I. OVERVIEW

Graduate school in political science teaches you how to enter a scholarly community or research tradition. You are instructed how to identify its important questions, propose answers that will interest its members, and design strategies that its members will accept as evaluating those answers. You are also taught how to communicate your ideas to this community in the form of a professional essay. Most graduate level courses cover these issues informally; in this course we
are explicit. We will train you to produce and convey knowledge to those who work in the discipline of political science.

Many of the issues we cover are unique to particular subfields and traditions in political science. Other concerns are common to the entire discipline, and indeed all of the social sciences. Hence, this course discusses the choices available to scholars - the diverse kinds of political science - and the epistemological foundations of all social inquiry. We take a broad view of the human sciences: case-centered approaches, for example interpretive theory and hermeneutics, and theory-centered approaches, for example statistical and mathematical modeling, are covered. We also take a broad view of evidence: quantitative and qualitative, historical and contemporary, ethnographic and statistical data are discussed. Specific methodologies that we explore include survey research, experiments, quasi-experiments, case studies, comparative case studies, aggregate data analyses, archival work, and participant observation.

This course thus considers the question of what makes for good political science. In Part I, we examine exemplars from three major research communities in the social sciences. Mancur Olson’s *Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* is a classic social or rational choice theory. Olson offers a rationalist account of why individuals join groups and why groups mobilize and succeed. Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is a classic interpretive or culturalist theory. Weber traces the origins of capitalism in the West to a certain set of religious orientations. Kenneth Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics* is a classic structural or system theory. Waltz argues that the study of the state system qua system offers great insights into international conflict and cooperation as well as into international stability and change.

Why are these studies exemplars of good social science? One approach to evaluating scholarship employs the criteria developed by philosophers of science. In Part II of the course we therefore discuss alternative philosophies of science. Twenty years ago, graduate scope and methods courses in political science taught the traditional, logical empiricist view of science. We present this view, identify the criticisms that have been raised against it, and offer some alternatives. We also discuss two other important issues: the significance of theory and theory evaluation in scientific change and of discovery and creativity in science.

Research methodologists have also developed approaches for assessing contributions to political science. Part III of the course therefore discusses quantitative and qualitative research designs for testing hypotheses. Quantitative research designs include cross-sectional, longitudinal, contextual, experimental, and quasi-experimental approaches. Qualitative research designs include case studies, comparative case studies, comparative historical, and ideal-type approaches. We survey these designs and identify their strengths and weaknesses.

In Part IV of the course we apply our lessons about philosophy of science and research methodology to our three research communities. This involves a discussion of social theory or the philosophy of social science. What are the assumptions behind rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist approaches? What are their boundaries - what phenomena can they explain and what do they choose to ignore? What combinations of approaches are possible? In pragmatic terms,
what are the characteristic advantages and pitfalls that face the political scientist who chooses to focus on rationality, culture, or structure?

Social scientists study the world and communicate their results to a community of scholars who are only a small part of that world. We conclude the course in Part V by exploring the relationships among social theory, political science, and the world in which we live. We raise questions about a scientist’s values, his or her intended audiences, and the interaction of social scientists and the subjects they study.

II. REQUIREMENTS

Students who take this course must satisfy six requirements.

1. Philosophy of science evaluation (10%)

Students must use the standards discussed in the philosophy of science literature to critically evaluate any empirically-oriented scholarly article or book in political science published within the last year. Choose an empirical piece, rather than a purely theoretical analysis or literature review. Place the work in context so as to enter into a dialogue with the research community of which it is a part; then critically assess the quality of the author’s work. Criticism is more than summary: indicate the work’s strengths and weaknesses and suggest areas of improvement. Show how your comments derive from the philosophy of science literature. The philosophy of science evaluation should be approximately five double spaced pages long, or 1500 words. Provide a word count.

