

**PS 5307 Scope& Methods in Social Sciences
Fall 2026
Sul Ross State University**

Instructor: Dr. Yen-Hsin Chen

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Office hours:

- Monday & Wednesday: 10 AM-12 PM
- Tuesday & Thursday: 11 AM-12 PM

Course Description

This course introduces the strategies and techniques of the scientific methods used in social science. Students are expected to learn how to apply knowledge of scientific methods to the study of politics and examine various political phenomena with appropriate approaches. This course covers research design, causal inference, hypotheses and variables, measurement, data collection, and basic statistical techniques to attain this goal. This course will enable students to become more informed consumers of political science. Thus, you can identify misleading or poorly conducted research, do original research in your classes, and become an informed participant in contemporary political debates.

Student Learning Outcomes

The three Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for MA-Political are:

SLO 1: Graduate students in Political Science will demonstrate the ability to analyze significant theoretical approaches of political science.

SLO 2: Graduate students in Political Science will demonstrate the ability to evaluate domestic and international political processes.

SLO 3: Graduate students in Political Science will demonstrate the ability to apply appropriate statistical tools for quantitative analysis.

This course particularly focuses on SLO 3. Students of this course will learn how to conduct a complete empirical research proposal. Further, for the comprehensive degree exam, students will be required to provide a detailed written and verbal explanation of a research question that interests them. Therefore, this course is very important for both MPA and MA Political Science students.

Course Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will:

- Be able to describe the difference between a basic research paper and a research study
- Understand the main parts of a research study
- Understand how to formulate a research question and hypothesis
- Be aware of the different ways to approach a research study
- Understand the importance of ethics in research and how to conduct ethical research properly
- Be able to conduct a literature review of existing studies
- Be aware of existing data sources for research
- Be able to select the appropriate statistical test for their research design
- Be more aware of existing theories and how to apply them to research
- Know the steps to publish research in at least one scholarly journal
- Gain valuable experience presenting a research proposal

Program Learning Outcomes

Public Administration The graduating student will: • Demonstrate the ability to critique significant theoretical approaches of public administration. • Demonstrate the ability to evaluate domestic and international administrative processes. • Demonstrate the ability to apply appropriate statistical tools for quantitative analysis.	Political Science The graduating student will: • Demonstrate the ability to analyze significant theoretical approaches of political science. • Demonstrate the ability to evaluate domestic and international political processes. • Demonstrate the ability to apply appropriate statistical tools for quantitative analysis.
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Marketable Skills

Public Administration • Students can organize and execute presentations relevant to public administration. • Students understand and can execute a program evaluation. • Students can conduct statistical analyses that are useful to the work of public administrators. • Students can read and interpret an organization budget.	Political Science • Students can organize and execute verbal and written presentations of complex social issues. • Students can tackle social and political problems by acquiring relevant data and using insight and technical skills to analyze data and develop logical solutions. • Students understand the roles and responsibilities of institutional authority within local, state, national, and international communities. • Students understand and can execute a policy analysis.
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Connecting with Students for Success

This course participates in the Connecting with Students for Success Program. I will do my best to learn your name, provide you with friendly and timely feedback on your assignments, maintain high standards and support you in achieving them, and hold individual meetings with each student.

Assignments and Grading

- **Homework** (20% of your grade, 5% for each of the four assignments):
There are four homework assignments for students to complete. Assignments may include short essays on topics learned in the course, math exercises using statistical formulas, and computer-based exercises.
A student who does not turn in an assignment on time will receive a zero.
- **Research Proposal & Peer Review** (40% of your grade):
Students of this course will write a research proposal. This paper includes sections covering the research statement, literature review, theory, hypotheses, and methodological approach. This paper must be between 10 and 15 double-spaced pages and is due **November 22**. The due dates and the scores of your final research project grades determined by each installment are as follows. Further details will be provided in a separate handout.
 1. Research statement (5 points): by September 6.
Meeting required
 2. Literature review (5 points): by October 4.
Meeting required
 3. Theory and hypothesis (5 points): by October 25.
Meeting required
 4. Research design (5 points): by November 8.
Meeting required
 5. Final Manuscript (10 points): by November 22.
You will lose 10% of your points for each calendar day your paper is late.
 6. Peer Review (10 points): by November 29.
You will lose 10% of your points for each calendar day your reviews are late.

