course schedule).** These questions should not be of the variety that can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no”; rather they should be ones that stimulate discussion. So, send in questions that you’d like to hear others’ reactions to. Good discussion questions will be ones that require your fellow students and discussion leaders to think critically about the material, consider how it relates to other articles we have read, and/or generate novel research hypotheses.

Although you are not required to read the other paper for that particular day, you are HIGHLY ENCOURAGED to do so. Not only are these articles interesting to most students, reading broadly will make it easier to generate research ideas for your projects.

### **Short Assignments**

There are four short assignments to be completed during (when time permitting) or after class. These are designed to reinforce concepts discussed in class. These are to be done INDIVIDUALLY, unless otherwise noted.

### **Midterm**

There will be an open-book, take-home midterm in this class to assess how well you have learned the basic concepts discussed in class, in the text, and practiced in the assignments.

### **Research Project**

The ultimate goal in this class is to perform a research study. To do so, you will need to generate a hypothesis, design a study, collect & analyze data, and then present the work to others in both verbal and written formats. Your performance on this project will be evaluated at various stages in a number of ways.

**Study Materials & Ethics Application.** You will be responsible for generating your own study materials and procedures, whether they are observations of natural behavior, surveys, computer programs, and/or physiological measurements. Part of your grade will be determined by both the creativity and appropriateness of the materials and procedures you decide to use. You will also be responsible for maintaining the highest ethical standards and practices. As such, you will be expected to document ethical safeguards.

**Group Presentation.** You will be asked to present your research idea and study materials as a group to the class. All members of the group will be expected to contribute in some way to this presentation. The presentation should present the theoretical and conceptual ideas behind the study, the study hypotheses, and proposed methods. The other members of the class will be expected to provide feedback to the presenters, asking questions to help them clarify their thinking and improving their study materials.

**Peer-Editing.** To assist you in writing up your research in an American Psychological Association (APA) style article, you will be asked to submit sections of your final paper to your peers in the class at various points during the quarter. That is, you will swap papers and exchange comments that range from simply formatting to abstract conceptual issues. This will allow you to identify potential problems and fix them before submitting the paper for a final grade.

**Data Preparation.** A lot of work goes into analyzing data. You will learn how to use statistical software to analyze and understand your data. You will be expected to bring your data to class in a way that facilitates efficient data analysis and discussion. More details of how to work with data will be provided throughout the semester.

**Conference Style Poster Presentation.** You will be expected to create a conference style research poster, a visual display of your research findings. Members of the Political Science Department will be invited to view these at the end of the quarter and ask you questions. Although there is only one poster per group, all members of the group are expected to help prepare and present the poster.

**Final Paper.** Each student is responsible for writing up their own final paper. This paper is to describe the research performed in an APA-style research article, detailing the conceptual background, materials and procedures, data analysis, discussion of results, and references.

### **Participation/Attendance**

Your active involvement in discussions and at various phases of the research process will be evaluated as part of your grade. Research is challenging, and will require active participation by all group members. On a related point, as you cannot participate if you are absent, attendance in each class will be carefully monitored and evaluated. If you cannot attend a class, you **MUST** notify the instructor **IN ADVANCE** for excusal. **Unexcused absences will result in a “0” for participation on that day.**

### **\*Note on “Free-Loading”:**

Although assigning projects by groups may suggest the possibility of “free-loading” and allowing others to do your work, there are several safeguards to prevent this. First, much of the work in this class will be performed individually (i.e., assignments, critique, midterm, final paper, participation). Moreover, all members of the group will each be asked to document who did what throughout the research process. The instructor will also be observing you throughout the process to monitor individual contributions to the research effort.

### **\*Note on Missed Assignments:**

You are responsible for turning in all assignments on time. The assignments in this course build upon one another very closely, so getting behind can have disastrous effects on your ability to complete the course successfully. For this reason, there is a very strict policy regarding late assignments: **late assignments (turned in after class time on the due date) will receive a “0”**. This penalty will be waived *only under extreme circumstances* (e.g., for severe medical reasons and/or family emergencies). **Should such circumstances arise, the student must contact the instructor immediately and submit suitable documentation.**

**GRADING**

Grading will be based on the various elements of the course, as listed below. All assignments will be graded on an individual basis, except for discussion-leading, the group research proposal presentation, and assignments marked, "1 per group."

