Course Description

This course provides an overview of the scope, methods, and norms of empirical research in the social sciences. After outlining the scientific method and its application in the various subfields of political science, we will move onto more specific discussions of concept formation, hypothesis construction, measurement development, and basic tests of cause-and-effect relationships. Within this general framework, we will examine cross-case and case-specific quantitative analysis, interview and survey methods, experimental design in both laboratory and field settings, mixed methods analysis, and formal theoretical and computational modeling. Finally and perhaps most importantly, priority will be placed on hands-on, task-oriented learning to include: typesetting research manuscripts with LaTex; organizing and managing databases with Stata; practicing transparent research with peer review and replication exercises; and drafting a full-length research proposal.

Course Objectives

The primary objectives of this course are fourfold. First, students should develop an aptitude for consuming, discussing, and critically evaluating empirical research in the field of political science. Second, students should develop a working understanding of the scientific method as well as how this method maps into various types of social inquiry. Third, students should begin to cultivate a familiarity with the different subfields of the discipline and choose one of these subfields in which to write an extended proposal for future research. Finally, students will be held responsible for demonstrating basic proficiencies in the Stata and LaTex computing environments, especially as these pertain to managing data and professionally typesetting research manuscripts.

Course Policies

Because this is a graduate-level seminar, academic integrity is of paramount importance and substantial evidence of plagiarism or cheating will result in a failing grade in the class. Please police your own work diligently to ensure that borrowed ideas are accompanied by appropriate attribution. Except for the most extenuating of circumstances (accompanied by adequate documentation and justification), I do not accept late work and I expect each student to come to each of our course meetings having completed the readings and assignments for that day. I am an advocate of limited technology in the classroom; laptops and tablets are acceptable for the purposes of referring to the course readings and electronic notes during discussion. Cell phones, smart phones, or other electronic devices are unacceptable. Checking email, sending text messages, and other forms of communication are also unacceptable. Please arrive to class on time and cultivate an open and fair-minded willingness to contribute to conversation with your peers.
Grading Rubric

Final grades will be assigned in accordance with the rubric that appears below. Keep in mind that LSU has recently migrated to a plus-minus grading system, which translates numerical scores to alphabetical grades in more fine grained detail. I am philosophically opposed to the idea that someone would earn a perfect A+ in this course, thus the rubric checks in at an A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94-100</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>83-86</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>73-76</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>63-66</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-93</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>80-82</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>60-62</td>
<td>D-</td>
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<tr>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>67-69</td>
<td>D+</td>
<td>&lt; 60</td>
<td>F</td>
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Requirements and Evaluation

Participation – 20 points

For each week in the schedule below, students are expected to have read and reflected upon the manuscripts listed for that day. In addition, students should be prepared to participate in discussion, both in response to comments from their peers as well as to direct questions from me. From time to time, we will run in-class simulations, hands-on labs, and small group discussions. I will demand a lot of you in the classroom during the semester and these participation points will have to be earned with diligent effort. Please take this aspect of our course very seriously so that we might have an engaging and energetic seminar.

Take Home Exams – 3 exams for 35 points total

For weeks 5, 10, and 14, students are required to submit a completed take home examination, which will have been circulated at the end of the previous week’s class (that is, exam questions will be distributed at the end of our fourth, ninth, and thirteenth course meetings and will be due one week later). All exams must be submitted electronically to me by email before we meet that day for class. The first exam may be typed using any Word processing program the student chooses; the second and third exams must be formally typeset using LaTeX, instruction in which will be provided to you through an in-class lab session. The first and second exams are worth 10 points and the final exam is worth 15 points, for a total of 35 points.

Extended Research Proposal – 5 components for 45 points total

For weeks 6, 8, 11, and 13 and on December 9, one of five separate components of the student’s extended research proposal will be due, again submitted to me electronically before we meet that day for class. These components include the research brainstorm activity (Oct. 5), the introduction section (Oct. 19), the theory section (Nov. 9), the data section (Nov. 30), and the final proposal draft (Dec. 9). All sections of this assignment must be formally typeset using LaTeX. The research brainstorm is worth 5 points while each subsequent section is worth 10 points, for a total of 45 total points on this major assignment. More details on the proposal will be provided in class.
Additional Information.

Laptops. For three of our course meetings, we will conduct computing-intensive lab sessions. It is imperative that you bring a laptop to these class periods. In the event that you do not own a laptop, I will partner you with a peer for the exercise.

Course readings. Readings have been made available for you on the LSU Moodle portal for this course. Although we will typically read 5-7 items for each meeting, the reading load for this course varies from week to week. I would suggest scanning through the readings a week before class to come up with a plan ahead of time for how to allocate your effort across the manuscripts.

