

84-265 Political Science Research Methods – Spring 2020 Syllabus

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Class: Tuesday and Thursday 9:00–10:20am, BH 235A (now online)

Office Hours: Wednesday 10:30am–12:30pm, PH 335A (now online)

Course Description:

In this course, students will learn the essentials of how to evaluate, design, and conduct modern social science research. In particular, the course is split into two main parts. Part one introduces students to the core challenges of developing research questions, drawing causal inferences, engaging with the literature, measuring concepts, and selecting cases or observations. The second part builds on this foundation and delves into a number of the leading methods or strategies for conducting research in the social sciences today, including case studies, interviews, surveys, regression analysis, and experiments of various kinds.

Throughout the course, the focus will be twofold. First, students will build their research toolkit, gaining an understanding of both (1) general principles of good research design, and (2) specific research strategies and their relative strengths and weaknesses. Second, students will apply their skills toward a group research project based on a class-wide research question. Each group must tackle this question using a different research strategy, producing a research presentation and paper at the end of the semester which communicates their results. In this sense, students will gain both a thorough conceptual *and* applied knowledge of central issues in the design and execution of social science research – something applicable not only to their time at CMU but to any effort to investigate difficult empirical questions in their future careers.

Course Materials:

In an effort to provide you with both a structured foundation and a diverse range of perspectives, the course relies on both a textbook that is required for purchase plus a variety of journal articles and book excerpts that will be provided for you. The required textbook is listed below (available on Amazon in either hard copy or digital versions):

-The Fundamentals of Political Science Research, 3rd Ed, by Kellstedt and Whitten, 2018 (henceforth FPSR)

Meanwhile, the following books are recommended but not required (we will read excerpts from them which I will provide to you, but they are classics of research design which you may want to consult more broadly as you develop your project):

-Designing Social Inquiry, by King, Keohane, and Verba, 1994

-The Craft of Research, 4th Ed, by Booth, Williams, and Colomb, 2016

You will also see readings marked “*Recommended*” in the syllabus. These are optional readings that will allow you to gain more exposure to a particular topic; they are not required but you are free to bring them up in class and ask me about any of them. Occasionally, I may bring them up myself with a brief explanation so that we can discuss them if they are especially relevant to the topic at hand.

In addition, students must purchase a six-month student copy of the statistical software program Stata for use during the course. This will be done via a link I will provide to you so that you can purchase it at a discounted, educational rate.

Note on Statistical Training:

This course is chiefly an attempt to provide you with a strong foundation in research design and an overview of the research methods used in the social sciences. It includes a substantial statistical component, as this is a key part of the modern social science research toolkit (and will likely be used in many of your group research projects). This component includes exposure to some of the central concepts of descriptive statistics, linear regression, and logistic regression, as well as experience with the software package Stata, which offers a powerful but accessible platform for you to practice your skills. That said, it is not chiefly a statistics course but a foundation for you to build on. Students can gain more statistics training from many places, from mass open online courses (MOOCs) to statistically-oriented CMU library workshops to individual meetings with IPS (or other) faculty for more targeted help. A nice applied resource is the Stata companion to our textbook, *A Stata Companion to Political Analysis*, and there are many other Stata oriented tutorials and resources online (some of which I may mention during the semester) that can give you a more applied look at different methods with enough intuition to make them useful to you. In sum, you have a variety of options if you want to gain more statistical training; don’t hesitate to use them if needed.

Course Evaluation:

Research Memos:

This is both a course on research design as well as a chance to begin gaining research experience. One of the key assignments is a series of four short research memos, in which you apply what we learn in class toward developing a major component of your group research project. In particular, the four memos cover the (1) research question, (2) literature review, (3) research design, and (4) preliminary results of your group project. Each memo is worth 10% of your final grade for a total of 40% – you should approach them with care.

Final Research Proposal:

The objective of these memos is to work toward the development of your group research project, which serves as the final paper in the class. The paper is based on a class-wide research question that varies each term – this spring it is **political participation on university campuses**. Why do some college students take part in political life, while others do not? What accounts for variation in their level of political participation or engagement? Each group must investigate this question using a different research strategy – such as fielding a survey, conducting interviews, running an

experiment, doing case studies, or examining existing observational data – and communicate the results in their final research paper. This paper is due on Monday, May 11th by 6pm and is worth 25% of your final grade. It must be a minimum of 15 pages double-spaced (12-point Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins and Chicago style citations). The paper must have the following elements: title and abstract, research question and description of its importance, literature review, theory/argument/hypotheses, research design, empirical analysis or results, and a brief discussion and conclusion. In essence, the paper should build on all of your memos and the original research you conduct to produce a coherent whole.