Final grades will be determined using the following scale: 97-100% = A+, 93-96% = A, 90-92% = A-, 87-89% = B+, 83-86% = B, 80-82% = B-, 77-79% = C+, 73-76% = C, 70-72% = C-, 67-69% = D+, 63-66% = D, 60-62% = D-, below 60% = F. Pass/Fail grades require at least a C to pass. Incompletes are at the discretion of the instructor, and will only be considered under extreme circumstances.

<b>Assignments (20 points each)</b>	
Assignment 1: Variables	20 points
Assignment 2: Experiment vs. Non-Experiment	20 points
Assignment 3: References	20 points
Assignment 4: Interpreting Data	20 points
<b>Discussions</b>	
Discussion Leading with partner	40 points
Discussion Questions (3 x 10 points each)	30 points
<b>Participation/Attendance in class throughout semester</b>	100 points
<b>Midterm</b>	80 points
<b>Project Materials</b>	
Study Materials (1 per group)	40 points
Ethics Application (1 per group)	20 points
Dataset Preparation (1 per group)	20 points
<b>Project Presentations</b>	
Group Presentation (1 per group)	40 points
Conference Style Poster (1 per group)	80 points
Poster Presentation Participation	20 points
<b>Paper Presentation</b>	
Draft of Introduction & Methods	25 points
Peer Editing of Introduction & Methods	15 points
Draft of Results & Discussion	25 points
Peer Editing of Results & Discussion	15 points
<b>Final APA Style Paper</b>	150 points
<b>TOTAL</b>	780 points

## **ADDITIONAL COURSE POLICIES**

### **Communication**

The best way to reach me is through email. I check it often (more often than I check voicemail) and will do my best to respond to your questions within 24 hours. You are also welcome and encouraged to stop by my office during office hours, or make an appointment to meet with me at another time. I will send announcements electronically, so please check your email and the course website often.

### **Academic Misconduct Warning**

All work must be your own. Plagiarism and all other forms of cheating outlined by the University's Student Code of Conduct (Section 4.2) will not be tolerated in this class. Cheating or plagiarism will be reported through official university channels, and the consequences will be severe. The minimum punishment is usually failure in the course. No one exam or assignment is ever worth this penalty. To avoid missing out on a good college GPA, or even your degree, keep your eyes on your own test and write your own papers.

### **Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the instructor for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodation to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.

**READINGS**

Additional articles may be assigned throughout the semester at the instructor's discretion.

**Required Textbook**

Leary, M. R. (2011). *Introduction to Behavioral Research Methods* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Pearson.  
[ISBN-13: 978-0205203987]

**Readings Assigned to All Students** (articles will be posted on Blackboard)

Bem, D. J. (2004). Writing the empirical journal article. In J. M. Darley, M. P. Zanna, & H. L. Roediger (Eds.), *The Compleat Academic* (pp. 185-219). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Jordan, C. H., & Zanna, M. P. (1999). How to read a journal article in social psychology. In R.F. Baumeister (Ed.). *The Self in Social Psychology: Essential Readings* (pp. 461-470). Philadelphia: Psychology Press.

**Topic Readings** (you will pick one to lead with partner, others will be assigned)

Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1973). Attitudinal and normative variables as predictors of specific behaviors. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 27, 41-57.

Bizer, G. Y., & Petty, R. E. (2005). How we conceptualize our attitudes matters: The effects of valence framing on the resistance of political attitudes. *Political Psychology*, 26, 553-568.

Fazio, R. H., & Williams, C. J. (1986). Attitude accessibility as a moderator of the attitude-perception and attitude-behavior relations: An investigation of the 1984 presidential election. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 505-514.

Fazio, R. H., Sanbonmatsu, D. M., Powell, M. C., & Kardes, F. R. (1986). On the automatic activation of attitudes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50, 229-238.

Lord, C. G., Ross, L., & Lepper, M. R. (1979). Biased assimilation and attitude polarization: The effects of prior theories on subsequently considered evidence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37, 2098-2109.