2. Research design evaluation (10%)

Students must use the standards discussed in the research design literature to critically evaluate any empirically-oriented scholarly article or book in political science published within the last year. Choose, for example, a case study, comparative case study, or experiment and assess the quality of the author’s work. Use the research design literature to critically explore the work’s central empirical finding or result: What did the author discover? How solid is that result? How could the finding have been strengthened by adopting a different research design? The research design evaluation should be approximately five double spaced pages long, or 1500 words. Provide a word count.

3. Critical analysis of a research community (10%)

Students must use the standards discussed in the philosophy of social science and research methodology literatures to critically evaluate any empirically-oriented scholarly article or book
published within the last year that is part of any of the three research communities - rationalist, culturalist, or structuralist - in political science. Use these literatures to explore the work’s strengths and weaknesses and to suggest areas of improvement. The philosophy of social science evaluation should be approximately five double spaced pages long, or 1500 words. Provide a word count.

4. Original research proposal (25%)

The best way for students to learn about research in political science is to write a research proposal. You may propose, for example, a case study, comparative case study, or quantitative analysis. The research design must be in principle "do-able." It also must be precise and operational, and hence more than a literature review. Students are permitted to build this research proposal upon the foundations created by the philosophy of science, research design, and philosophy of social science papers. Students may also combine this paper with a paper from a different course. For instance, you might want to link the research proposal required in this course to the data analysis paper required in the introductory statistics course. This would give you a good start toward writing the "first year" paper. If you go this route, permission of both instructors is needed. The research proposal should be approximately ten double spaced pages long, or 3000 words. Provide a word count.

NOTE: I have prepared some guidelines for the four writing assignments. These appear later in this syllabus and will be discussed in class. I will not read preliminary drafts of these papers, because these are usually woefully incomplete and typically generate grievances about grades. However, I will be delighted to discuss your preliminary ideas with you during office hours.

5. Take home final (25%)

Students will have three days to answer questions about the required readings and about the material covered in class. These questions will be broadly similar to the comprehensive exams offered here at CU. The final will thus be good practice for this particular hurdle in your graduate careers.

6. Class participation (20%)

All graduate students must complete each week’s readings and must participate in class discussions. Everyone will be called upon to speak at least once each week and asked to reflect on the readings. This is an important requirement. Students who repeatedly come to class unprepared do not belong in graduate school.
III. BOOKS TO ACQUIRE

The following books are required reading:


These books are available for purchase in the CU bookstore. Articles and sections of books that are required reading are xeroxed and available in the reserve room in Norlin Library.

**IV. COURSE ORGANIZATION**

Class meets on Monday from 9:00 to 11:30 in Ketchum 116. I will hold office hours on Wednesdays and Fridays, 11:00 to 12:00, in the Chair’s office, Ketchum 106. If these times are inconvenient, call and make an appointment. I can be reached by phone at 492-8601. It is important for students to get to know faculty and for faculty to get to know students. Stop by for a chat.

**LECTURE SEQUENCE**

Three types of readings are listed below. A reading denoted by "***" means that it is required for this course. You will find it available for purchase in the bookstore or on reserve in the library. A reading denoted by "*" means that it is recommended (i.e., for comprehensives). All other readings are additional or background readings that students interested in a particular topic may consult.

**PART I. INTRODUCTION**

We begin slowly, attempting to introduce students to the course and to the discipline by studying exemplars of great social science and by placing social science in historical context.

**WEEK 1 (AUGUST 25) A. ORGANIZATION**
The first part of the period is spent summarizing the course. In the second part, the political science bibliographer in Norlin Library, Chris Busick, gives us a tour of our library’s resources.

WEEK 2 (SEPTEMBER 8) B. CLASSICS/EXEMPLARS

One of the aims of this course is to teach you about theories in the social sciences, generally, and in political science, specifically. The course focuses on three types of theories: rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist. We refer to an exemplar of each type of theory throughout the course: Olson on rational or social choice theory, Weber on cultural or interpretive theory, and Waltz on structural or institutionalist theory. As you go through these classics, ask yourself the following questions: What do you think about them? How should we evaluate them? Why are they seminal, in the sense of having enduring value and yet displaying deficiencies that generate numerous follow-up studies?