Final Presentations:

During the final week of the semester (4/27-5/1) each group will present its research to the class. These presentations will last approximately 20 minutes (with 5 additional minutes for Q&A) and they will comprise 5% of your final grade. They are meant to emulate the format of a conference panel and give you practice sharing your work and answering questions about it. They should be supported by some type of visual aid (i.e. PPT, Prezi, Beamer), which you must submit to me on Canvas prior to your presentation.

Problem Sets:

The ability to interpret and analyze data is an increasingly vital part of the social sciences today. Accordingly, you will be assigned two problem sets in order to help you better understand some of the basic statistical methods used in the field. The first will focus on descriptive statistics and the second will focus on multivariate regression analysis. Each problem set will be worth 5% of your final grade. You may discuss these assignments with other students but you must write and submit your own work.

Attendance and Participation:

Your attendance – as well as your active and thoughtful participation – are critical to our success this semester. Toward this end, I will take attendance every time we meet, with 3 points awarded for being on time, 1 point for being up to 5 minutes late, and 0 points after that (as well as for all unexcused absences). I will also monitor your participation throughout the semester and will use this to adjust your attendance grade up to 2 points (out of 10) in a positive or negative direction. Attendance and participation are worth 10% of your final grade.

NOTE FOR ONLINE TRANSITION: after spring break, this policy will be slightly more flexible. We will still have required attendance, as described above, but the lectures will be recorded and posted on Canvas. Students who miss a specific class for logistical reasons (e.g. internet failure) can still earn attendance credit by watching the video and emailing me a 1-paragraph response with their thoughts or reactions by the following class period.

Reading Reactions:

In order to promote discussion and accountability, all students must submit brief (one paragraph) reactions to the course readings each week by Monday at 6pm (that is, *before* we discuss them in class on Tuesday and/or Thursday). These memos should go beyond summary; they should raise a question, make a critique, and/or propose a new idea to build on at least one of the readings for that week. These memos will be shared via Canvas and will be graded on a check, check plus, or check minus basis every week, comprising 10% of your final grade.

Extra Credit:

Students will also have the opportunity to receive extra credit for attending – and learning from – relevant talks or workshops during the semester. Students can receive credit for attending up to 5 such events, with each one adding an additional half point to their overall research memos grade. To receive credit, students must attend the talk and email a one-paragraph summary of what they learned to me that day. I will frequently ask those who attend to share what they learned in class. Eligible events include research talks by faculty in IPS or other social science fields at CMU (i.e. Psych., SDS, Heinz/Public Policy, etc.), as well as CMU library workshops (only those related to the social sciences, not those specific to STEM or humanities). The list of library workshops this fall is available at: <http://www.library.cmu.edu/workshops>. If you have a question about whether an event is eligible for extra credit, contact me before attending for an answer.

NOTE FOR ONLINE TRANSITION: after spring break there is a new policy. You will now have 2 options for extra credit (added to your research memos grade):

- 1) Watch an approved research talk/lecture online and write a 2-paragraph reaction memo. This should include a short summary of the lecture as well as a discussion of its methodology. How did the speaker reach his or her conclusion(s)? What research strategy was used? Do you have any concerns about how the research was done, and/or do you think other strategies would yield the same result? Why or why not? This should be emailed to me and is worth up to 1 point.*
- 2) Conduct a “methodological literature review.” This is an attempt to delve into a (social science) topic of interest from a methodological perspective. You can take on any social science topic, from why genocides occur to how consumers make choices to what drives opposition to education reform. You will attempt to review the existing literature on this topic, reading at least 5 articles on it. You will then discuss the research strategies used on the topic and their potential impact. What methods have been used by scholars studying this topic? Do you have any concerns about how these studies have been conducted, and/or do you think other research strategies would yield the same results? Why or why not? This should be emailed to me, and is worth up to 2 points.*

Note that the total amount of extra credit you can receive in the class, across all options (including offline and online), is 5 points.

