The objective of this course is to introduce the student to the world of research methods at the graduate level. The goal of this course is twofold. First, to establish a foundation for more advanced knowledge of research methods for both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. Second, to give the student the tools and skills required to write papers or professional reports that would meet the standards of the academic and scientific community.

We will first explore the utility and meaning of the scientific method then proceed to basic issues of research design before concluding with discussions on case study and statistical methodologies. Topics to be covered include: science, theory construction, research design issues, case study methodologies, data management and presentation, statistical software (SPSS primarily), descriptive statistics, measures of central tendency, correlations, and linear regression analysis.

**Plagiarism (Read this disclaimer and avoid trouble!!!)**

An unpleasant topic that we need to discuss is plagiarism. Briefly, plagiarism entails the use of other people’s words, songs, or images without their consent or without documentation. For the papers in this class, students must provide footnotes or endnotes for passages in the text that are borrowed or inspired by other person’s works. It is not hard to avoid plagiarizing -- if you use a quote from someone, acknowledge it in a footnote; if you paraphrase or summarize an argument, cite the source from where you got the idea. I recommend looking into a style manual such as the Style Manual for Political Science, which I will provide.

**Special Circumstances**

The University of Texas, El Paso encourages qualified persons with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell the
instructor as soon as possible. I will do my best to make special arrangements for students with any required special needs or conflicts as far as course lectures or test-taking circumstances. However, if you anticipate a particular requirement, let me know as soon as possible and preferably with a formal form from UTEP’s Disabled Student Services. I will always try to accommodate legitimate needs, but I am unlikely to accommodate last minute requests. Special circumstances include disabilities and any scheduled activities that you have that conflict with this class. If you do not notify me of conflicts early on, I am under no obligation to allow you a make-up exam or assignment extension.

**Student Evaluation**

Student performance will be evaluated based on various assignments and class participation. Students are expected to attend class and come prepared with homework assignments and to participate in discussions. The final grade will be based on the following components:

- Midterm Exam: 10%
- Homework Assignments: 30%
- Research Protocol (see below): 25%
- Final Exam (cumulative): 25%
- Class Participation: 10%

**Homework Assignments**

The homework assignments are designed to allow students to learn through application, which helps to solidify theoretical knowledge but also teaches practical skills necessary in the use of research methods. I will try to keep these short and simple, although you will need to apply yourself, especially in learning how to use SPSS.

**Research Protocol**

The research protocol will be a product where the student will try to put together everything that s/he learned in class. The student will select a topic previously agreed with the instructor. The research protocol should include: a research question or “puzzle” that interests the student, a literature review to learn what has been said and done regarding the topic, the research design the student would use to test the hypotheses or questions, the type of data to be collected and the sample selection, type of statistical technique appropriate to test the hypotheses, etc. (see guidelines below)

**Exams**

The exams may include simple math problems essay, multiple choice questions, and analytical essays. The final exam is cumulative.
**Class Participation**

I expected everybody to come to class. In addition I expect the students to come to class prepared with the readings assigned and ready to ask questions. I will try to give you as much time as possible particularly during the computer lab sessions in which we learn the SPSS software.

**Required Readings**

The following books have been ordered and will be the base readings for the entire semester.


**PART I**

**August 24:** *Introductions and Discussion of Science and Research*

**August 31:** *What is Science? Are social sciences really scientific?*


**September 7:** *What is Science? Discussion of Theory, Testing, and Knowledge*


**September 14:** *How Do We Assess Claims to knowledge in Social Research?*


**HOMEWORK 1 ASSIGNED:** Critique of a research article
September 21: Types of Research Designs and Measuring Variables I


HOMEWORK 1 IS DUE

September 28: Types of Research Designs and Measuring Variables II


October 5 Qualitative Research Design and Methods


HOMEWORK 2 ASSIGNED: LITERATURE REVIEW & RESEARCH PROPOSAL

PART II

October 12 MID TERM EXAM

October 19 Introduction to Quantitative Data Management and Software


October 26 Introduction to Quantitative Research -- Basic Descriptive Statistics


HOMEWORK

Nov. 2 Measures of Central Tendency


LITERATURE REVIEW & RESEARCH PROPOSAL IS DUE

HOMEWORK

Nov. 9 Inferential Statistics and Tests of Significance

HOMEWORK

Nov. 16  Analysis of Correlation

HOMEWORK

Nov. 23  Bivariate Linear Regression Analysis


RESEARCH PAPER IS DUE

HOMEWORK

Nov. 30  Multivariate Regression

HOMEWORK

FINAL EXAM (IN CLASS DECEMBER 7, 6:00 TO 8:50)

Guidelines for literature review and research protocol

According to the Merrian Webster dictionary a protocol is a “detailed plan of a scientific or medical experiment, treatment, or procedure”.

I advise that the literature review you undertake be related to the topic that you will be doing for your research protocol. The aim of the literature review is for the student to begin studying a topic of his/her interests more in depth and critically. Having a question in mind or a “puzzle” is the first step to get us thinking on research methods. For instance: Why is El Paso’s literacy rate so low? Once I have a question I need to learn something about literacy to offer a plausible explanation or hypothesis. So I need to conduct a literature review. The literature review will provide me with information about theories of educational attainment and factors that affect people’s educational attainment. Also, I will learn about research design used by the authors to determine cause and effect, what variables are used and how they are operationalized, sampling techniques and representatives, statistical techniques and methods, etc.
Once I have completed my literature review, I am ready to start developing a research methodology to answer the question of why El Paso’s literacy rates are lower than the national average. Then, I need to think about how I am going to answer the question. What is my dependent variable? What is (are) my independent variables? What kind of research design is the most appropriate? What are the things I need to be aware of that are weaknesses in my research design? How am I going to determine my sample? What data do I need and how am I going to get it? How am I going to organize and analyze the data? How am I going to establish cause and effect? What statistical test is appropriate? These questions are just an example of issues you will outline in your research protocol. This class is design to give you the research tools to undertake research that not only will meet the standards that academia requires but also to question knowledge claims.