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Alan Monroe. *Essentials of Political Research.* Essentials of Political Science Series. Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 2000. x + 199 pp. $25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8133-6866-5.

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Introducing the

Introducing the Science in Political Science

Although seemingly simplistic, there are really only two elements to teaching any subject in political science. Using American Government as an example, a course on Congress must illustrate how Congress works. That same course must also illustrate how we know how Congress works. The key is the presence of a scientific approach and the analysis of data. As I like to tell my students, without the scientific and scholarly focus our discussions would be no more sophisticated or useful than those heard around the water cooler. The effort to teach undergraduates how to investigate political phenomena occurs at varying levels of skill and knowledge. *Essentials of Political Research* by Alan Monroe attempts to distill a scientific approach to the study of politics into what the "Essentials of Political Science Series" editor terms a "primer for a given college course."

Monroe's primer introduces research: the process, design and approach to answering political-science research questions. The first three chapters concisely and effectively define "the scientific study of research questions," the "building blocks of the research process," and the concepts of "research design." Through boxes, Monroe easily explicates complex topics discussed in the text, like the differences between empirical, normative and analytical sentences. In the exercises at the end of each chapter, Monroe asks the student to apply and employ each new concept. Interestingly, Monroe provides "suggested answers to exercises," presumably to allow an instructor room to debate, discuss, and maneuver. The first three chapters of *Essentials* travel easily through difficult concepts and make the world of independent variables, causality, and operational definitions comprehensible for all undergraduates.

In Chapter Four, "Published Data Sources," Monroe turns to the nuts and bolts of research: "How do we get the data necessary to execute our research designs and test hypotheses?" (p. 47) Monroe first defines the term "data" and takes the student through how and where to get information that will answer research questions. Monroe covers data-gathering by guiding students to where to look and what to look for amongst previous research, libraries, and the Internet. Monroe primarily covers U.S. Government, although the lessons regarding bills, election results, interest groups, and newspapers are certainly relevant to other countries. Monroe also discusses content analysis in this chapter. Monroe continues the discussion of data gathering in Chapter Five, taking the student through survey-research design.

Of all the chapters, I found Chapter Four to be the most novel. Monroe undertakes two goals here: to introduce data gathering and to introduce data analysis. I would have preferred the separation of these goals, adding content analysis to the survey-design chapter might have better integrated data gathering. The illustration of the Internet and its utility was excellent. Given the devotion of students to this form of research, I would have liked more, particularly on the pitfalls of web research.

Monroe dedicates the remainder of the book, Chapters Five through Ten, to statistical analysis. Assuming no knowledge, Monroe travels from univariate statistics to multivariate in one hundred and eleven pages. The brevity of the book results in varying levels of clarity amongst the topics. Chapter Six does an effective job introducing statistics, and more importantly, introducing the use of statistics. The chapter addresses and simplifies the foundations of this kind of analysis. Chapter Seven, like Chapter Four, successfully relates to the student, focusing on the effective and ineffective display of data. The chapter illustrates "how to construct several common types of graphics while avoiding many common mistakes....[and] explain[s] how to interpret graphics you might encounter in your reading–and not be misled when others make common mistakes" (p. 105).

Chapters Eight, Nine and Ten build on the simple

introduction to statistics and breeze the novice through interval and multivariate statistics. Unfortunately, students with little to no college math would probably require significant help. As a substitute for a statistical course, the utility of these chapters would depend entirely on the instructor's ability to incorporate and explore the book. Perhaps as a "primer," *Essentials* should have introduced multivariate analysis and taught students how to read the material in scholarly articles rather than attempted to teach students to perform the math themselves. These chapters are no substitute for a course on statistics.

That said, *Essentials of Political Research* would serve an introductory methods course, particularly one that also introduced the theoretical underpinnings of political science. Moreover, any department that requires or recommends a statistics course could easily support this book as an effective introduction.

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