Research memos (4)	40% (10% each)
Problem sets (2)	10% (5% each)
Final presentation	5%
Final paper	25%
Attendance/Participation	10%
Reading memos	10%
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Total	100%

Proper documentation of a medical or personal emergency is needed for late work to be excused, otherwise it will be penalized at a rate of 10% per day. Barring exceptional conditions, late work that is excused must be submitted within one week of the original deadline. Any grievances with a grade must be submitted in writing to the instructor within one week of the grading as well, and will lead if appropriate to a re-grading of your assignment. Do note that your grade may be raised

or lowered in this process. Final grades will be based on the following grade scale, with rounding at instructor discretion:

Grading Scale:

A = 90-100

B = 80-89.9

C = 70-79.9

D = 60-69.9

R = <60

Inappropriate Technology Use:

Cellphones should be silenced and stowed during class. Laptops may be used for class purposes, but inappropriate or disruptive technology use will affect your participation grade.

Academic Integrity/Misconduct:

All work you do in this course is expected to be your own. Absolutely no cheating or plagiarism (use of someone else's words or ideas without properly citing them) will be tolerated. Any cases of cheating or plagiarism will be reported to the university according to the University Policy on Academic Integrity. For questions about this policy, see <http://www.cmu.edu/policies/student-and-student-life/academic-integrity.html>

Accommodations for Disabilities:

If you have a disability and have an accommodations letter from the Disability Resources office, please discuss your accommodations or needs with me as early in the semester as possible. I will work with you to ensure appropriate accommodations are provided. If you suspect you may have a disability and would benefit from accommodations but are not yet registered with the Office of Disability Resources, I encourage you to contact them at access@andrew.cmu.edu.

Maintaining Personal Wellness:

Take care of yourself. Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle this semester by eating well, exercising, avoiding drugs and alcohol, getting enough sleep, and taking time to relax. This will help you achieve your goals and cope with stress. All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. You are not alone. There are many helpful resources on campus, and an important part of the college experience is learning how to ask for help. Asking for support sooner rather than later is often helpful. If you or anyone you know experiences any academic stress, difficult life events, or feelings of anxiety or depression, we strongly encourage you to seek support. Counseling and Psychological Services (CaPS) is here to help. Call 412-268-2922 and visit their website at <http://www.cmu.edu/counseling/>. Consider reaching out to a friend, faculty, or a family member you trust for help in getting connected to support services.

Part 1 – Research Foundations

Tuesday 1/14 & Thursday 1/16. Research and research questions.

- *Designing Social Inquiry*, Ch. 1

- Chenoweth, Erica, and Jason Lyall. 2012. “What NSF-Funded Projects Have Taught Us About National Security Issues.” *The Monkey Cage*.

Recommended:

- Musgrave, Paul. 2017. “The Starbucks Curse: A Research Design Thought Experiment.”

Tuesday 1/21 & Thursday 1/23. Drawing (valid) causal inferences.

- FPSR, Chs. 3-4
- Intro to Stata (basics)

Memo #1: Research Question – due on Sunday, 1/26

Consider the course-wide research question on college students’ political participation and its significance. Identify at least one working hypothesis that you think might shed more light on what explains it. Based on this, produce a two-page memo that introduces the question, being sure to address its theoretical and real-world significance (the “so-what?”) in addition to your hypothesis about what explains it. Remember to phrase it as a “why?” (not a “what?”) question and to use general terms (no proper nouns). Submit by 6pm on Sunday.

Tuesday 1/28 & Thursday 1/30. Engaging with existing literature.

- *Craft of Research*, Ch. 16 (Introductions and Conclusions)
- Knopf, Jeffrey W. 2006. “Doing a Literature Review.” *PS, Political Science & Politics* 39(1): 127-32.

Tuesday 2/4 & Thursday 2/6. Conceptualization and measurement.

