The American University in Cairo  
Department of Political Science

POLS 2104 – Introduction to Research Methods in Political Science  
Spring 2015  
Sunday and Wednesday 14:00-15:20  
Waleed C-153

Lecturer: Dr. Pauline Ndirumpatse  
Office: HUSS 2001  
Office hours: Sunday 12:30-13:30 or by appointment  
E-mail: pauline.ndirumpatse@aucegypt.edu

Course description & Objectives

This course aims to introduce students to some of the main research approaches and methods used in the social sciences and in political science. The overall objective is to allow students to gain a logical understanding of the research process, its principles and elements, and critically engage with this process. Throughout the course, the main thread will not only be to raise and discuss different questions, issues, considerations, facing the researcher at every stage of the research process but also to pay attention to the assumptions underlying some of the choices/decisions implied, in terms of methodologies and methods. An emphasis will therefore be put on the plurality of approaches available to the researcher in the social sciences and, hence, the need to understand, in relation to one’s specific research purpose(s)/question(s)/objective(s), the choices one makes and why (what informs those choices).

By the end of the course, students will be familiar with:
- The language of social science research;
- The different steps and procedures entailed in the conduct of research (from developing a question to choosing methodologies and methods of data gathering and analysis without forgetting the writing process)
- The thought process underlying the research process.

Students Evaluation

The final grade will be based on 5 different evaluations

1. Weekly Quizzes (40%): There will be one unannounced quiz each week (in one of the 2 classes) based on the readings assigned for that day. Total of 12 quizzes. The best 10 will count towards the final grade.
Important: When there is a quiz, it will take place right at the beginning of class. There will be no make-up quiz if you are absent or come to class late (after the quiz has taken place) for no justifiable (documented) reason. A missed quiz=0.

2. One journal assignment and a presentation (10 %): Each student will have to write a journal on one of the assigned readings and present the reading in class.

- The journal (2 pages) will consist of: a. A summary of the text and the main points/arguments put forward by the author and b. One or two questions you have with regards to the topic discussed in the text. Each journal is due on the day the assigned reading is scheduled in the course outline (see below). A typed hard copy of the journal has to be handed in on the due date at the beginning of class.

- The presentation will be done the following class. It will be based both on the journal previously submitted and the lecture of the previous class. Done at the beginning of the following class, the presentation will serve as a recap and a reminder of the points discussed in the previous class. The aim of this recap is to progressively make the group aware of the interactive process involved in a research design and the logical links between its different components. The presentation will not exceed 10 min. (5 min. for the summary of key elements, 5 min for issues/questions arising from your reading of the text.

Important: Your presentation cannot solely be based on your journal handed in the previous week as it also has to integrate additional information discussed during the previous lecture. Both components will be taken into account in the grade.

Each student will be assigned a reading in the second week of class.

3. A Conference report (10%): We will have an invited guest speaker on May 8th (see course outline below) on the topic of ‘Decolonizing knowledge and methodologies’. For that week, there will be no reading assigned but each student will have to submit at the beginning of the following class (May 11th) a typed hard copy of the conference report (2 pages) consisting of:

a. summary of the main arguments of the speaker and
b. a discussion of: why you think the question presented is relevant given the different issues raised throughout the semester with regard to research and knowledge production.

This conference comes towards the end of the course so I expect the discussion component of the report to be more elaborated, reflecting and integrating the cumulative understanding gained throughout the session.

Note: -As the conference will be a public lecture, the class of May 8th will be from 13h-14h.
- More precise information about the report will be given a week before the conference.
4. **A Research Proposal (30%):** The end-of-term paper will be a research proposal outlining your research topic and questions; literature review; proposed methodologies & methods of data gathering and analysis.

- You will be divided into groups of 3 (8 groups of 3, one group of 2) to work on the research proposal throughout the semester. Groups will be constituted by the end of **WEEK 2**.

- Though the process of elaborating the research proposal is a group-project, the paper to be submitted has to be written **individually** by each member of the group.

  *Note:* **More precise information about the structure of the final paper and the main points to be discussed will be posted on blackboard.**

- Starting **Week 6:** each week, the last part of the class will be devoted to a collective *forum* on your ongoing process of developing the research proposal. This is an occasion to exchange and gain insight from the class on questions, difficulties, etc. arising as you progress towards the final proposal. The discussions will be structured around the 4 components of the proposal. This means that the crafting of your research proposal has to follow the pace of the course. You have to start reflecting on how each component applies to your specific proposal as soon it has been covered in class. This will allow you to progressively build your proposal and benefit from the weekly forum.

- The session of **March 16th** will be devoted to a formal presentation by each group of the first part of their *draft-proposal*, followed by a collective forum. At this stage, your draft has to include: topic, question, literature review. Each group needs to have a written handout for everyone in class so we can have a sense of where you are at. *Note:* **Specifics of the handout will be posted on blackboard.**

  *Note:* **The research proposal is worth 30%, 10% of which will be based on these weekly forum and draft-proposal presentations & discussion.**

The final research proposal is due on **May 15th, 2016. A typed hard copy** has to be handed in at the beginning of class.

5. **Presentation of the research proposal (10%):** Each group will present in-class their final research proposal.

