***Chapter 1***

**A Brief Overview of Research Methods in Political Science**

**Purpose of Chapter**

This chapter provides the following:

· an explanation of the goals of the book;

· a description of the organization of the book;

· a brief overview of the overall research process in political science;

· an introduction to the use of the MicroCase software with the data files included in the package.

**Notes on Chapter 1 Text Material**

The chapter begins by setting out the following goals for the student to have achieved upon completion of this book:

· Define and explain the core concepts used in the discussion of research methods in political science;

· Explain the basic strategy and stages—from the beginning stage to the ending stage—of political science research;

· Create a data file and do the appropriate statistical analysis of variables in data files.

The chapter then explains how the book is organized. Next, the chapter briefly describes each of the stages of the overall research process. The purpose here is to give the student some perspective of the overall process before getting into the individual parts of that process. While it is emphasized that real-world research does not necessarily follow this sequence exactly, the research process is discussed in terms of the following stages:

· Formulating the Research Idea

· The Literature Review

· Formulating the Hypothesis

· Defining the Concepts

· Operationalizing the Concepts

· Measuring the Data

· Statistical Analysis

· Drawing Conclusions

· Writing the Research Report

The rest of the chapter gives the student greater familiarity with Student MicroCase and the data files included in the package.

**Notes on the Chapter 1 Worksheet Section**

The worksheets for Chapter 1 introduce students to Student MicroCase and the data files included with it. By the time that students have finished this chapter, they will know how to start MicroCase, open a data file, view lists of variables in a data file, obtain variable descriptions, search for variables that contain a particular word or phrase, view frequency distributions from the NES file (with bar graphs or pie charts), and map aggregate variables from the GLOBAL and STATES files, and how to exit from MicroCase.

By the time they finish this section, students will also have learned that it is easy and fun to use Student MicroCase. Students who have little computer experience might approach the worksheets with some dread; after this section is completed, they will see that using MicroCase is not difficult at all. Students should also be impressed with the quality and variety of the data available to them in the five data files.

**Sample Exam Questions**

**True/False**

There is a sequence of steps in the political research process that all political researchers must follow exactly.

Answer: FALSE

Students do not really need to understand the research process in political science unless they are going to do research themselves.

Answer: FALSE

The discussion of controversial political issues can be aided by knowledge gained through political research.

Answer: TRUE

As students of politics, we attempt to develop descriptions and explanations of aspects of political reality.

Answer: TRUE

After formulating the idea for political research, it is important to do a literature review to find out what is already known in this area of research.

Answer: TRUE

An operational definition is a specification of what we mean by a particular concept.

Answer: FALSE

**Essay**

Describe the stages in the overall research process in political science.

Particular political issues or policy areas often center on basic value disagreements among people. However, some questions involved in these areas are not simply a matter of values and can be investigated through political research. Specify a particular political issue or policy area (e.g., welfare, capital punishment, pornography, school prayer, international trade, crime prevention) and write at least two questions that could be investigated through political science research methods.