- FPSR, Ch. 5
- CPOST vs. GTD debate in *The Monkey Cage*
- Stata Module #2 (description)

Recommended:

- Peruse the codebooks for some of the primary databases in the field. How do they define and measure concepts like democracy, war, and terrorism? Do these measures look valid and reliable? How can we evaluate and improve them?
 - Polity: <http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/p4manualv2017.pdf>
 - COW: <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/COW-war/the-cow-typology-of-war-defining-and-categorizing-wars/view>
 - GTD: <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/downloads/Codebook.pdf>

Memo #2: Literature Review – due on Sunday, 2/9

Identify at least ten studies (at least eight of which must be scholarly journal articles or books) about your research question, summarize them, and synthesize them into natural perspectives, camps, or schools of thought. In other words, outline what we know about your specific topic. Then, identify at least one flaw or “gap” in this literature – what we do not know – that might be amenable to further study. Based on this, write a two-page memo reviewing and evaluating the literature on your question. Circulate by 6pm on Tuesday.

Tuesday 2/11 & Thursday 2/13. Case selection.

- Geddes, Barbara. 1990. "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics." In *Political Analysis*, vol. 2, ed. James A. Stimson, 131-50. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Gerring, John, and Lee Cojocar. 2015. "Case-Selection: A Diversity of Methods and Criteria." *Working Paper*.

Recommended:

- Skocpol, Theda. 1976. "France, Russia, China: A Structural Analysis of Social Revolutions." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 18(2): 175-210.

Part 2 – Research Strategies and Methods

Tuesday 2/18 & Thursday 2/20. Case studies.

- Mahoney, James. 2000. "Strategies of Causal Inference in Small-N Analysis." *Sociological Methods & Research* 28(4): 387-424.
- Mahoney, James, and Rodrigo Barrenechea. 2019. "The Logic of Counterfactual Analysis in Case-Study Explanation." *British Journal of Sociology* 70(1): 306-338.

Recommended:

- Fravel, Taylor. 2010. "The Limits of Diversion: Rethinking Internal and External Conflict." *Security Studies* 19: 307-41.
- Bellin, Eva. 2004. "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective." *Comparative Politics* 36(2): 139-57.
- Slater, Dan, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2013. "The Enduring Indispensability of the Controlled Comparison." *Comparative Political Studies* 46(10): 1301-27.

Problem Set #1: Descriptive Statistics – due on Sunday, 2/23 by 6pm

Tuesday 2/25 & Thursday 2/27. Interviews.

- Leech, Beth, et al. 2002. "Symposium: Interview Methods in Political Science." *PS, Political Science & Politics* 35(4): 663-88.
- Pinderhughes, Howard. 1993. "The Anatomy of Racially Motivated Violence in New York City: A Case Study of Youth in Southern Brooklyn." *Social Problems* 40: 478-92.

Recommended:

- Parkinson, Sarah Elizabeth. 2013. "Organizing Rebellion: Rethinking High-Risk Mobilization and Social Networks in War." *American Political Science Review* 107(3): 418-32.

Tuesday 3/3 & Thursday 3/5. Surveys.

- Krosnick, Jon A. and Stanley Presser. 2010. "Question and Questionnaire Design." In *Handbook of Survey Research*, eds. Peter V. Marsden and James D. Wright. Bingley, UK: Emerald.
- Berinsky, Adam, Kai Quek, and Michael Sances. 2012. "Conducting Online Experiments on Mechanical Turk." *Newsletter of the APSA Experimental Section* 3(1): 2-6.

Recommended:

- Keeter, Scott. 2005. "Survey Research." In *Doing Research: Methods of Inquiry for Conflict Analysis*, ed. Daniel Druckman. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Tuesday 3/10 & Thursday 3/12 – Spring break!

Memo #3: Research Design – due on Monday, 3/23

Outline a three-page research strategy – qualitative or quantitative in nature – to shed light on your (our) research question. Explain what kind of research strategy (case studies, interviews, surveys, experiments, large-n stats, etc.) you will use and why. Then explain the specifics and how you will conduct it in detail.

1. If it is a case-based approach, explain the logic of the case study or case studies (i.e., between-case, within-case, both), what you will look for in them to confirm or reject your hypotheses, and what kind of evidence you will rely on to analyze the case.
2. If it is a large-n quantitative analysis of existing data, explain what data sources you will use, how you will use them to measure your central concepts, and how you will analyze the data to accept or reject your principal hypotheses.
3. If you are collecting original human subjects data (i.e. with interviews/focus groups, surveys, or an experiment), explain who you will sample, how you will recruit or access them, and what you will ask them and/or expose them to.

Justify your choices. Submit by 6pm on Monday.