Students are required to schedule four meetings with me to report on their progress by the due date for the first four installments. For example, in addition to submitting your research statement on Blackboard by September 6, you must also meet with me by that date, so I have a good sense of it. These meetings are not optional. I will not accept your submission if you fail to meet this requirement. More specifically, it is not acceptable to submit your paper without meeting with me. For example, if you only submit your research statement on Blackboard but do not meet with me by September 6, you will receive a “0”.

Regarding your final manuscript, in addition to submitting it on Blackboard, please email it to your reviewer(s). A separate handout about peer review arrangements will provide additional details in the future.

- **Exams** (40% of your grade, 20% for each exam)

Two online, closed-book, closed-notes exams will be held. The exams will include multiple-choice questions and short essays on topics covered in the course. The midterm exam is due on 9/27 (Sunday), and the final exam is due on 12/6 (Sunday).

Exams are closed-book, closed-notes. You need to install Respondus LockDown Browser to take exams. If you have any questions, please contact OIT. You will lose 10 points for each calendar day if your exam is late.

Grade Scale

Your points=

Homework Assignment Scores + Research Proposal + Midterm Exam Score $\times$ 0.2 + Final Exam Score $\times$ 0.2 + your total extra points earned.

Your course grade will be determined based on the following grading scale:

Points	Letter Grade
100- 90.0	A
89.9-80.0	B
79.9-70.0	C
69.9-60.0	D
59.9 or less	F

Please remember that a “C” is required in graduate school to pass the class. In addition, you must maintain at least a 3.0 GPA to remain in good standing. The program faculty evaluates the progress of students in the program at the end of each semester. Maintaining a “B” average in the program is not enough to be deemed eligible to continue or complete the comprehensive exam.

Many of our graduate students consider this course very challenging. It is your responsibility to keep me posted on your progress in learning. Otherwise, I assume everything is working well for you. Please keep in mind that everyone is busy. If you have any difficulties meeting my requirements, let me know in advance.

Assigned Reading

The required textbook for this course is:

- Johnson, Janet Buttolph, H. T. Reynolds, and Jason D. Mycoff. 2019. *Political Science Research Methods*. 9th ed. Washington D.C.: CQ Press. ISBN: 9781544331430
This text is referred to in the course schedule as J&R.

In addition, the following two books are worth reading. They are not required textbooks, but they are suitable for learning how to conduct empirical research.

1. Creswell, John W, and J. David Creswell. 2018. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 5th ed. ISBN: 9781506386690
2. Shively, W. Phillips. 2010. *The Craft of Political Research*. 8th ed. ISBN: 9780205791200

All additional readings will be on Blackboard and through the library website.

Attendance and Participation

This is a web-delivered course, and I expect that you will watch all lecture recordings. Although not watching lecture videos will not hurt your course grade, it will affect my overall evaluation of your academic performance. Meanwhile, please note that I will never give an extra-credit assignment to any individual student.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (8/24), Topic 1: Course Introduction

- J&R Chapters 1 and 2
- Lupia, Arthur. 2000. "Evaluating Political Science Research: Information for Buyers and Sellers," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 33 (1): 7-13.

Week 2 (8/31), Topic 2: The Empirical Approach to Political Science

- J&R Chapters 2, 3, and 4
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, Shanto Iyengar, Adam Simon, and Nicholas Valentino. 1994. "Does Attack Advertising Demobilize the Electorate?" *American Political Science Review* 88 (4): 829-838.
- Niven, David. 2006. "A Field Experiment on the Effects of Negative Campaign Mail on Voter Turnout in Municipal Election." *Political Research Quarterly* 59 (2): 203-210.
- Research Statement due on 9/6 at 11:59 PM

Week 3 (9/7), Topic 3: Causal Inference and Research Design

- J&R Chapter 6
- Diamond, Jared. 2010. "Intra-Island and Inter-Island Comparison." In *Natural Experiments of History*, eds. By Jared Diamond and James A. Robinson. Cambridge, M.A.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Banerjee, Abhijit, and Lakshmi Iyer. 2010. "Colonial Land Tenure, Electoral Competition, and Public Good in India." In *Natural Experiments of History*, eds. By Jared Diamond and James A. Robinson. Cambridge, M.A.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- HW1 due on 9/13 at 11:59 PM

Week 4 (9/14), Topic 4: Concepts and Measurement

- J&R Chapter 5
- HW2 due on 9/20 at 11:59 PM

Week 5 (9/21), Midterm Exam Week

- The midterm exam will be available from 9/21 to 9/27.