Schwarz, N. (1999). Self-reports: How the questions shape the answers. *American Psychologist*, 54, 93-105.

Sweeney, P. D., & Gruber, K. L. (1984). Selective exposure: Voter information preferences and the Watergate affair. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 46, 1208-1221.

Zaller, J., & Feldman, S. (1992). A simple theory of the survey response: Answering questions versus revealing preferences. *American Journal of Political Science*, 36, 579-616.

### POLS 450 | TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Due dates for assignments and exams, as well as required readings, are listed below. Readings should be completed prior to class. Please note that this schedule represents a tentative plan and is subject to change at the instructor's discretion. Any changes will be announced in class.

WEEK	DATE	TOPIC	READING	ASSIGNMENTS
1	T 1/14	Introduction & Course Overview		
	R 1/16	Theories, Hypotheses, & Variables	Leary Ch. 1 & Ch. 9 (pp. 184-189)	Discussion Leading Preference Sheet
2	T 1/21	Research Design	Leary Ch. 7 (pp. 140-151, 154-156), Ch. 8 (pp. 163-170), Ch. 9, & Ch. 10	Assignment 1: Variables
	R 1/23	Reliability & Validity		Assignment 2: Research Design
3	T 1/28	Topic Overview  Article Discussion: Attitude Function	Fazio et al. (1986) Bizer & Petty (2005)  Recommended: Jordan & Zanna (1999)	Discussion Questions due by noon M 1/27
	R 1/30	Article Discussion: Attitude Measurement	Schwarz (1999) Zaller & Feldman (1992)	Discussion Questions due by noon W 1/29
4	T 2/4	Article Discussion: Impact of Attitudes on Perception and Judgment	Lord, Ross, & Lepper (1979) Sweeney & Gruber (1984)	Discussion Questions due by noon M 2/3
	R 2/6	Article Discussion: Impact of Attitudes on Behavior	Ajzen & Fishben (1973) Fazio & Williams (1986)	Discussion Questions due by noon W 2/5
5	T 2/11	Topic Selection		Study Topic Preferences
	R 2/13	<b>No class (SPSP Conference)</b>		
6	T 2/18	Group Formation & Discussion		Midterm Exam due
	R 2/20	Ethics  Group Discussion	Leary Ch. 15	Assignment 3: References
7	T 2/25	Group Meetings: Design & Materials Preparation	Leary Ch. 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13 (as relevant for project)	
	R 2/27	Tips on Writing  Group Meetings: Design & Materials Preparation	Leary Ch. 16 Bem (2004)	
8	T 3/4	Group Meetings: Design & Materials Preparation		
	R 3/6	Group Presentations		Study Materials (script, ethics, materials, debriefing) due
9	T 3/11	Group Presentations		Study Materials (script, ethics, materials, debriefing) due
	R 3/13	Basics of SPSS		Introduction & Methods due for peer-edit

WEEK	DATE	TOPIC	READING	ASSIGNMENTS
10	T 3/18	Selecting Participants  Peer Editing: Intro & Method	Leary Ch. 5	
	R 3/20	Data Collection		Start collecting data outside of class Introduction & Methods due for grading by 5pm
11	<b>T 3/25- R 3/27</b>	<b>No class (Spring Break)</b>		
12	T 4/1	Data Collection		Continue collecting data outside of class
	<b>R 4/3</b>	<b>No class (MPSA Conference)</b>		
13	T 4/8	Factorial Designs & Data Interpretation	Leary Ch. 11 & 12	
	R 4/10	Analyzing Data (location TBD)		Bring SPSS dataset to class!
14	T 4/15	Analyzing Data & Poster Design (location TBD)		Assignment 4: Interpreting Data
	R 4/17	Analyzing Data & Poster Design (location TBD)		Results & Discussion due for peer-edit
15	T 4/22	Peer Editing: Results & Discussion  Analysis Wrap-up & Poster Design		
	<b>R 4/24</b>	<b>No class (Nebraska Motivation Symposium @ UNL)</b>		Results & Discussion due for grading by 5pm
16	T 4/29	Poster Session (location TBD)		
	R 5/1	Course Wrap-Up		
<b>***</b>	<b>R 5/8</b>	<b>Final Papers due by 12:00pm</b>		