

Political Science 381: Political Science Research Design

Instructor: Sara Morell (she/her/hers)

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Class Time: TBD

Office Hours: TBD

You: If you would like me to refer to you by a name or pronouns other than those on the class roster, please let me know.

Course Overview:

The purpose of this course is to introduce undergraduate students to the methods that political scientists use to form and answer questions about the world. This course will take you through the steps of the research design process, including the development of a research question, the building of a literature review, the formulation of theory and hypotheses, and the creation of a research design plan. The final project for this course will be a self-design project proposal, which includes all the above components, that you could be ready to implement as either a senior thesis or a professor-directed research project. This course will also develop student's abilities to constructively evaluate other social science research, by teaching students how to assess the assumption made throughout the research design process.

This course is beneficial both for students hoping to write a senior thesis and for students who want to further their ability to evaluate assumptions made by political research, as well as in scholarly articles, news sources, and everyday conversation. For students interested in writing a thesis, they will come away with a fully-formed project that has undergone considerable feedback and revision, which they will be prepared to implement in the coming year. For students interested in honing their research skills, they will develop a toolkit for analyzing the choices made in research design. This set of skills is extremely useful for a range of careers in politics, law, government, policy, business, and data science.

This course is intentionally methodologically diverse, and we will cover a range of social science tools including interviewing, participant observation, surveys and survey experiments, content analysis, and linear regression. However, it is worth noting that this class focuses solely on empirical approaches to political science. This course also is not a research methods course. You will come out of this course with a strong sense of how to decide which methods to use, as well as a comprehensive understanding of some of the techniques, challenges, and assumptions associated with a range of methods. We will not, however, implement these methods, as this course's goal is to teach the design stages of political research. I am happy to point students towards additional courses that could further their abilities in a range of social science methods, above the overview that this course provides.

Course Format:

Each week, the course will be divided into two parts. The first part of the course will focus on discussing readings and topics relating to a different stage of the research design process. This will be a mix of lectures, and small and large group discussions.

The second part of the course involves workshopping the writing assignments that will eventually culminate into your final project proposal. Students will be placed into peer-groups at the beginning of the semester, which will help students develop supportive communities in which to give and receive feedback. Students are expected to make their assignments available to both the professor and their peer-group in advance of class each week.

I do want to emphasize that some of the readings are challenging! I do not expect you to get/remember every detail. Still, you should come to class with an understanding of the major takeaways from each reading, the questions you had after reading the piece, and some initial thoughts on where you agree/disagree.

Grade Breakdown:

The grade for this course is based primarily on the set of writing assignments you will submit throughout the semester, culminating in the final research design proposal. Your research design proposal can be on any topic of your choosing, but it must have politics as a core component and must further our understanding of established research in the field. Your topic must receive approval from the professor at the research question stage, before going on to complete the rest of the assignments.

The remainder of your grade is based on your participation in both class discussions and peer-group workshop sessions. Participation in class discussion can mean many things, from asking substantive questions about the material to summarizing small group discussions for the class. When participating in class discussions, I expect everyone to listen to previous comments and actively respond to each other's points. Everyone comes into this classroom with a different background and set of experiences, and I hope to create a learning environment where everyone can grow their critical thinking skills and can discuss each other's ideas in a constructive manner. Participation in your peer-group will be based both on the professor's observations and a peer-grading process done at the end of the semester.

I'm not going to do reading quizzes or use Perusall to track whether you're doing readings. However, if it becomes clear that readings aren't being done consistently (and there aren't extenuating circumstances), I may randomly start doing reading quizzes as part of your participation grade.

Part of participation is coming to class. **You have one unexcused; no questions asked absence that you can use at any time without notifying me.** After that, if you are unable to attend a class, you must email me the day before. Unless it's medical, a personal/family emergency, or a UM recognized excused absence, you should assume that your absence is unexcused. I will not expect a doctor's note for medical absences.

The relative weight of course requirements towards your final grade is as follows:

- Class attendance and participation (includes peer review): 25%
- Research questions (draft due Week 3, final due Week 4): 5%
- Measurement assignment (draft due Week 5, final due Week 6): 10%
- Literature review (draft due Week 11; final due Week 12) 15%
- Research design (draft due Week 13, final incorporated into proposal) 15%

- Final Research Proposal (due one week after the last day of class): 30%

A Note About Grading:

The final grade breakdowns for this class are as follows: A (94-100), A- (90-93), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D+ (67-69), D (63-66), D- (60-62), F (Below a 60)

You are always welcome to speak with me to get more information about why you received the grade you did and what you can do to improve on future assignments.