Week 6 (9/28), Topic 5: Survey Research

- J&R Chapter 11
- Literature review due on 10/4 at 11:59 PM

Week 7 (10/5), Topic 6: Data Analysis 2

- J&R Chapters 10 and 11

Week 8 (10/12), Topic 7: Sampling 1

- J&R Chapter 7
- HW3 due on 10/18 at 11:59 PM

Week 9 (10/19), Topic 8: Statistical Inference

- J&R Chapter 12
- Theory and hypothesis due on 10/25 at 11:59 PM

Week 10 (10/26), Topic 9: Sampling 2

- J&R Chapter 12

Week 11 (11/2), Topic 10: Bivariate Analysis

- J&R Chapter 13
- Research design due on 11/8 at 11:59 PM

Week 12 (11/9), Topic 11: An Example

- HW4 due on 11/15 at 11:59 PM

Week 13 (11/16), Research week

- Final Manuscript due on 11/22 at 11:59 PM
- In addition to posting it on Blackboard, please email your paper to your reviewer(s).

Week 14 (11/23), Thanksgiving Holiday

- Enjoy the Thanksgiving Holiday, y'all
- Post your review (s) on Blackboard and email it (them) to the author of the paper you reviewed.

Week 15 (11/30), Final Exam

- The final exam will be available from 11/30 to 12/6.

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ADA Statement

SRSU Accessibility Services. Sul Ross State University (SRSU) is committed to equal access in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1973. It is SRSU policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. It is the student's responsibility to initiate a request each semester for each class. To help protect confidentiality, students seeking accessibility/accommodation(s) services must submit the [Accommodation Request Form](#) located on our [website](#). Students are welcome to call the Office of Accessibility Services at 432-837-8203 or stop by Ferguson Hall Room 112 if they have any additional questions regarding the process. Our mailing address is PO Box C-122; Alpine, TX; 79832.

Statement Regarding Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The University does not recommend or endorse any specific AI tools or resources. Students should be aware that many generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot) store user input and may use this data to train future models. For this reason, students should never upload or share personal, confidential, or identifiable information—such as names, ID numbers, health data, or assignment submissions containing such details—into any generative AI platform. When using AI tools, students should verify whether the tool complies with student privacy standards as indicated by the University. Faculty may recommend specific tools that better align with institutional data privacy policies, but ultimate responsibility for data protection rests with users. Students are encouraged to use faculty-recommended platforms when engaging in coursework involving generative AI. The University is not liable for any adverse experience or impact when students interact with these tools. Here are some recommended statements faculty might adapt for their syllabi: <https://ctl.utexas.edu/chatgpt-and-generative-ai-tools-sample-syllabus-policy-statements>. Review the entire [AI Policy](#) [here](#).

Student Responsibilities

All full-time and part-time students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the [Student Handbook](#) and the [Undergraduate & Graduate Catalog](#) and for abiding by the [University rules and regulations](#). Additionally, students are responsible for checking their Sul Ross email as an official form of communication from the university. Every student is expected to obey all federal, state and local laws and is expected to familiarize him/herself with the requirements of such laws.

SRSU Distance Education Statement

Students enrolled in distance education courses have equal access to the university's academic support services, such as library resources, online databases, and instructional technology support. For more information about accessing these resources, visit the SRSU website.

Students should correspond using Sul Ross email accounts and submit online assignments through Blackboard, which requires a secure login. Students enrolled in distance education courses at Sul Ross are expected to adhere to all policies pertaining to academic honesty and appropriate student conduct, as described in the student handbook. Students in web-based courses must maintain appropriate equipment and software, according to the needs and requirements of the course, as outlined on the SRSU website. Directions for filing a student complaint are located in the student handbook.

