



Researching Congress in D.C.

Applied Research in American Politics
Quality Enhancement Project
Summer 2008

Course Description

- This course is designed to engage students in a hands-on research project on the U.S. Congress that will involve conducting elite interviews in Washington, D.C.
- Not only will students explore the types of research methods available to political scientists, they will focus on the ins and outs of one type of research methodology – that of elite interviewing.
- The reading material and tentative course schedule are both geared to guide students through the conceptualization of a research question, the identification of an interview set, the execution and transcription of elite interviews, and the oral and written communication of research findings.
- Students will devise their own research agenda and explore the answers to their questions on Capitol Hill.

Undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes

- First, students will **understand** the basic structure and organization of the U.S. Congress.
- Secondly, students will **recognize** major fields of congressional study and identify areas for future study.
- Third, students will **analyze** principles of research design and determine the relevance of these principles to their own research on Congress.
- Fourth, students will **demonstrate** their understanding of the U.S. Congress through a research paper they will collaboratively produce from the data collected during their field research in D.C.
- Finally, students will **communicate** effectively both in written and oral form the results of their research.

Graduate Student Learning Outcomes

- Beyond the objectives articulated for the undergraduate students in this course, graduate students will **examine** the scholarship on research design and elite interviewing.
- They will **translate** these principles into a blueprint for conducting firsthand data collection and analysis.
- They will lead the undergraduate students in **articulating** a research question and **identifying** an interview sample.
- In addition, they will **supervise** teams of undergraduate students in **developing** interview questionnaires and communication skills while scheduling elite interviews.
- They will **apply** the principles of elite interviewing by personally conducting and supervising other students conducting firsthand interviews in D.C.
- They will **synthesize** their group's findings in a research paper and presentation.
- Through this experience, graduate students will **develop** their understanding of the skills required for project management.

Grading Schema

Undergraduate Grading Scheme					
Participation	10%	A	93-100%	C	73-76%
Trip Performance	25%	A-	90-92%	C-	70-72%
Project Management	40%	B+	87-89%	D+	66-69%
- Conceptualizing the Research Design	10%	B	83-86%	D-	60-65%
- Gathering the Evidence	15%	B-	80-82%	F	0-59%
- Analyzing and Communicating the Results	15%	C+	77-79%		
Final Paper and Presentation	25%				
Graduate Grading Scheme					
Participation	10%	A	93-100%	C	73-76%
Leadership at Field Site	25%	A-	90-92%	C-	70-72%
Project Management	40%	B+	87-89%	D+	66-69%
- Conceptualizing the Research Design	10%	B	83-86%	D-	60-65%
- Gathering the Evidence	15%	B-	80-82%	F	0-59%
- Analyzing and Communicating the Results	15%	C+	77-79%		
Final Paper and Presentation	25%				

Tentative Course Schedule

	Topics in American Politics	Topics in Research Methods	Undergraduate Readings	Graduate Readings
5/13	Congressional Structure and Legislative Process		Committee Organization (5pp) Committee Types and Roles (3pp) Authorization & Appropriation (2pp)	(same)
5/15		Conducting Research: Quantitative and Qualitative		KKV (1996) Ch. 1 (19pp) Barkin (2006) (18pp)
5/20- 5/22	Areas in Congressional Studies	Surveying the Field/ Developing a Research Question	DeGregorio (1988) (16pp)	(same) Fenno (1986) (12pp)
5/27	An Introduction to the Congressional Office		Staff Guide	(same)
5/29		Ethics of Elite Interviewing *Request for IRB Approval	Woliver (2002) (2pp)	(same)
6/3		The Mechanics of Elite Interview	Leech (2002a) (1pp) Peabody et al (1990) (4pp)	(same)
6/5	How to Talk (and Listen) to Members of Congress	Conducting Elite Interviews and Gathering Data	Leech (2002b) (4pp) Aberbach and Rockman (2002) (4pp)	(same)
6/10		The Shape of Interview Notes	Fenno Interview Notes	(same)
6/12	The Diversity of Congressional Personnel	Selecting the Subjects and Scheduling the Interview	Goldstein (2002) (4pp) Rivera et al (2002) (4pp) Berry (2002) (4pp) Party Leadership (2pp) Organizational Structure	(same) KKV (1996), Ch. 4 (34pp)
6/17	Asking Good Questions	Questionnaire and Interview Schedule	Kingdon (1983) (3pp) Fenno Interview Notes (selections)	(same)
6/19	Pre-Trip Meeting	Pre-Trip Meeting		
6/24	In D.C.	AT THE FIELD SITE		
7/1	Recording and Making Sense of Your Experience	Data Transcription & Interpretation	Fenno Interview Notes (selections) Fenno (1978) Appendix	(same)
7/8	The Outline: Previous Scholarship	The Research Paper: Literature, Data and Methods	Evans (2008)	(same)
7/15	Bringing the Pieces Together	Analysis and Findings	Examples provided in class.	Hall (1996) (17pp); Swers (2002) (19pp)
	Group Meetings	Group Meetings	No Readings	No Readings
8/5	Final Paper and Presentation	Final Paper and Presentation		