Schedule for Lecture and Readings:

Week 1: Course Introduction

- Gary King, Robert Keohane and Sidney Verba: Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research (Chapter 1)

Week 2: How to Ask Questions and Formulate Hypotheses

Lecture & Discussion

- Robert Putnam: Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital (*article version*)
- Rayman Fisman and Edward Miguel: Corruption, Norms and Legal Enforcement: Evidence from Diplomatic Parking Tickets (Read pages 1-8 carefully; feel free to skim the rest).
- Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder: News That Matters: Television and American Opinion (Chapter 1)

*****DRAFT Research Question Assignment Due**

Assignment Description: In a 1-2 page document, write a brief description of 2-3 research questions of interest to you that fit into the field of Political Science. For each question, note why it is theoretically interesting and/or substantively important and identify the likely independent and dependent variables.

Week 3: How to Ask Questions and Formulate Hypotheses

Workshop: Present DRAFT Research Questions, Preliminary Hypotheses

- Come prepared to make a 2-3 minute "pitch" of your top research question to your classmates.

*****FINAL Research Question Assignment Due**

Assignment Description: Based on feedback, students will select ONE research question.

Week 4: Conceptualization and Measurement

Lecture & Discussion

- Robert Adcock and David Collier: Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research
- Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F Klein: Data Feminism (Chapter 3 and 5)
- Zachary Elkins: Gradations of Democracy? Empirical Tests of Alternative Conceptualizations

- Andrew Kerner: What We Talk About When We Talk About Foreign Direct Investment

*****DRAFT Measurement Assignment Due**

Assignment Description: Choose a core concept in the social sciences (other than democracy) that relates to your own research interests and then do the following: a) investigate how it has been measured by other scholars; b) demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches, and c) create your own “better” measure, clearly stating what makes it so.

Week 5: Conceptualization and Measurement

Workshop: Present DRAFT Measurement Assignment

*****FINAL Measurement Assignment Due**

Assignment Description: Submit a revised version of your assignment based on feedback.

Week 6: Understanding Causality

Lecture & Discussion

- Gary King, Robert Keohane and Sidney Verba: Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research (Chapter 3)
- Maintenance Phase: The Sleep Loss Epidemic (podcast episode)
- Brad Bushman and Gary Wells: Trait aggressiveness and hockey penalties: Predicting hot tempers on the ice.
- Donald T Campbell and H Laurence Ross: The Connecticut Crackdown on Speeding: Time Series Data in Quasi-Experimental Analysis

Week 7: Literature Review

Workshop: Discuss DRAFT Preliminary Literature Review

- Each student should come prepared to identify the scholarly literature that is most relevant to his/her research question. S/he should also be able to present their research question and preliminary hypotheses clearly to their instructors and peers, which will enable them to assist in identifying the most relevant bodies of literature. Successfully identifying the relevant scholarly literature is the first step in writing a literature review, which is a critical and comprehensive review of the previous research on your topic or on an important aspect of your topic. This literature will help you identify and assess alternative hypotheses.

*****DRAFT Literature Review Due**

Assignment Description: Students should provide a full draft of their literature review for their peers to review. In approx. 10 pages, you should identify, describe, and analyze related research that has already been done and summarizes the state of knowledge about the topic, including the main academic debates. This should be done in an impartial and rigorous manner. You should use this literature to help you identify and assess alternative hypotheses.

Week 8: Spring Break

Week 9: Case Selection and the Comparative Method

Lecture & Discussion

- Barbara Geddes: How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics
- Arend Lijphart: Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method
- James Fearon: Counterfactuals and hypothesis testing in political science

*****FINAL Literature Review Due**

Assignment Description: Submit a revised version of your assignment based on feedback.

Week 10: Research Design – Interviews and Participant Observation

Lecture & Discussion

- Jean Converse and Howard Schuman: The Role of the Interviewer
- Richard Fenno: Home Style: House Members in Their Districts (Methods Appendix)
- Katherine Cramer: Putting Inequality In Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective
- Karen Kurasaki: Intercoder Reliability for Validating Conclusions Drawn from Open-Ended Interview Data

Week 11: Research Design – Surveys and Survey Experiments

Lecture & Discussion

- Peverill Squire: Why the 1936 Literary Digest Poll Failed
- Josh Pasek and Jon Krosnick: Optimizing survey questionnaire design in political science: Insights from psychology (pages 27-44)
- Robert Groves and Emilia Peytcheva: The Impact of Nonresponse Rates on Nonresponse Bias: A Meta-Analysis
- Adam Berinsky et al: Evaluating Online Labor Markets for Experimental Research: Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk

Week 12: Research Design – Content Analysis and Historical Texts

- Cameron Thies: A Pragmatic Guide to Qualitative Historical Analysis in the Study of International Relations
- Meredith Conroy: Masculinity, Media, and the American Presidency (Chapter 5)
- Michael Laver et al: Policy Positions from Political Texts Using Words as Data
- Lori Young and Stewart Soroka: Affective News: The Automated Coding of Sentiment in Political Texts

Week 13: Research Design – Statistical Techniques and Linear Regression

- Abby Long, EGAP: 10 Things to Know About Reading a Regression Table
- Paul Kellstedt and Guy D. Whitten: The Fundamentals of Political Science Research (Chapters 6, 9 and 10)

*****DRAFT Research Design Due**

- Assignment Description: Students should provide a full draft of their research design for their peers to review. In approx. 3 pages, you should your method of analysis, justify why that method would make sense for your question, and provide an overview of the steps you plan to take. What data will you use? What questions will you ask / themes will you identify /

items will you measure? How will you identify that your hypothesis is correct or incorrect? What are the threats to inference and how will you address them?

Week 14: Research Design – Workshop

- Students present a summary of their research project in poster format; they must be prepared to answer questions and hear feedback from their peers.

*****FINAL Research Proposal Due**

- Assignment Description: Your research proposal should be approx. 20 pages. It should include a statement of the question, why it is of interest (to academics and/or the “real world”), a revised and focused literature review, a description and justification of the methodology you propose to use, and how it can be reasonably carried out.

Additional Information:

Arrangements for Students with Disabilities: If you think you will need accommodation(s) for a disability, please let me know immediately. Once I'm made aware of your needs, I can work with you or Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to determine appropriate accommodations. Some aspects of this course, including the assignments, the in-class activities, and how the course is taught, might be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. SSD (734-763-3000; <https://ssd.umich.edu/>) typically recommends accommodations through a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form. Any information you provide is private and confidential and will be treated as such.

Attendance: Each student will be responsible for all announcements and materials covered in class. If you miss class for any reason, you should set up a time to meet with me during office hours to catch up.

Canvas: I will post a Canvas announcement on Friday of each week, going over the material for the following week, along with any updates or announcements you will need before class on Monday. It is your responsibility to set up your Canvas notifications so that you receive these in your inbox, or make sure you check the Canvas announcements page each week on Friday after 5:00 PM.

Email policy: I will reply to emails that I receive during regular working hours (i.e., Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM) as soon as possible, often the same day. For emails received outside of those working hours, I will generally reply during the next working day. **This policy also applies to emails sent the day an assignment is due. If you have a question about an assignment, it is always best to ask it at least one day in advance.**

Plagiarism and Cheating: My experience at the University of Michigan has been that plagiarism is extremely rare. However, out of fairness to all students behaving ethically, I have absolutely no tolerance for any type of cheating, including plagiarism. This class is new, and I made all of the assignments myself, so I doubt this will be an issue. But know that any student who is found to have cheated on any assignment will **fail this course**. The best way to ensure you are not plagiarizing is to cite all of your sources. Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism or cheating does not provide an excuse or justification for engaging in such behavior. To familiarize

yourself with these issues, you should read LSA's webpage on academic misconduct:
<https://lsa.umich.edu/lsa/academics/academic-integrity/academic-misconduct.html>.

Religious and Academic Conflicts: In keeping with the University of Michigan's policy of respecting students' religious commitments, all attempts will be made to accommodate conflicts arising out of religious observances. For example, I am happy to move assignment deadlines that conflict with a religious holiday or to set up a time to meet during office hours to talk about topics covered in class that were missed because of a religious holiday. However, you must give me **considerable** advanced notice if you need to miss class or move an assignment because of a religious holiday.

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing: **More than any other year, I know that many of you may be struggling with issues of mental health and wellbeing.** Please also know that if you are having difficulties, you should feel free to contact me to figure out what steps to take to address these issues.

If you or someone you know feels overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, here is some information about the available resources. You can contact **Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)** at (734) 764-8312 and <https://caps.umich.edu/> during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or through its counselors physically located in schools on both North and Central Campus. You can also consult **University Health Service (UHS)** at (734) 764-8320 and <https://www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs>, or for alcohol or drug concerns, see www.uhs.umich.edu/aadresources.

For a listing of other mental health resources available on and off campus, visit <http://umich.edu/~mhealth/>.