WEEK 3 (SEPTEMBER 15) C. HISTORY AND CONTEXT

How are we to make sense of the "war of the schools" or the "battle of the paradigms" in political science that we studied last week? This week’s reading sets the historical context for the theme of the course. After critically evaluating the issues that separate the schools, we turn to an effort at reconciling them: science. We show how questions of science and modernity are closely connected by studying how science emerged in the modern world and by investigating how it has been challenged.


PART II. PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

We now begin to directly address questions about evaluating scholarship in our discipline. Alternative philosophies of science offer alternative standards by which political science may be judged. We consider competing theories of science, alternative approaches to theory and explanation, and finally questions about discovery and creativity.

A. THEORIES OF SCIENCE

How does science work? Philosophers of science ask fundamental questions about epistemology (the theory of knowledge) and ontology (the nature of things) in order to clarify our understanding of the growth of scientific knowledge. Many political scientists adopt a traditional view of science that they believe characterizes the natural sciences. Others criticize this view and propose alternative philosophies or theories of science.

WEEK 4 (SEPTEMBER 22) 1. THE TRADITIONAL VIEW

The traditional view of the growth of scientific knowledge is rooted in modernist and enlightenment thought. Traditionalists emphasize how an open and democratic scientific community uses reason, the scientific method, and the canons of scientific rationality to discover truth. We discuss logical positivism, logical empiricism, covering-law explanations, theories, concepts, and criteria for theory evaluation.


WEEK 5 (SEPTEMBER 29) 2. CRITICISMS

Philosophers, historians, and sociologists of science have offered numerous criticisms of the traditional view of science. Critics challenge all of the demarcations stressed by traditionalists: science vs. nonscience, facts vs. values, nominalism vs. realism, analytic vs. concrete, and the context of discovery vs. the context of verification. Hence, there is a debate over how scientific theories are invented; developed, evaluated, and accepted; and finally displaced as scientific change occurs. Some of these criticisms arise from confronting the traditionalists’ idealized and rationalized reconstructions with the actual historical record of scientific practice. Normative and empirical issues are therefore at stake. (Note: This week’s required readings are relatively light and closely connected with next week’s relatively heavy readings; I therefore suggest that you begin the next set of readings.)

1. OVERVIEWS AND EVALUATIONS:


2. THEORY DEVELOPMENT IN THE PHYSICAL SCIENCES:


3. THEORY DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES:


4. SOCIAL SCIENTISTS DISPUTING THEORY AND SCIENTIFIC CHANGE:
WEEK 6 (OCTOBER 6) 3. ALTERNATIVES

In response to the criticisms of the traditional view of science, several alternative philosophies of science have been developed. Popperians stress falsification as the basis of science. Others stress paradigms, research programs, and research traditions. Realist approaches to the philosophy of science have become important and influential. Still others, including research anarchists, critical theorists, feminists, and postmodernists, offer even more radical alternatives to the traditional philosophy of science. All these critics of the traditional view stress the incommensurability of theories and the difficulties of transparadigmatic comparisons.

1. FALSIFICATIONISM - POPPERIANS:


2. THEORIES EMPHASIZING RESEARCH SCHOOLS:


3. REALISM:

**Wendt, Alex (1995). "Scientific Realism and Social Science." Typescript.**


Wendt, Alex and Iran Shapiro. "The Misunderstood Promise of Realist Social Theory." Typescript.


4. POSTMODERNIST/RELATIVIST APPROACHES:


WEEK 7 (OCTOBER 13) B. THEORY AND EXPLANATION

Almost every social scientist claims that he or she is a theorist. Given the diversity of our discipline, what could "theory" possibly mean? We discuss the differences between several types of theory: general and middle range (or islands of theory); laws and hypotheses; universalism,
relativism, and contextualism; formal and informal; deductive and inductive; causal and functional; and deterministic and probabilistic.