Counseling

Sul Ross has partnered with TimelyCare where all SR students will have access to nine free counseling sessions. You can learn more about this 24/7/365 support by visiting [Timelycare/SRSU](https://timelycare.com/SRSU). The SR Counseling and Accessibility Services office will continue to offer in-person counseling in Ferguson Hall room 112 (Alpine campus), and telehealth Zoom sessions for remote students and RGC students.

Libraries

The Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library and Archives of the Big Bend in Alpine offer FREE resources and services to the entire SRSU community. Access and borrow books, articles, and more by visiting the library's website, library.sulross.edu/. Off-campus access requires logging in with your LobolD and password. Librarians are a tremendous resource for your coursework and can be reached in person, by email (srsulibrary@sulross.edu), or by phone (432-837-8123).

No matter where you are based, public libraries and many academic and special libraries welcome the general public into their spaces for study. SRSU TexShare Cardholders can access additional services and resources at various libraries across Texas. Learn more about the TexShare program by visiting library.sulross.edu/find-and-borrow/texshare/ or ask a librarian by emailing srsulibrary@sulross.edu. Mike Fernandez, SRSU Librarian, is based in Eagle Pass (Building D-129) to offer specialized library services to students, faculty, and staff. Utilize free services such as InterLibrary Loan (ILL), ScanIt, and Direct Mail to get materials delivered to you at home or via email.

Academic Integrity

Students in this class are expected to demonstrate scholarly behavior and academic honesty in the use of intellectual property. Students should submit work that is their own and avoid the temptation to engage in behaviors that violate academic integrity, such as turning in work as original that was used in whole or part for another course and/or professor; turning in another person's work as one's own; copying from professional works or internet sites without citation; collaborating on a course assignment, examination, or quiz when collaboration is forbidden. Students should also avoid using open AI sources *unless permission is expressly given* for an assignment or course. Violations of academic integrity can result in failing assignments, failing a class, and/or more serious university consequences. These behaviors also erode the value of college degrees and higher education overall.

Classroom Climate of Respect

Importantly, this class will foster free expression, critical investigation, and the open discussion of ideas. This means that all of us must help create and sustain an atmosphere of tolerance, civility, and respect for the viewpoints of others. Similarly, we must all learn how to probe, oppose and disagree without resorting to tactics of intimidation, harassment, or personal attack. No one is entitled to harass, belittle, or discriminate against another on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, age, gender, national origin, or sexual preference. Still, we will not be silenced by the difficulty of fruitfully discussing politically sensitive issues.

Supportive Statement

I aim to create a learning environment for my students that supports various perspectives and experiences. I understand that the recent pandemic, economic disparity, and health concerns, or even unexpected life events may impact the conditions necessary for you to succeed. My commitment is to be there for you and help you meet the learning objectives of this course. I do this to demonstrate my commitment to you and to the mission of Sul Ross State University to create a supportive environment and care for the whole student as part of the Sul Ross Familia. If you feel like your performance in the class is being impacted by your experiences outside of class, please don't hesitate to come and talk with me. I want to be a resource for you.

Tutoring Center

[The Lobo Den Tutoring Center](#) offers FREE tutoring support to help you excel in your courses. Whether you need assistance in Writing, Math, Science, or other subjects, we're here to help!

Important Information:

- **Drop-in and Scheduled Appointments:** Flexible options to fit your needs.
- **Hours of Operation:** Monday–Friday, 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM.
- **Workshops:** Attend our regularly hosted academic workshops on STEM topics and professional development, often in collaboration with specialized faculty.
- **Location:** BWML Room 128.
- **Contact Us:** For more information or to book an appointment, email tutoring@sulross.edu or call (432) 837-8726.

Looking for additional support?

- Tutor.com offers FREE 24/7 online tutoring in over 200 subjects, including specialized support for ESL and ELL learners with native Spanish-speaking tutors.
- Access Tutor.com via Blackboard: Log in to your Blackboard account to get started anytime, anywhere.

Take advantage of these valuable resources to boost your confidence and performance in your classes. We look forward to helping you succeed!