

PUBL 401
Senior Seminar
Analyzing Politics and Policy: Obama Year One
Thursday 1:45-4:30
Macmillan Hall 126

Instructor: Professor Susan Tabrizi

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Office Hours: Tuesday 2-4 & by appt.

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Course Description: The purpose of this course is to explore the process of doing research in political science through exercises in substantive political analysis and research design. Students will critically assess the first year of the Obama Administration as a way of introducing political issues and important questions surrounding them. The major focus of the course will be the practice of political science research. Each student will complete the design and initial research for a major independent research project that will serve as the senior thesis for the Public Affairs major.

Course Objectives: At the successful conclusion of this course students will be able to:

- offer an informed and critical assessment of the major policy proposals put forth by the Obama Administration to date including the substance of such proposals, the politics surrounding them and potential explanations for their success or failure
- demonstrate mastery of the major steps required in the process of research design including but not limited to:
 - selection of a topic
 - crafting of a research question and discussion of theoretical significance
 - literature search and review
 - conceptualization and operationalization of major variables
 - statement of hypotheses
 - selection of research strategy including testing of hypotheses
 - clear and professional presentation of written design

Course Materials:

Title: The Audacity of Hope

Author: Barack Obama

Publisher : Vintage

Date: 2008 (reprint)

ISBN-10: 0307455874

ISBN-13: 978-0307455871

Title: The Basics of Social Research, 4th Edition

Author: Earl Babbie

Publisher: Thomson/Wadsworth

Date: 2008

ISBN-10:0-495-09468-4

ISBN-13: 978-0-495-09468-5

Methods of Evaluation:

- Weekly Assignments: 30%
- Individual Research Design: 60% (includes the on-time completion of the following elements of the research design and an evaluation of the completed final product):
 - Research question and statement of significance 10%
 - Bibliography draft 5%
 - Literature review 15%
 - Conceptualization and Operationalization 5%
 - Hypotheses statement 5%
 - Test design and discussion 15%
 - Final design & report 10%

Course Schedule*

*Subject to change at instructor's discretion

Week 1: Thursday August 27

Course overview and discussion of student research interests

- Start reading Obama book

Week 2: Thursday September 3

Fundamental characteristics of science.

- Read Babbie Chapters 1-2
- Assignment: Chapter 1 Review Exercises #1 and #3 a and b (5%)
- Assignment: Chapter 2 Review Exercise #2 (5%)

Week 3: Thursday September 10

The Ethics of Social Research

- Read Babbie Chapter 3
- Assignment: Chapter 3 Review Exercise #1 (selected) (5%)

Week 4: Thursday September 17

Let's Talk Politics: What are we interested in studying: issues, politics, then versus now, source for topics, focus on economy, environment, energy and healthcare,

- Read: Finish Obama
- Read: Jost, Kenneth. 2009. "The Obama Presidency." *CQ Researcher*. 19(4).
- Assignment: Write a short paper (4-5 pages) on a topic of interest to you that details initiatives by the Obama administration (or lack thereof) and offers an assessment of state of those initiatives from a political perspective. Use web and newspaper/magazine resources – minimum 5. (10%)
- In class: How can we understand all of this? Making the leap from consumer to producer.
- In class: Developing research questions about Obama administration

Week 5: Thursday September 24 LIBRARY DAY

Reading and Writing Social Science Research

- Read: Babbie Chapter 17
- Read: Babbie Appendix A
- In class: Meet in the library today (place tba).

Week 6: Thursday October 1

The Scientific Project: Research Design

- Read Babbie Chapter 4
- Assignment: Select one article from a political science journal and outline the research question, theory, hypotheses, operationalization, tests and conclusion. Be prepared to present outline to the class (informal). (5%)
- In class: research topic selection completed
- In class: research question draft due by 1:45

Week 7: Thursday October 8

Conceptualization, Operationalization and Measurement

- Read Babbie Chapter 5
- Assignment: Research question and statement of significance. Write a 4-5 page paper detailing your research question and offering a justification for why it is important to answer. (10%)

Start of Individual Meetings Weekly

Week 8: Thursday October 15

- Bibliography draft due by noon on October 16 (5%)

Week 9 Thursday October 22

- Work on literature review

Week 10: Thursday October 29

- Literature review due by noon on October 30 (15%)

Week 11: Thursday November 5

- Conceptualization and Operationalization outline due by noon on November 6 (5%)

Week 12: Thursday November 12

- Hypotheses due by Noon on November 13 (5%)

Week 13: Thursday November 19

- Test design and discussion due by noon on November 23 (10%)

Week 14: THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 15 Thursday December 3 LAST DAY OF CLASS

- Completed research design due 5%
- Professional presentation to the class. 5%