1. EXPLANATION:


2. PREDICTION:


3. FORMAL/MATHEMATICAL/AXIOMATIC MODELS:


WEEK 8 (OCTOBER 20) C. DISCOVERY AND CREATIVITY

Where does one locate interesting and important problems and puzzles? Where do ideas come from? In short, how is research motivated? The issues of scientific creativity and the context of discovery are clouded in mystery. We know a lot more about how research methodologies address existing questions than we know about how those questions arise in the first place.

1. SCIENCE:


2. SOCIAL SCIENCE:


3. STUDIES OF CREATIVITY:


PART III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Political scientists also evaluate scholarship by examining how arguments are empirically verified and falsified. Good research, that is, often employs a research design that allows the researcher to probe hypotheses and establish causality. We explore quantitative and qualitative designs.

WEEK 9 (OCTOBER 27) A. THE PROBLEM OF RESEARCH DESIGN
This section makes a transition from philosophy of science considerations to research methodology considerations.


WEEK 10 (NOVEMBER 3) B. THE PRINCIPLES OF RESEARCH DESIGN

This section discusses the basic principles behind research design by following KKV’s text. We discuss goals and criteria, procedures, design problems, sampling problems, other problems of research, and an important solution to research problems - increasing observations.

WEEK 11 (NOVEMBER 10) C. QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGNS

We evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of common quantitative research designs: cross-sectional, longitudinal, contextual, experimental, and quasi-experimental approaches.

1. OVERVIEW:


2. EXPERIMENTAL DESIGNS:


3. QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL DESIGNS:


4. NONEXPERIMENTAL DESIGNS:

   A. CROSS-SECTIONAL (SURVEY RESEARCH AND AGGREGATE DATA):


B. LONGITUDINAL:


C. CONTEXTUAL/MULTILEVEL:


5. MEASUREMENT:


6. GREAT QUANTITATIVE SOCIAL SCIENCE:


7. QUESTIONABLE QUANTITATIVE SOCIAL SCIENCE:


WEEKS 12 (NOVEMBER 17) D. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGNS

We evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of common qualitative research designs: case studies, comparative case studies, comparative historical, and ideal-type approaches.

1. OVERVIEW:


2. CASE STUDY:


3. COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY:


4. COMPARATIVE HISTORY:


5. THE COMPARATIVE METHOD:


6. CONCEPT FORMATION:


7. IDEAL TYPES/TYPOLOGIES/CLASSIFICATIONS:


8. RAGIN’S BOOLEAN ALGEBRA


9. COUNTERFACTUALS:

10. NARRATIVES:


11. HISTORIOGRAPHY AND ARCHIVAL WORK:


12. FIELD RESEARCH - OBSERVING, LISTENING, AND INTERVIEWING:


13. GREAT QUALITATIVE SOCIAL SOCIAL SCIENCE:


14. QUESTIONABLE QUALITATIVE SOCIAL SCIENCE:


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**PART IV. PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE**

There are many different models, types, and approaches to social analysis. This part of the course evaluates three of the most prominent research communities in political science: rational choice...
theorists, cultural theorists, and structural theorists. Each poses distinctive problems in the philosophy of the social sciences. Given that you will reread the classics, Olson, Weber, and Waltz, you can test your intellectual progress in this course: Has the material we covered on the philosophy of science and research methodology improved your analytical skills?

Here are some background readings to get you started on these critical issues.

1. OVERVIEWS OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE:


2. CRITICAL STUDIES IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE:


3. COMPETING RESEARCH SCHOOLS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE:


4. COMPETING RESEARCH SCHOOLS IN SOCIOLOGY:


**WEEK 13 (NOVEMBER 24) A. RATIONALITY**
Social science is about people. Micro approaches focus on the individual. One assumption is that humans are goal oriented and situation interpreting: desires and beliefs guide action. Rational actor and social choice theorists use this assumption about individuals to derive conclusions about social outcomes. Critics of social choice theories question the nature of rationality.