  *Note:* **A more precise memo on the structure of the presentation will be posted on blackboard.**
Summary of deadlines

- Journal: Each student has a specific due date.
- Draft-Proposal: March 16th (in-class presentation)
- Conference Journal: May 11th
- Research Proposal: May 15th
- Proposal Presentation of: Each group will have a specific date.

Grade Scale

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<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
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<th>Letter Grade</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>A</td>
<td>93+</td>
<td>C+</td>
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Course requirements

Attendance:

Attendance will be taken each class. Students who: *come after the first 15 minutes of class; leave before the end of class; leave repeatedly during class; spend time on their phone/tablet or chatting among themselves*, are deemed absent.

The university attendance policy states:

"A student who misses more than the equivalent of three weeks of class meetings during a semester for any reason may be assigned a reduced grade for the course — including the grade of “F” — solely on the basis of inadequate attendance, regardless of excuse... Students who miss fewer than three weeks of class sessions may not be penalized on the grounds of attendance alone... Students are personally responsible for making up any academic tasks and assignments missed due to their absence."

Attendance is mandatory including to make-up classes.

Behaviour:

The keyword in this class as a human & learning environment, is RESPECT towards your peers and the instructor. There is a 0 tolerance policy on this.

Late assignments: All late submissions of assignments will be penalized 5 % per day. 
Note: - For the journal assignment: NO late assignment will be accepted as the journal has to be handed in before the reading is discussed in class.
-For the **weekly quizzes**: No make-up quiz (see note above in the Evaluation section under quiz).

**Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism will under no circumstances be tolerated and will be systematically reported to the Academic Integrity Committee. Please refer to the AUC website: [http://schools.aucegypt.edu/academics/integrity/Students/Pages/AvoidingPlagiarism.aspx](http://schools.aucegypt.edu/academics/integrity/Students/Pages/AvoidingPlagiarism.aspx)

**Notice:** All the information pertaining to the class will be posted on **blackboard**. It is therefore **your responsibility** to familiarize yourself with the platform and consult it **at all times** as it will be the main tool of communication outside of class.

## Course outline & schedule

### I. THE RESEARCH PROCESS

#### Week 1

**S.1. January 31**

**Introduction**

- Research: what is it, why do we do it?
- The research process: methods, methodology, theory, epistemology


#### S.2. February 3

**Plural approaches in the Social Sciences**


#### S.3. February 7

**Plural approaches in the Social Sciences**

S.4. February 10\textsuperscript{th}: Power, politics & Ethics in Research


\textbf{Week 3}

S. 5. February 14\textsuperscript{th}: No class (make-up class on \textbf{March 16\textsuperscript{th}}-will be a double 14h-16h50)

S. 6. February 17\textsuperscript{th}: No class (make-up class on \textbf{May 15\textsuperscript{th}}-will be a double class from 14h-16h50)

\textbf{Week 4}

S.7. February 21\textsuperscript{st}: The conceptual Framework


S.8. February 24\textsuperscript{th}: The Research Question:


\textbf{Week 5}

S.9. February 28\textsuperscript{th}: Literature Review


S.10. March 2\textsuperscript{nd}: Library Search workshop (at the library)
II. RESEARCH DESIGN

Week 6

S. 11. March 6th:

Research Design


S.12. March 9th:

Methodologies & Qualitative approach (Concept, reliability, validity, quality criteria, critique of quali, …)


WEEK 7

S.13. March 13th:

Methodologies: Quantitative approach (Concepts, Measurement, reliability, validity, causality, critique of quanti …)


S. 14. March 16th:

Double class: regular 14h-15:20 & make-up class for Feb 14th 15:30-16:50.

In-Class Presentations of draft-proposals

WEEK 8

S.15. March 20th:

Respondents: Samples, informants, cases

III. DATA COLLECTION

S.16. March 23rd:

Direct Data Collection or Obtrusive methods (Surveys, Interviews)


March 27th: No class-Official Holiday

WEEK 9

S.17. March 30th:

Indirect Data Collection or Unobtrusive methods (Observation, Documents)


S.18. April 3rd:

Official documents and statistics


WEEK 10

S.19. April 6th:

E-Research

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

S. 20. April 10th:
Analyzing Quantitative Data (Variables, descriptive & inferential statistics)


WEEK 11

S. 21. April 13th:
Analyzing Qualitative Data


S. 22. April 17th:
Doing research in hostile environments
Guest lecturer.

WEEK 12

S. 23. April 20th:
Writing Research


April 24th-May 2nd:
Easter Holiday.

WEEK 13

V. EPISTEMOLOGIES, METHODOLOGIES QUESTIONED

S. 24. May 4th:
Traditional Critique


S. 25. May 8th:
Decolonizing knowledge and methods
Invited Speaker. This class will be a public lecture from 13:00-14:00
WEEK 14

S. 26. May 11th:  Feminist approaches

Reading: Signs, Vol. 30, No. 4, New Feminist Approaches to Social Science Methodologies Special Issue Editors Sandra Harding and Kathryn Norberg (Summer 2005), pp. 2009-2015

S. 27. May 15th: (this class will be a double class: regular class + make up class for Feb. 17th running therefore from 14:00-16:50)

Students presentations

WEEK 15

S. 28. May 18th:  Students presentations