IR 211: Approaches to Research
Syllabus for Fall 2015 (Version August 22)
Professor: Benjamin Graham
Teaching Assistant (TA): Joey Huddleston (rhuddles@usc.edu)
Lectures: MWF 9-9:50 AM, SOS B46
Sections: M, 12-12:50pm in VKC 257; W 12-12:50, 1-1:50 in VKC 252
Course Website: https://dornsife.usc.edu/graham/ir-211/
Office Hours: Fridays 10AM – Noon
TA Office Hours: Wednesdays 10AM – 12PM
Office: VKC 305
TA Office: VKC B42G

This syllabus is current as of the version date above. It is subject to change. You will be notified in class and/or by e-mail whenever the syllabus is updated. The current version of the syllabus will always be posted on the course website

Overview
This class is an introduction to social science research methodology. My main goal is to teach you the basics of creating and consuming research in the social sciences, and international relations in particular. The course will lead you through conceptualization and theory construction, the derivation of testable hypotheses, and a variety of methodologies that may be used to evaluate these hypotheses. We will discuss causal inference, observation and measurement, and other issues encompassing both qualitative and quantitative research methods. We will discuss the way in which academic articles in the social sciences are written, and how they should be read.

This course includes some very basics statistics, and requires use of Excel for some class assignments. These include some simple description and correlation of data from the World Development Indicators.

Requirements
Students are expected to complete all assigned readings before the class for which they are assigned, and to arrive in class and in section prepared to discuss that material. There will be a reading quiz at the beginning of most lectures.

There will be 5 homework assignments, due at the beginning of class. Late assignments are docked 50% if they are handed in the class meeting following the meeting at which they are due. Assignments later than this are not accepted. Homework assignments will only be accepted in class and may not be handed in at other times. There will also be a midterm and a final.
Grading
Homework & In-Class assignments .... 35%
Midterm ........................................... 20%
Final ................................................... 25%
Participation ...................................... 10%
Reading Quizzes.................................. 10%

Clickers:
All students in this course are required to purchase a responsecard (i.e. clicker). Students will use the clickers to answer multiple-choice questions during lecture.
The primary purpose of the clickers is to give students a chance to actively participate in the lecture and to check understanding as we proceed through the material. Clicker responses will be used to calculate participation grades for lecture. I will not deduct points for wrong answers, but students must attempt to answer the questions to receive participation credit.

Reading Quizzes: Reading quizzes are not hard. They are designed to test whether you did the reading, not whether you grasped every nuance. Do the reading and you should get the questions right.

However, if you want to be sure you get full credit for a quiz, all you have to do is write your own multiple choice quiz question. If you submit a usable quiz question, you will automatically receive full credit for the quiz. Questions must be received by 7pm the night before the course meeting in which the quiz will be given.

Course Webpage and Blackboard
This syllabus and appropriate links are available on the course webpage at http://dornsife.usc.edu/graham. The slides from lecture will be available on the website. Whenever possible, I will post the slides before class so that students can print them out to take notes directly onto the slides. Reviewing the slides is not a substitute for attending lecture, and the slides will not include all the information covered in lecture, or all the material that will be on the exams.

While I will not use blackboard to post materials, you will need to use blackboard to register your clicker. (To do so, click on “IR 211” under courses, then use the “Turning Point Registration Tool” under “Tools.”)
Statement for Students with Disabilities
Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Statement on Academic Integrity
USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/.

Rules:
The midterm and final are closed book. The final is cumulative, and both exams will cover material from lecture, section, and the required readings/viewings/listenings.

Homework assignments must reflect your own work. You may discuss homework assignments with other students, but if you do so, you must list the students with whom you have discussed the assignment on the top of your homework.

You must do all computer work and write all answers yourself. DO NOT hand in homework for which any of your answers are identical to your peers, even if your peers’ names are listed on your assignment. This will be considered cheating.

Students who cheat on either a homework assignment or an exam will receive an F in the course and the case will be referred to SJACs.

All homework assignments must be typed with questions and pages numbered. For assignments where Excel is required, include the printed output in your homework submission. All assignments will be collected at the beginning of class.

Grade Disputes
You may contest the grade on an exam up to 1 week after it is returned. If you believe that there has been an error on your exam, submit a written description of the error you believe occurred along with the exam to your TA for re-grading.
Clerical errors and outright mistakes will be corrected; decisions about the amount of partial credit to give for an answer will not be re-visited.
Schedule of Meetings

**Week 1: The Big Picture**

Monday, August 24
   **Introduction**

Wednesday, August 26
   **Research Design & Wicked Problems**
   Assigned Viewing: Jonathan Haidt. Three Stories About Capitalism (Talk is 25 minutes long. You only need to watch the first 14:30 of the talk)
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOu_ByoqZoQ

Friday, August 28
   **Wicked Problems in International Relations**
   Assigned Viewing: Simon Jackman’s TED talk on The Democracy Data Revolution
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INf5u29n-5Q

**Week 2: The Scientific Method**

Monday, August 31
   **Guest Lecture: The Scientific Method**
   ***************Wicked Problems Homework is Distributed**********
   Reading: http://slantchev.ucsd.edu/courses/ps12/01-scientific-method.pdf