1. THE MICROFOUNDATIONS OF MACRO-OUTCOMES:


2. COLLECTIVE ACTION:


3. COLLECTIVE CHOICE:


4. INSTITUTIONS:


5. EVALUATIONS:


WEEK 14 (DECEMBER 1) B. CULTURE

One may adopt a different micro assumption: People are motivated by culturally defined values, norms, and rules. Hermeneutic perspectives on identity and consciousness have always been important in the social sciences. They have seen a considerable revival in recent years. The study of interpretive theories raise several important controversies in the philosophy of the social sciences: explanation and understanding, idealism and materialism, subject and object (the insider/outsider problem), and nature and nurture.

1. INTERPRETIVE THEORY:


2. COGNITION:


3. CULTURE:


4. POLITICAL CULTURE:


5. COMPARATIVE POLITICAL CULTURE:


6. EXEMPLARS/CLASSICS:

WEEK 15 (DECEMBER 8) C. STRUCTURE

Structuralists take a more macro or holistic view of social science. They see systems and institutions as real entities that structure social outcomes. Structural approaches raise several important controversies in the philosophy of the social sciences: methodological individualism and methodological structuralism; structure and action; micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis; and holism and reductionism.

1. STRUCTURAL THEORY:


7. EVALUATIONS:


2. EXEMPLARS/CLASSICS:


3. THE MICRO-MACRO PROBLEM:


4. CONTEXTS AND NETWORKS:


5. AMERICAN POLITICS AND INSTITUTIONS:


6. HISTORY AND COMPARISON:


7. SOCIOLOGY AND INSTITUTIONS:


8. POLITICAL SCIENCE AND THE STATE


*Evans, Peter B., Rueschemeyer, Dietrich and Skocpol, Theda (1985). "On the Road toward a More Adequate Understanding of the State." In Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol, Eds. *Bringing the State Back In*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.*


9. EVALUATIONS:


Symposium on "Institutions and Institutionalism" *Polity* 28 (Fall, 1995): 83-140.


**PART V. CONCLUSION**

**WEEK 16 (DECEMBER 15) THEORY, DISCIPLINE, AND SOCIETY**

We conclude the course by considering the relationship between political science and the larger society of which it is a part. We raise questions about normative and positive analysis, theory and practice, and activism and criticism.


**WEEK 17 (DECEMBER 18) FINAL**

**HOW TO WRITE A RESEARCH PAPER**

If you look closely at articles that appear in scholarly journals in the social sciences you will discover that most of the articles follow a similar style. There are six parts to the typical research paper.
Part No. 1: Introduction

The first part of a research paper typically explores what you are studying and why. Here are some questions that you should try to address.

1. What is your general goal?
   a. What subject do you wish to explore?
   b. What problem do you wish to investigate?
   c. What topic do you wish to study?

2. What is your specific purpose?
   a. What puzzle is to be resolved?
   b. What issue is to be confronted?
   c. What is your particular point of view?
      i. The theme of this paper is ...
      ii. The argument to be investigated is ...
      iii. I aim to ...
      iv. I would like to demonstrate the point that ...
      v. My solution to the problem of ... is ...

3. Why are there issues worthy of investigation?
   a. What motivates your analysis?
   c. What justifies your interest?
   d. What makes the subject important?
   e. What contributions will your study make?

Your introduction, in short, should contain a clear motivation and a well-defined thesis statement.
Part No. 2: Literature Review

The second part of a research paper typically discusses what is known and unknown, settled and debated, about the subject under study. Here are some questions that you should try to address.

1. What is the current state of our knowledge?
   a. How does your problem relate to existing scholarship?
   b. What does the research record on your problem look like?
   c. What do existing studies on your topic tell us?

2. What does the journal literature look like? (You must track down journal articles as well as books. Much of the good empirical work in our discipline occurs in the journals and not in books.)