Tasks Related to Project Management

Undergraduate and Graduate Tasks Related to Project Management		
Pre-Trip Tasks	Undergraduate	Graduate
	* Articulation of Research Question	* Articulation of Group Research Question
	* Development of Open-Ended Questionnaire	* Development of Open-Ended Questionnaire
	* Completion of Practice Interview	* Completion of Team's Practice Interview
	* Preparation of Personal D.C. Schedule	* Preparation of Personal/Group D.C. Schedule
		* Submission by Leaders of IRB Forms
Post-Trip Tasks	Undergraduate	Graduate
	* Transcription of Individual Interviews	* Transcription of Individual Interviews
		* Compilation of Group's Transcribed Interviews
	* Identification of Tasks Related to Paper	* Assignment of Paper Tasks to Group Members
	* Completion of Tasks Related to Paper	* Compilation and Revision of Group Contributions to Paper
	* Presentation of Research at Final Meeting	* Presentation of Research at Final Meeting
		* Finalization and Submission of Group Paper Abstract for SPSA

Designing the Assessment Mechanism

- Establishing a Rubric
- Three phases of Project
 - Conceptualizing the Research Design
 - Gathering the Evidence
 - Analyzing and Communicating the Results
- Three Modes of Assessment
 - Student Self Assessment
 - Student Peer Assessment
 - Instructor Assessment



Phase 1: Conceptualizing the Research Design	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Fails to Meet Expectations
Selects and defines realistic problem to be solved	Works to select and define theoretically interesting and important research question.	Selects and defines realistic research question.	Fails to select and define realistic research question in timely manner.
Identifies relevant resources and potential obstacles	Provides a fairly comprehensive bibliography and actively addresses potential obstacles in conceptualizing research design.	Accurately identifies appropriate resources and assesses potential obstacles in conceptualizing research design.	Fails to identify appropriate sources; does not foresee obstacles in conceptualizing research design.
Develops strategies for execution in relation to constraints	Develops multiple strategies to accommodate the unique contexts presented by research design.	Articulates possible strategy for conceptualizing research plan given potential obstacles.	Fails to articulate possible strategies for conceptualizing research plan in face of constraints.
Integrates discipline concepts appropriately	Clearly identifies and summarizes main relevant disciplinary concepts; successfully explains connection of concepts to research problem.	Identifies and summarizes main relevant disciplinary concepts; but does not clearly explain connection to research problem.	Fails to identify, summarize, or explain the relevant disciplinary concepts to the research problem and/or misrepresents the concepts.
Identifies criteria for successful completion	Identifies detailed criteria for successful conceptualization of research design.	Identifies basic criteria for successful conceptualization of research design.	Fails to identify criteria for successful conceptualization of research design.
Accurately assesses quality of plan	Quality of research design far exceeds expectations.	Provides accurate assessment of quality of research design.	Fails to provide realistic assessment of quality of research design
Sets appropriate goals for completing the project	Project was completed on or before specified deadlines and may be used as model example for future students.	Project was well planned, meets the requirements for quality, and was completed on schedule.	Project was poorly thought out or implemented and did not meet its goals for quality or schedule.
Completes responsibilities as team member	Not only completes delegated responsibilities, but takes on leadership role in research design phase.	Completes delegated responsibilities in research design phase.	Fails to complete delegated responsibilities in research design phase.
Contributes positively to task completion	Not only contributes positively, but is central to positive experience of team in research design phase.	Helps to complete task through positive contributions in research design phase.	Fails to contribute positively to task completion either through lack of contribution or negative attitude in research design phase.