Wednesday, September 2
   **Guest Lecture: The Scientific Method Solves Wicked Problems (and More!)*
   Assigned (quick) exercise: Complete this online exercise before class. Takes only a few minutes. http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/07/03/upshot/a-quick-puzzle-to-test-your-problem-solving.html?_r=0&abt=0002&abg=1
   Listening (listen until 19:24): “Is there a better way to fight terrorism?”
   - http://freakonomics.com/2015/02/13/is-there-a-better-way-to-fight-terrorism-a-new-freakonomics-radio-podcast/
   Reading: “Are All Terrorists Muslims? It’s Not Even Close”
   - http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/01/14/are-all-terrorists-muslims-it-s-not-even-close.html
   Viewing: “Definition of Terrorism”
   - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QV-2mXfYLDg

Friday, September 4
   ***************NO CLASS. MAKE-UP DATE TBD**********

**Week 3: Selecting Research Questions**

Monday, September 7
LABOR DAY – NO CLASS

Wednesday, September 9
Literature Reviews & Selecting a Research Question
   http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=386229&fileId=S1049096506060264

Friday, September 11
***********Literature Review Homework Circulated***********
Group project formulating a research question.

Week 4: Hypotheses and Theory Construction

Monday, September 14
   Deriving Testable Implications

*No readings for today – start readings for Wednesday. They are long. And important.

Wednesday, September 16
   Controversy: The Democratic Peace Theory
   Required Readings:


Friday, September 18
***********Literature Review Due in Class Today***********

Activity: Generating Testable Hypotheses

Week 5: Measurement, Operationalization, and Validity
Monday, September 21
   Required Viewing: “What is GDP”
   http://www.npr.org/sections/money/2011/10/26/141741360/video-what-is-gdp

   Required Reading: “What does Nigeria’s new GDP number actually mean?”
Wednesday, September 23
Discussion about Measurement validity

Read pp. 529-532, stopping before the “Measurement Validity and Choices about Concepts” section. Then read from p. 536-544, staring with the section on “Alternative Perspectives on Types of Validation”

Friday, September 25
Exercise and discussion on Operationalization, Measurement and Validity
**********Measurement Validity Homework Circulated**********

Week 6: Sampling & External Validity
Monday, September 28
**Required Reading:**
1. Key Research Concepts in Politics and International Relations by Harrison and Callan. Sampling (This is a 2-page pdf posted to my website).

Wednesday, September 30
Sampling Error
**Required Viewing:** Sampling error introduction: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGuWrPFSstdg
**Required Online Exercise:**
(Note: The reading quiz will just be questions from this exercise)
**Optional Interactive Exercise:**
http://onlinestatbook.com/stat_sim/sampling_dist/

Friday, October 2
**********Measurement Validity Homework Due**********

Week 7: True Experiments
Monday, October 5
Wednesday, October 7
Assigned Reading: TBD

Friday, October 9
Group activity: Designing experiments (Tversky & Kahneman)

**Week 8: Natural & Quasi-Experiments**
Monday, October 12
Assigned Reading: http://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/impact-women-policy-makers-public-goods-india

Wednesday, October 14
Regression Discontinuity Designs
**********Midterm Exam Review Guide Circulated**********

Friday, October 16
Surveys (1)
******Experiment Design Homework Due?***************
Survey Methods Chapter, *Political Science Research Methods* by Johnson and Reynolds

**Week 9: Surveys, Interviews, and Focus Groups (1)**
Monday, October 19
Surveys
Reading: TBD (Example Article Using Survey Data)

Wednesday, October 21
Interviews & Focus Groups
Readings: Leech, “Asking Questions” (course website)
Woliver, “Ethical Dilemmas” (course website)
Goldstein, “Getting in the Door” (course website)

Focus Groups, Pages TBD
https://books.google.com/books?id=APtDBAAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=focus+groups&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CDEQ6AEwAGoVChMI7pDUpfrOxgIVkSyICh2ViApi#v=onepage&q=focus%20groups&f=false

Friday, October 23
**********Midterm Exam Today**********

**Week 10: Surveys, Interviews, and Focus Groups (2)**
Monday, October 26  
Class Project: Qualtrix Survey Experiment

Wednesday, October 28  
Survey Experiment Project (Continued)

Friday, October 30  
Survey Experiment Project (Continued)

**Week 11: Research Ethics**  
Monday, November 2  
Readings: TBD

Wednesday, November 4  
Reading: TBD

Friday, November 6  
Reading: TBD

**Week 12: Working with Data: Descriptive Statistics**  
Monday, November 9  
Required Reading: Agresti and Finlay (1 chapter)

Wednesday, November 11  
Working with excel, summary statistics  
**Required Viewing:** The Central Limit Theorem:  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvoxEYmQHNM

Friday, November 13  
Working with excel Graphs

**Week 13: Working with Data: Inferential Statistics**  
Monday, November 16  
********Data Homework 1 Due***********

Wednesday, November 18

Friday, November 20

**Week 14: Consuming Research**  
Monday, November 23  
How to Read a Journal Article (1)  
********Data Homework 2 Due ***********
Wednesday, November 25
NO CLASS -- THANKSGIVING

Friday, November 27
NO CLASS -- THANKSGIVING

**Week 15: Back to the Big Picture**

Monday, November 30
How to Read a Journal Article (2)
******Final Exam Study Guide Circulated******

Wednesday, December 2
Careers in Social Science Research

**Required Readings:**

Friday, December 4
Coming Full Circle