3. What do we know about your
   a. Research program?
   b. Theories?
   c. Hypotheses?
   d. Methodologies?
   c. Evidence?

4. What are the literature’s major limitations?
   a. Is there progress or stagnation in this field?
   b. What are the shortcomings in theory and method?
   c. What are the major roadblocks to progress?
   d. What are scholars fighting about (i.e., what don’t we know)?
   e. What do scholars agree upon (i.e., what do we think we know)?

5. What are the literature’s major themes?
a. What are the Big Questions that scholars are asking?

b. What are the key issues scholars are debating?

Your literature review, in short, should be based on a carefully compiled sample of the professional literature. You then need to reflect upon that literature. Summarize thematically and avoid summarizing article by article. If your refer to theories, methods, or data, you must cite specific sources.

**Part No. 3: The Theory To Be Tested**

The third part of a research paper typically states the theoretical arguments to be explored. Here are some questions that you should try to address.

1. What is the research program under which you are working?
   a. What are its core assumptions?
   b. What are its operating rules?

2. For each hypothesis that you derive from that research program:
   a. What is the bivariate linkage among the variables?
      i. Can you offer a verbal statement of the causal argument?
      ii. Can you offer a formal statement, an if-then hypothesis?
   b. What do you want to explain?
      i. What is your dependent variable?
      ii. How do you define it?
   c. What is your explanation?
      i. What is your independent variable?
      ii. How do you define it?
   d. Under what conditions is the hypothesis true?
      i. What are your control variables?
ii. What is the context under which the relationship holds?

iii. Where and when are the independent and dependent variables related?

e. Why do you believe that the hypothesis is true?

i. What assumptions lead you to propose the hypothesis?

ii. Why is the hypothesis plausible?

iii. What is the reasoning behind the hypothesized relationship?

Your theory section, in short, should contain clearly stated ideas. You may or may not choose to put your ideas in terms of hypotheses, independent variables, dependent variables, etc. However, you must be precise about what you are trying to explain and how you are trying to explain it.

**Part No. 4: The Research Design**

The fourth part of a research paper typically proposes a research design to probe the theoretical arguments you have advanced. Here are some questions that you should try to address.

1. What methodological guidelines will you follow?

   a. What is your study design or research plan?

      i. How will you confront the issues you raised?

      ii. How will you answer the questions you posed?

   b. How does your research design address the problem?

      i. Why have you chosen your approach to the problem?

      ii. How would you justify your research choices and decisions?

2. How will you choose cases to examine?

   a. Why were your cases selected?

   b. Why were other cases not selected?

   c. What type of sample are your drawing?

      i. Individual level data or aggregate data?

      ii. Cross-sectional or time series data?
3. How will you choose your indicators?
   a. What is your measurement strategy?
   b. Will you use nominal, ordinal, or interval variables?
   c. What sources of evidence will you use?
      i. Survey research - questionnaires, interviews
      ii. Fieldwork - participant and non-participant observation
      iii. Secondary analysis of statistical sources
      iv. Content analysis of archives and historical records

4. How will you eliminate plausible rival hypotheses?
   a. What test implications lend support to your hypotheses?
   b. What test implications lead to the rejection of your hypotheses?
   c. What challenges to falsification exist?

Your research design, in short, should contain clear procedures. You should state how you will evaluate your ideas.

Part No. 5: Findings

The fifth part of a research paper typically discusses and interprets findings. Here are some questions that you should try to address.

1. What was your purpose in analyzing the data?
   a. Why present the data?
   b. Why conduct the analysis?

2. What speculations follow from the data?
   a. Where do the results lead us?
   b. What do the results tell us about the hypotheses?
b. What indirect implications can be drawn?

c. What is the larger importance of your findings?

This part of your paper is the punch line. You must demonstrate that all your careful preparation paid off. Explore your evidence. Think about what you have found.

**Part No. 6: Conclusions**

The final part of a research paper typically evaluates the research. Here are some questions that you should try to address.