Phase 2: Gathering the Evidence			
Manages appropriate timeframe	Student not only participates in each phase of gathering the evidence but proactively backward maps research schedule to manage appropriate timeframe.	Student participates in each phase of gathering the evidence thus managing appropriate timeframe.	Student fails to participate in every phase of gathering evidence thus failing to manage appropriate timeframe.
Executes appropriate priorities	Manages time so well that not only able to execute appropriate priorities, but also able to gather unexpected evidence.	Accurately prioritizes the tasks related to gathering the evidence.	Fails to accurately prioritize tasks related to gathering the evidence.
Shows flexibility by planning back-strategies	Not only shows flexibility in gathering evidence, but plans back-up strategies in case of scheduling conflicts.	Shows flexibility in gathering evidence.	Fails to show flexibility in gathering evidence; if plan falls through, no alternative in place.
Manages conflict among team members	Engages in successful conflict resolution where applicable; introduces conflict to faculty when necessary.	Engages in conflict resolution with team members in gathering evidence phase.	Fails to engage in conflict resolution with team members; fails to introduce conflict to faculty when necessary.
Practices appropriate ethical judgment (pass/fail item)	Clear documentation of compliance with relevant ethical guidelines (IRB review, protection of confidentiality of clients, etc.)		Evidence of failure to obtain IRB approval, to protect client confidentiality, or other transgression of scientific, professional, or academic integrity
Completes responsibilities as team member	Student displays excellent teamwork skills, provides, seeks out, and accepts feedback enhancing the quality of the gathering evidence phase.	Student is able to work with others, and accepts and provides feedback in the completion of the gathering evidence phase.	Student's interactions with others adversely affects the quality of the gathering evidence phase.
Contributes positively to task completion	Student is aware of own progress and makes adjustments in gathering the evidence; uses back-up plans or asks for assistance when necessary, while keeping faculty member well-informed regarding project status.	Student provides faculty member with project status when asked and requests assistance when appropriate to do so.	Student must be prompted to provide information on progress of the project; fails to make necessary adjustments when faced with problems; or fails to seek assistance when necessary to do so.

Phase 3: Analyzing and Communicating the Results			
Practices appropriate ethical judgment (pass/fail item)	Demonstrates academic integrity in presentation of research findings through appropriation citation of sources and avoidance of plagiarism.		Fails to demonstrate academic integrity in presentation of research findings through inappropriate citation of sources and evidence of plagiarism.
Completes responsibilities as team member	Student displays excellent teamwork skills, provides, seeks out, and accepts feedback which enhances the quality of the analysis and research report phase.	Student is able to work with others, and accepts and provides feedback in the completion of the analysis and research report phase.	Student's interactions with others adversely affect the quality of the analysis and research report phase.
Contributes positively to task completion	Student is aware of own progress and makes adjustments in analyzing and communicating research results; uses back-up plans or asks for assistance when necessary, while keeping faculty member well-informed regarding project status.	Student provides faculty member status on analysis and research report when asked and requests assistance when appropriate to do so.	Student must be prompted to provide information on the progress of the analysis and research report; fails to make necessary adjustments when faced with problems; or fails to seek assistance when necessary to do so.
Delivers acceptable product on time	Student turns in finished product, including and exceeding all the required components, on time.	Student turns in finished project, including all the required components, on time.	Student fails to turn in finished product on time or product does not include all the required components.
Effectively presents results using appropriate oral, written, and/or visual means	Word choice is particularly matched to the intended audience. No errors in disciplinary style.	Word choice is acceptable for intended audience. Minimal errors in disciplinary style.	Word choice is inappropriate to the intended audience. Writing is poor. Errors in disciplinary style detract substantially from the paper.
Responds effectively to constructive feedback	Receives and responds to constructive student and faculty feedback; incorporates suggestions into final product.	Receives and responds to constructive student and faculty feedback, but fails to integrate suggestions into final product.	Fails to receive and respond to constructive student and faculty feedback; fails to integrate suggestions into final product.
Makes valid suggestions for improvement in process and product	Offers constructive, valid suggestions for improvement of process and product.	Offers suggestions for improvement of process and product, but suggestions are not constructive.	Fails to offer suggestions for improvement of process and product.

