I. Nature of the Course
Political polling and survey research are used by political scientists, journalists, the media, and the general public to both understand and interpret political life. Unfortunately, the information gleaned from polls is often misinterpreted or misrepresented (in whole or in part), many times in order to substantiate a claim that furthers a particular political agenda. As Mark Twain was known to have said, “There are three kinds of lies: lies, damn lies, and statistics.”

This course is designed to teach students HOW political scientists go about conducting polling and survey research and analyses, and to understand WHY they do it that way. We will cover the key elements of polling and survey research and analysis, including conceptualization (identifying the problem or theory to be tested), operationalization (formulating concepts into observable variables, surveys, etc.), research design (units of analysis, hypothesis construction), logic (deriving causal inferences, deduction, etc.), math (probability and other statistics), and writing and presentation skills (writing abstracts, literature review, reporting results, creating effective tables and graphs, etc.). During the semester, students will learn how to use a powerful program called Statistical Package for the Social Sciences or SPSS. SPSS has become one of the standards in social science research, and other programs (such as STATA) are easily learned after having mastered SPSS.

This course is also a community based research (CBR) course and offers students the opportunity to put these techniques to good use immediately in the real world. In conjunction with CILSA, various non-profit organizations in the Bay Area that work to promote social justice have identified survey research projects within their organization that require some of the polling skills learned in this course. Students will form small groups of four or five students each and work together on one of these research projects. Students benefit from community based research because 1) it enhances one’s resume with quantitative research experience in an applied setting, 2) it helps to broaden one’s horizons to social justice issues in the Bay Area, 3) it allows students to make a significant contribution to an organization working for social justice, and 4) provides a potentially excellent letter of reference/recommendation from the director of the organization and course instructor. This list of organizations and their specific projects will be discussed during the first week of class.

II. Learning Objectives
1) Increase student knowledge of scientific polling and survey methods, appreciating its usefulness and limits.
2) Understand the various stages of the polling research and analysis process.
3) Foment critical thinking skills by careful attention to theoretical assumptions, the use of
precise concepts, theoretical logic, drawing valid inferences, distinguishing empirical
from normative issues, and the application of theory to data.
4) Learn how to conduct a survey with an appropriate survey method in order to answer a
(set of) specific research question(s).
5) Learn how to use the software program SPSS to analyze raw data.
6) Enhance writing, graphic and oral presentation skills.

III. Required Course Text and Software
Mifflin: Boston, MA. OUT OF PRINT
Website: http://college.cengage.com/polisci/carlson/depr/1e/students/index.html
POL 116 Supplemental Packet (in SMC bookstore soon!)
SPSS Student Version 17.0 PC-version. (Optional: Recommended)
Download at http://e5.onthehub.com/WebStore/Welcome.aspx?ws=49c547ba-f56d-dd11-bb6c-
0030485a6b08&vsro=8
Calculator (must have square and square root functions)
1 red pen and 1 working stapler

IV. Coursework
Attendance and Participation
Attendance and participation is required for all class sessions. First and foremost, attendance
means coming to class after reading with a basic understanding of what you read AND
questions regarding items you did not understand. My job is not to tell you what you were
supposed to read, but to discuss the text with you to make sure you understood it. We have a
very limited amount of reading for this course, so I expect you to read well. All absences that
are not directly tied to school functions are unexcused absences. If you are very sick, please stay
home, but be responsible and catch up by reviewing with another student. No matter when/why
you miss class, do not ask if you missed something important! Yes, you did! I leave all the
unimportant stuff out. If you are shy, make sure you come out of your shell. I may call on some
who do not volunteer to participate and may ask stronger participants to yield to others at times.
If I find students are not keeping up with the reading adequately, I may employ reading quizzes
to provide motivation for careful reading.

Homework Assignments
The 11 homework assignments listed on the syllabus are designed to practice the major concepts
and skills we cover in the corresponding chapters. Each homework is due at the beginning of
the class period for which it is listed. Students must complete all 11 assignments, but will be graded
on their best 10. Sometimes the homework is more conceptually based, while at other times it
requires statistical manipulation of data via SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences)
and the production of tables and graphs. All homework assignments are worth 20 points and are
graded on accuracy, completeness, grammar (if applicable) and neatness (roughly in that order). All
homework assignments MUST BE TYPED (double spaced and 1” margins with Times New
Roman 12 font or near equivalent) and you must ensure that all tables from SPSS are complete,
well labeled, and neatly presented on the page. The only exception to the typed homework rule
is where students show their calculations to math problems. Students are to come with their
homework completed for the day that it is listed. Late homework assignments will be penalized 2 points for each day late. Habitually late work will not be accepted. The instructor may assign alternative homework assignments for students handing in work late. We will typically review homework during the class period for which it is due. Students can earn up to 1/3 of the points back that they didn’t earn on the homework simply by making corrections to it in class. NOTE: the overall points on homework is curved at the end of the course, so don’t feel like you are failing if you get a 10 sometimes. The most important thing from the homework is that you understand the material in order to prepare for the exams.