1. What is a succinct summary of your paper?
   a. Purposes?
   b. Arguments?
   c. Methods?
   d. Findings?
   e. Implications?

2. What has your research accomplished?
   a. So what?
   b. How would you assess your work?
   c. Did you satisfy your original motives and purposes?
   d. What was the significance of your investigation?

3. What are the limitations of your analysis?
   a. How adequate was your work?
   b. What self-criticisms would you raise?
   c. How firm were your conclusions?
d. What shortcomings exist?

e. What problems remain?

4. What does your research imply about future work?

a. What new theoretical speculations should be investigated?

b. What new policy recommendations should be developed?

c. What new research strategies should be explored?

In sum, the final section of your paper allows you to move beyond the data. You can offer a mini-research agenda for your upcoming honors thesis.

**The Specific Requirements**

Your papers must be done professionally. They must be written as if you were going to submit them to a professional journal in political science, such as the *American Political Science Review*. More specifically, your papers must meet the following requirements:

1. Typed (presumably on a word processor)

2. Stapled (no clips)

3. Double-spaced

4. Cover sheet (no plastic research covers)

5. Title page contains
   - name
   - date
   - title
   - who the paper is submitted to
   - course name and number

6. 8-1/2" x 11" paper

7. 1.5" margins on top and bottom, left and right
On Writing

You must do more than get the form right. You must write clearly and effectively. Social scientists who write well get their ideas across. Social scientists who write poorly tend to have their ideas ignored.

I can offer two suggestions for improving your writing skills. First, take a few days off and read a couple of books on writing and composition.

1. Some References on How to Write a Research Paper:


2. Some References on How to Compose Readable Prose:


Second, try using a grammar checker. Many are available as an auxiliary "tool" that supplements your word processor. You should know, however, that some people like grammar checkers and others hate them. My view is that grammar checkers are not perfect but do assist the novice writer by forcing him or her think about sentence structure and paragraph construction. As your writing improves, grammar checkers tend to slow you down and generally become a hindrance.
One final note. If you use a word processor, you should think about using its related tools: a speller, thesaurus, and bibliographic compiler. You should at least run a spell check on your papers. A paper with numerous typos and other spelling errors is unprofessional.

Sample Final

This is the final exam for our introductory graduate course, Introduction to the Study of Politics. You may pick up the exam at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, December 12 and must return it by 9:00 a.m. Friday, December 15. Answer one question from each of the three parts. You may use books and notes, but please work alone. Each response should take the form of a professional essay: it should be well reasoned, documented, and include scholarly references to specific illustrations of your arguments. Limit your response to five pages per question, or 1500 words. Provide a word count.

Part I (Philosophy of Science)

1. "One cannot reduce theory to data. There is more to a case than the observable implications of one or more theories." Comment on the meaning and significance of this argument.

2. Compare and contrast Hempel’s logical positivism with Lakatos’s research programs.

Part II (Research Methodology)

1. "Strong on external validity, weak on internal validity; strong on internal validity, weak on external validity." Comment on this charge with respect to sample surveys, aggregate data, experimental work, and quasi-experimental designs.

2. Compare and contrast the relative strengths and weaknesses of a single case study and comparative case study. How may both be designed to increase the likelihood of valid inferences?

Part III (Philosophy of Social Science)

1. "Thick versions of the rational/social choice approach start to look like the culturalist approach." Comment on the meaning and significance of this argument.

2. All social scientific theories must confront the structure-action problem of reconciling individuals and collectivities. Choose any research school - rationalist, culturalist, or structuralist - and show how it addresses the structure-action problem.
Sample Final

This is the final exam for our introductory graduate course, Introduction to the Study of Politics. You may pick up the exam at 9:00 a.m. on Friday, December 13 and must return it by 9:00 a.m. Tuesday, December 17. Answer one question from each of the three parts. You may use books and notes, but please work alone. Each response should take the form of a professional essay: it should be well reasoned, documented, and include scholarly references to specific illustrations of your arguments. Limit your response to five pages per question, or 1500 words. Provide a word count.