Thursday 3/19 & Tuesday 3/24. Regressions/Large-n.

- FPSR Chs. 8-9
- Nyhan, Brendan, and Jason Reifler. 2010. “When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions.” *Political Behavior* 32(2): 303-30.
- Stata Module #3 (regression)

Recommended:

- Brambor, Thomas, William R. Clark, and Matt Golder. 2006. “Understanding Interaction Models: Improving Empirical Analyses.” *Political Analysis* 14(1):63-82.

Thursday 3/26. Beyond linear regression (LCDVs).

- FPSR Ch. 11
- Stata Module #4 (logit)

Recommended:

- Stephan, Maria J., and Erica Chenoweth. 2008. “Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict.” *International Security* 33(1): 7-44.
- Reifler, Jason, Christopher Gelpi, and Peter Feaver. 2006. “Success Matters: Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq.” *International Security* 30(3): 7-46.

Tuesday 3/31 & Thursday 4/2. Experiments 1 (lab and survey).

- Masoud, Tarek, Amaney Jamal, and Elizabeth Nugent. “Using the Qur’an to Empower Arab Women? Theory and Experimental Evidence from Egypt.” *Comparative Political Studies* 49(12): 1555-98.
- Chung, Eun Bin. 2015. “Can Affirming National Identity Increase International Trust? Experimental Evidence from South Korean, Chinese, and Japanese Nationals.” *International Studies Review* 16(1): 75-97.

Recommended:

- Sears, David O. 1986. "College Sophomores in the Laboratory: Influences of a Narrow Data Base on Social Psychology's View of Human Nature." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 51(3): 515-30.

Problem Set #2: Regression Analysis – due on Tuesday, 4/7 by 6pm

Tuesday 4/7 & Thursday 4/9. Experiments 2 (lab-in-the-field and field).

- Gerber, Alan S., Donald P. Green, and Christopher Larimer. 2008. "Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment." *American Political Science Review* 102(1): 33-48.
- Robinson, Amanda. 2016. "Nationalism and Ethnic-Based Trust: Evidence from an African Border Region." *Comparative Political Studies* 49(14): 1819-54.

Recommended:

- Loewen, Peter John, Daniel Rubenson, and Leonard Wantchekon. 2010. "Help Me Help You: Conducting Field Experiments with Political Elites." *ANNALS of the American Academic of Political and Social Science* 628(1): 165-75.

Tuesday 4/14 & Thursday 4/16. Social media and text as data.

- King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts. 2013. "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression." *American Political Science Review* 107(2): 326-43.
- Munger, Kevin. 2017. "Tweetment Effects on the Tweeted: Experimentally Reducing Racist Harassment." *Political Behavior* 39(3): 629-49.

Recommended:

- Lucas, Christopher, et al. 2015. "Computer-Assisted Text Analysis for Comparative Politics." *Political Analysis* 23(2): 254-77.

Memo #4: Preliminary Data Analysis – due on Sunday, 4/18

Write a three-page memo in which you (briefly) restate your question and argument and then present a preliminary effort to empirically test it. If you are conducting a case study, you can present a "plausibility probe" or a brief and preliminary analysis of your case. If you are analyzing existing data, you can present some descriptive results (e.g., cross-tabs, bar graphs, or scatterplots) or initial regression results that get at your key hypotheses. If you are collecting original data, you can present some "pilot" or preliminary interview, survey, or experimental results. Circulate by 6pm on Sunday.

Tuesday 4/21 & Thursday 4/23. Research ethics.

- Fujii, Lee Ann. 2012. "Research Ethics 101: Dilemmas and Responsibilities." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 45(4): 717-23.
- Humphreys, Macartan. 2013. "Monkey Business." *Newsletter of the APSA Comparative Politics Section*, 17-19.
- Anderson, Richard G. 2013. "Registration and Replication: A Comment." *Political Analysis* 21(1): 38-39.

Recommended:

- Singal, Jesse. 2015. “The Case of the Amazing Gay-Marriage Data: How a Graduate Student Reluctantly Uncovered a Huge Scientific Fraud.” *The Cut*.

Tuesday 4/28 & Thursday 4/30. Final presentations.

- No readings, presentation week!

*****Final group research papers due by Monday, May 11th at 6pm*****