Assessment



Three Phases

- Phase 1: Conceptualization
- Phase 2: Data Collection
- Phase 3: Analysis

Phase 1: Conceptualizing the Research Design

Student Self Assessment of Performance in Applied Methods in American Politics and in UWF Student Learning Outcomes Related to Project Management - Phase 1: Conceptualizing the Research Design

Student _____
Course _____

Faculty _____
Date _____

To what degree do you feel you met expectations for the course? Use the following rubric to answer the question concerning several specific student learning outcomes for the course.

Phase 1: Conceptualizing the Research Design	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Fails to Meet Expectations
Selects and defines realistic problem to be solved			
Identifies relevant resources and potential obstacles			
Develops strategies for execution in relation to constraints			
Integrates discipline concepts appropriately			
Identifies criteria for successful completion			
Accurately assesses quality of plan			
Sets appropriate goals for completing the project			
Completes responsibilities as team member			
Contributes positively to task completion			

Describe areas where you feel you might need improvement:

Phase 2: Gathering the Evidence

Student Self Assessment of Performance in Applied Methods in American Politics and in UWF Student Learning Outcomes Related to Project Management

Student _____
Course _____

Faculty _____
Date _____

To what degree do you feel you met expectations for the course? Use the following rubric to answer the question concerning several specific student learning outcomes for the course.

Phase 2: Gathering the Evidence			
Manages appropriate timeframe			
Executes appropriate priorities			
Shows flexibility by planning back-up strategies			
Manages conflict among team members			
Practices appropriate ethical judgment			
Completes responsibilities as team member			
Contributes positively to task completion			

Describe areas where you feel you excelled or might have room for improvement:

Phase 3: Analyzing and Communicating the Results

Student Self Assessment of Performance in Applied Methods in American Politics and in UWF Student Learning Outcomes Related to Project Management – Phase 3: Analyzing and Communicating the Results

Student _____
Course _____

Faculty _____
Date _____

To what degree do you feel you met expectations for the course? Use the following rubric to answer the question concerning several specific student learning outcomes for the course.

Phase 3: Analyzing and Communicating the Results			
Practices appropriate ethical judgment			
Completes responsibilities as team member			
Contributes positively to task completion			
Delivers acceptable product on time			
Effectively presents results using appropriate oral, written, and/or visual means			
Responds effectively to constructive feedback			
Makes valid suggestions for improvement in process and product			

Describe areas where you feel you excelled or might have room for improvement:

Evaluation

Student Self Assessment Forms
Student Peer Assessment Forms
Instructor Assessment
Student Course Evaluations



Assessment of Phase 1: Conceptualizing the Research Design

	Student Self Assessment	Student Peer Assessment	Instructor Assessment
	μ (s.d.)	μ (s.d.)	μ (s.d.)
Phase 1: Conceptualizing the Research Design			
Selects and defines realistic problem to be solved	91.92 (4.0452)	93.75 (4.9187)	92.50 (4.5227)
Identifies relevant resources and potential obstacles	91.82 (6.0302)	94.38 (5.6440)	92.50 (4.5227)
Develops strategies for execution in relation to constraints	92.73 (4.6710)	92.50 (5.0800)	94.17 (5.1493)
Integrates discipline concepts appropriately	93.64 (5.0453)	93.44 (6.0158)	92.50 (6.2158)
Identifies criteria for successful completion	93.64 (5.0453)	94.69 (5.6707)	93.33 (6.5134)
Accurately assesses quality of plan	90.91 (3.0151)	93.44 (5.4533)	90.83 (9.0034)
Sets appropriate goals for completing the project	92.73 (4.6710)	92.50 (5.6796)	92.50 (9.6531)
Completes responsibilities as team member	94.55 (5.2223)	95.00 (5.6796)	93.33 (8.8763)
Contributes positively to task completion	93.64 (5.0453)	95.94 (5.5992)	97.50 (6.2158)
Valid N	11	32	12