**Exams**

There are three exams in this course. The purpose of the exams is to test the extent to which students have mastered the material covered in the text, class discussion, and practiced on the homework assignments. Exam #2 requires a calculator. You may not use your cell phone, iPod, iPad, a computer or any other device not yet named for this exam—only a calculator. Exams are technically not cumulative, though, as stated above, the nature of the knowledge in this course is cumulative in nature. There is no final exam during finals exam week. Study guides for the exams are included in the course supplement.

**Community Based Research Project**

Students will meet as necessary with a Bay Area non-profit organization and conduct a survey research project for it. Students will be divided into groups of about four or five for this purpose. The research project consists of traveling to the non-profit destination, meeting with the project contact person on an as-needed basis to complete the research project. In some cases, a prior survey exists. While this may be helpful, students must review and revise questions as well as incorporate data from the prior survey to compare with the present findings. Students groups will be assigned no later than the second class meeting. The instructor will allot limited time in class for group organizing and reporting on the status of the research project, but most of this work will be done outside the classroom.

**Presentation of Research Project Findings**

Your research project will be presented in two formats: written and oral. The written research report should be 20-40 pages long, and contain specific elements according to research report writing guidelines the instructor will provide. The written report is worth 25% of each student’s grade. A completed draft version of the final research report must be finished by Week 12 and turned in to the instructor. During the last week of class, students will present their findings to the class, making ample use of graphs, tables and charts and appropriate multi-media to convey their research findings. Students making a professional presentation of their project in person to the organization will receive 5% extra credit (increases final grade by up to 2/3 of a letter grade).

The student’s grade for these two items (the research project and the presentation) will consist of a combination of the overall quality of the final research project and oral presentation, and a group and self evaluation that students will conduct individually and hand in to the instructor. Working in small groups can be scary for some since it means that each student’s grade is in part dependent on the quality of other students’ work. This type of activity, however, is common in the real world and promotes valuable group work skills. All students will be working in small groups and must be conscious of how their contributions (or lack thereof) affect the overall
quality of the group’s research project. I expect all students to work together well in a professional manner, and contribute fairly to the final result. At times, communication and cooperation “issues” arise. I expect all groups to contribute significantly to working these problems out on their own, but students should consult the instructor about serious issues that the group is unable to resolve on its own.

Honor Code “YOUR OWN WORK, IN YOUR OWN WORDS”
Supporting and strengthening academic integrity is a strong value at St. Mary’s College and for me personally as a professor. According to the honor code at St. Mary’s College, all students are required, on their honor, to do their own work unless otherwise indicated for special assignments by the instructor. The group project here is one of those exceptions. On homework assignments, students may consult with each other, but must type and hand in their own work after such consultations (ie, students may not copy and paste someone else’s homework).

Moodle
All students are enrolled in Moodle for this course, where I post all class announcements, reading or homework changes. I also post copies of all materials and handouts for this class. Therefore, if you miss any class or come late to class and miss a reading change announcement, it is your responsibility to check Moodle for anything you may have missed.

Academic Accommodations
Reasonable and appropriate accommodations, that take into account the context of the course and its essential elements, for individuals with qualifying disabilities, are extended through the office of Student Disability Services. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the Student Disability Services Coordinator at (925) 631-4164 to set up a confidential appointment to discuss accommodation guidelines and available services. Additional information regarding the services available may be found at the following address on the Saint May’s website:
http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/academics/academic-advising-and-achievement/student-disability-services.html

Classroom etiquette
1) Learning is collective exercise, so we are all responsible for learning and for the atmosphere create a positive and inclusive atmosphere!
2) Respect for other students and the instructor by avoiding side conversations or comments.
3) List of no-no’s: Use of cell phones, texting, iPods, breakfast, lunch, lateness, packing to go early, falling asleep, and getting up unexcused during class. Please go to the bathroom BEFORE you get to class or be ready to hold it for an hour—especially on exam days.
4) We are adults and I expect professional behavior.
5) Disagreements are welcome, especially contrary views to the instructor’s opinion. I love debating and am happy when students confront me. This requires listening intently and responding intelligently and respectfully, especially not shouting over anyone else.
6) I don’t know everything, though I know a lot. Please don’t be afraid to push me or challenge me, yourself or other students on issues.
V. Grading
Each student’s overall grade in this course consists of the following weighted items:

- Attendance and Participation: 10%
- Research Project: 25%
- Best 10 Homework Assignments: 30%
- Presentation of Research Project: 5%
- 3 Exams: 30%

Course Schedule

Week 1
2/9: Introduction to the course
2/11: Basics of science (Chapters 1 and 2)

Week 2
2/16: HM01: Activities 2.2 A, B and C, and Activity 2.3 B only
Lecture: Formulating Problems and Hypotheses (Chapter 3)
2/18: HM02: Activities 3.2 and 3.6
Lecture: Causality (Chapter 6)

Week 3
2/23: HM03: Activities 6.1, #1 & 3; and 6.2 #1 & 3
Lecture: Conceptualization, operationalization, and measurement (Chapter 7)
2/25: HM04: Activities 7.2, and 7.3 # 1, 2, and 3 (exclude part c for 7.3)
Lecture: Review Chapters 1-3, 6 & 7

Progress Report #1

Week 4
3/2: Exam 1: Chapters 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7
Lecture: Introduction to SPSS (Chapter 8)
3/4: HM05: Activity 8.2 #1 and #2 (use handout for variables), and write a descriptive
statement that uses cumulative percentage usefully
Lecture: Survey Construction (Chapter 10 and entire IRB page:
http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/about-smc/irb/index.html)
Recoding a variable in SPSS

Week 5
3/9: Groups hand in complete draft of survey & IRB letter
Review Exam 1
Lecture: Sampling Methods (Chapter 9)
3/11: HM06: Homework sheet Hm06 (see page 23 in supplemental book)
In-Class: Finalize survey and IRB letters in class

Week 6
3/16: Lecture: Measures of Central Tendency and Dispersion (Chapter 13)
IRB meets on March 17
3/18: HM07: Activity 13.1 and 13.2 (Homework Excel File Hm07 on Blackboard)
Lecture: Bivariate Tables and Measures of Association (Chapter 14 and handout)
Week 7
3/23: HM08: Activity 14.3 (use NES database and run who00 by partyid7) and 14.4 (use GSS database and variables as listed)
3/25: Exam 2: Chapters 9, 10, 13, and 14

EASTER RECESS: March 29 through April 5

Week 8
4/6: Review Exam 2
   Lecture: Simple Bivariate Regression (Chapter 15)
4/8: HM09: Activity 15.1 and 15.2 (use “hiv aids” as ind. var. and “death” as dep. var., and interpret meaning of Pearson’s r, r-square, the regression coefficient, and the constant
   Progress Report #2

Week 9
4/13: Lecture: Multivariate analysis and control variables (Chapter 16)
4/15: HM10: Activity 16.4 Create a new dummy variable entitled “south” to the equation before running it. Interpret the R-square, each partial regression coefficient, the constant, and draw an inference about the relative impact of these variables on the dependent variable by examining the beta coefficients.

Week 10
4/20: Statistical significance (Chapter 17 and pages 44-55 of supplemental booklet)
   Lecture: Statistical significance with multiple regression (pages 57-62)
   Work on projects to find relationships for your final report

Week 11
   Lecture: Review for Exam 3
5/2: Exam 3: Chapters 14, 15, 16, and 17
   Class time to analyze research project data

Week 12
5/4: Lecture: Putting it all together; hints on table and figure design (Chapter 18)
   Students work on research project
5/6: Review Exam 3
   Students work on research project
   Completed draft of research project due on Sunday, Friday, May 9 at 5 pm

Week 13
5/11: Review and edit research project; prepare oral presentation
5/13: First round of student research oral presentations
   SMC Class evaluation
Week 14
Final Exam Meeting: Thursday, May 20, 9-11 am

**Final written research projects due**
Second round of oral presentations
Group and self-evaluations

**Final Item:** Monday, May 24 at 5pm: Hand in to the instructor a signed or emailed confirmation of receipt of report by the contact person of your agency. In other words, I must receive confirmation from your agency’s contact person that he/she has received the final written project report.

**PLEASE NOTE: Failure to hand in the report will result in an F for the final grade for all persons on the project.**

Students are highly encouraged (though not required) to make an oral presentation of findings to the agency during week 13 or finals week. Extra credit will be earned by those individual who participate.