Part I (Philosophy of Science)

1. Ernest Gellner, in Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals (1994, Penguin Press, p. 138) suggests that "Theories are underdetermined by facts, as philosophers like to tell us; what they generally fail to add is that coercion and social pressure take up the slack. Nothing else can possibly do it. The leeway allowed by the lack of logical compulsion is made up by social compulsion." Comment on the meaning and significance of this argument.

2. Compare and contrast Feyerabend’s "anything goes" approach with Kuhn’s paradigms.

Part II (Research Methodology)

1. Discuss the relative strengths and weaknesses of sampling on the dependent variable, independent variable, or some combination of both.

2. Compare and contrast the relative strengths and weaknesses of experimental and statistical research designs with respect to the ability to make causal inferences. How may both designs be improved to increase the likelihood of valid causal inferences?

Part III (Philosophy of Social Science)

1. "Culturalists are really structuralists because they always look at culture as structured; structuralists are really culturalists because they always consider the meaning and significance of structures." Comment on the meaning and significance of this argument.

2. "Rational choice theories are untestable and untested." Comment on the meaning and significance of this argument.
Sample Final

This is the final exam for our introductory graduate course, Introduction to the Study of Politics. You may pick up the exam at 9:00 a.m. on Monday, December 15 and must return it by 9:00 a.m. Thursday, December 18. Answer one question from each of the three parts. You may use books and notes, but please work alone. Each response should take the form of a professional essay: it should be well reasoned, documented, and include scholarly references to specific illustrations of your arguments. Limit your response to five pages per question, or 1500 words. Provide a word count.

Part I (Philosophy of Science)

1. "Paradigms come and go but a good experiment remains. The bedrock of science is evidence and not ideas." Comment on the meaning and significance of this argument.

2. Compare and contrast Wendt’s realism with Popper’s falsificationism.

Part II (Research Methodology)

1. Demonstrate how multicollinearity, endogeneity, and omitted variable bias present problems for causal inference in qualitative research. Use concrete examples.

2. Compare and contrast the relative strengths and weaknesses of single case study and large-n statistical research designs with respect to the ability to make causal inferences. How may both designs be improved to increase the likelihood of valid causal inferences?

Part III (Philosophy of Social Science)

1. Culture has been looked at as constitutive, contextual, and causal. Compare and contrast the relative strengths and weaknesses of these alternative approaches to cultural analysis.

2. "Structural theorizing culminates in typologies." Comment on the meaning and significance of this argument.

SUMMARY OF MEETINGS
WEEK TOPIC

I. INTRODUCTION

1 (August 25) A. ORGANIZATION

2 (September 8) B. CLASSICS/EXEMPLARS

1. RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY: OLSON

2. CULTURAL THEORY: WEBER

3. STRUCTURAL THEORY: WALTZ

3 (September 15) C. HISTORY/CONTEXT

II. PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

A. THEORIES OF SCIENCE

4 (September 22) 1. THE TRADITIONAL VIEW

5 (September 29) 2. CRITICISMS

6 (October 6) 3. ALTERNATIVES

7 (October 13) B. PARTS OF SCIENCE

1. THEORY AND EXPLANATION

8 (October 20) 2. DISCOVERY AND EXPERIMENT

(These last two are an analytical summary of the key issues)

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

9 (October 27)* A. THE PROBLEM OF RESEARCH DESIGN

10 (November 3) B. THE PRINCIPLES OF RESEARCH DESIGN

11 (November 10) C. QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGNS
12 (November 17) D. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGNS

IV. PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

13 (November 24)** A. RATIONALITY

14 (December 1) B. CULTURE

15 (December 8) C. STRUCTURE

16 (December 15)*** V. CONCLUSION: THEORY, DISCIPLINE, AND SOCIETY

17 (December 18)**** FINAL

* = philosophy of science paper is due

** = research design paper is due

*** = philosophy of social science paper is due

**** = research proposal is due