Assessment of Phase 2: Gathering the Evidence

	Student Self Assessment	Student Peer Assessment	Instructor Assessment
	μ (s.d.)	μ (s.d.)	μ (s.d.)
Phase 2: Gathering the Evidence			
Manages appropriate timeframe	97.27 (4.6710)	95.63 (6.1892)	92.50 (8.6603)
Executes appropriate priorities	95.45 (5.2223)	93.75 (6.0907)	92.50 (8.6603)
Shows flexibility by planning back-up strategies	94.55 (5.2223)	92.81 (7.28870)	93.33 (8.8763)
Manages conflict among team members	91.82 (7.5076)	94.06 (6.6524)	94.17 (7.9296)
Practices appropriate ethical judgment	94.55 (5.2223)	93.44 (6.5300)	94.17 (6.6856)
Completes responsibilities as team member	95.45 (5.2223)	93.91 (7.2662)	95.00 (6.7420)
Contributes positively to task completion	94.55 (5.2223)	93.59 (7.2105)	96.67 (7.7850)
Valid N	11	32	12

Assessment of Phase 3: Analyzing and Communicating the Results

	Student Self Assessment	Student Peer Assessment	Instructor Assessment
	μ (s.d.)	μ (s.d.)	μ (s.d.)
Phase 3: Analyzing and Communicating the Results			
Practices appropriate ethical judgment	95.00 (5.2705)	95.71 (5.0395)	93.90 (4.4833)
Completes responsibilities as team member	97.00 (4.8305)	96.07 (5.6695)	95.00 (7.0711)
Contributes positively to task completion	98.00 (4.2164)	96.07 (6.2889)	93.50 (6.6875)
Delivers acceptable product on time	96.00 (5.1640)	95.00 (6.3829)	93.00 (6.3944)
Effectively presents results using appropriate oral, written, and/or visual means	96.00 (5.1640)	95.00 (6.3829)	93.70 (4.6200)
Responds effectively to constructive feedback	96.50 (4.7434)	95.36 (6.9293)	90.70 (5.0783)
Makes valid suggestions for improvement in process and product	94.00 (5.1640)	95.71 (6.3413)	93.00 (4.9216)
Valid N	10	28	10

Item	Undergraduate	Graduate
Expression of expectation for performance in this class.	83% (5/6)	100% (5/5)
Description of course objectives and assignments.	100% (6/6)	100% (5/5)
Communication of ideas and information.	83% (5/6)	100% (5/5)
Stimulation of interest in the course.	100% (6/6)	100% (5/5)
Facilitation of learning.	83% (5/6)	100% (5/5)
Respect and concern for students.	83% (5/6)	100% (5/5)
Availability to assist students in or out of class.	83% (5/6)	100% (5/5)
Overall, assessment of instructor.	83% (5/6)	100% (5/5)
Course requirements.	100% (6/6)	60% (3/5)
Course assignments.	100% (6/6)	100% (5/5)
Course materials.	100% (6/6)	100% (5/5)
Provides feedback.	83% (5/6)	100% (5/5)
Testing procedures.	67% (4/6)	100% (5/5)
Grading practice.	67% (4/6)	100% (5/5)
Student work.	100% (6/6)	100% (5/5)
Class meeting.	100% (6/6)	100% (5/5)
The instructor's command of the subject was:	100% (6/6)	100% (5/5)
Overall, I would rate the course organization.	83% (5/6)	100% (5/5)

Student Comments

Undergraduate	Graduate
<p>“*Best instructor I’ve had in 3 years!”</p> <p>“Dr. Evans was awesome, as always!”</p> <p>“I would take and probably already have taken every class with Dr. Evans. She consistently commands the subject and the class itself.”</p> <p>“This class was well organized. The entire course proved to be a valuable experience. Dr. Evans made it extremely interesting.”</p> <p>“This class was definitely challenging and stretched me a great deal. It was completely worth it.”</p>	<p>“Praise for you for juggling this trip.”</p> <p>“Everything was well explained, and Dr. Evans was incredibly accommodating with out-of-class questions.”</p> <p>“This course was amazing. Dr. Evans did an excellent job leading our class into this trip. It was a great learning experience.”</p> <p>“Dr. Evans is an outstanding instructor, in addition to being a caring advisor. Her excitement for this course was felt by all. She did an amazing job!”</p>



Discussion