Software. You will need access to Stata as well as versions of the open-access typesetting software programs LaTeX and Biblatex. You must procure Stata on your own before November 2; we will go over in class how to access and install LaTeX and Biblatex during our Sept. 28 meeting. I would suggest also having Microsoft Word and Excel (or comparable programs) on hand.

Survival Strategies and Recommendations

There are many ways to teach an introductory seminar in research design. Political science is an extremely diverse discipline with all manner of methodological outlooks and approaches. Practitioners of political science are steeped in different backgrounds and each approach comes with its fair share of biases and blinders. I have great respect for methodological pluralism and I hope to have discussions in this class that are inclusive of multiple approaches to research design.

You also have your own biases, whether you’re aware of them at this point or not. To a large extent, your experience with the material is mediated by your academic background, your interests, and your ability to roll up your sleeves and put in a good day’s work. For this reason, you will find that you and your peers will understand concepts at different rates, develop certain facilities with greater intensities, and harbor divergent preferences over which questions and manuscripts are interesting, effective, and successful. Here are some general principles to keep in mind:

You will not quickly “get” most things. Graduate school is a difficult process where you read hard materials, wrestle with challenging concepts, and labor intensively on nailing down seemingly minute details. You will feel lost and you may feel lost often. That’s fine. Take a deep breadth and plow ahead. Understanding comes with time and iteration.

Patience and work trumps intelligence quotient. Get into the habit of working 12 hour days and weekends. Grow accustomed to running down rabbit holes, meticulously collecting data, and writing multiple drafts of course papers. Step away from the internet, set aside the cell phone, and turn off the television. The life of the successful scholar is characterized by focused, quiet contemplation. Brilliance is biological, but learnedness is acquired through labor.

There is no dignity here, but also no shame. If you spend time trying to maintain a facade of intelligence in front of your peers, you’ll be wasting most of that time. We are all essentially idiots moonlighting as smart people. Learn to take criticism, internalize it, and adapt in line with its suggestions. Learn to hazard a guess, take a risk in discussion, and get corrected.
How to Read

Of necessity, there is a rather large reading load in this course. You will probably find yourself getting overwhelmed at points and, to an extent, this is by design. Learning how to “skim” materials or read strategically is a valuable tool you need to develop in the course of your graduate education. This is not to say that you should read superficially; rather, read with a focused aim that extracts from manuscripts important pieces of information.

Our readings can be largely classified into two sets: first, those that are instructional in nature insofar as they summarize or detail an approach to research; second, those that are examples of said approaches. The latter set will be substantively grounded in one of the subfields of political science, while the former set will present materials that are broadly applicable across all subfields.

I would recommend “active” engagement while reading. Rather than simply highlighting or taking notations in the margins, get out a separate piece of paper (or a new Word document) and write (or type) summaries of specific important details within each manuscript. This will constitute a reading journal, of sorts, that you can use for the in-class discussion. Remember that retention is correlated with activity; passive reading will not help you.

How to Write

I take the evaluation of your written work extremely seriously. There is, in short, no more important task an academic performs than writing. You will be put to a variety of writing tasks this semester, none of which is a full-length research manuscript, but all of which are designed with the underlying goal of preparing you for such a task. Practice clear, analytical writing across all of these assignments. Remember that in the context of this course, you are analysts rather than advocates.

Submitted manuscripts should be carefully proofread, free of typographical errors, and evince a high level of organization. I am very willing to read preliminary drafts and provide feedback in advance of the submission deadline; I am much less willing to read hastily assembled and poorly organized final submissions. Good time management and close consultation with the professor will result in stronger end-of-semester products.

How to Interact

I exist for you as a resource. I do not keep set office hours because I am almost always willing to meet with students provided that they’ve given me a bit of notice ahead of time. I’m around a lot and I try to be accessible to you.

In general, building rapport with your professors is the sine qua non of a successful graduate school career. I want to know what you’re interested in working on; I don’t mind hashing out half-formed research ideas; I very much enjoy reading students’ work while it is in-progress; and I am happy to provide advice or support if you find yourself in a bind during the semester. As problems or confusions arise, please be proactive and come talk to me. The sooner I am aware of a situation, the more helpful I can be.
## Semester Schedule Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Paper Timeline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Aug 24 Subfields: Scope and Content</td>
<td>Readings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Aug 31 Epistemology of Social Science</td>
<td>Readings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sept 14 Theories, Causality, and Mechanisms</td>
<td>Readings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sept 21 Topics, Questions, and Ethics</td>
<td>Readings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sept 28 In-Class Lab: Formatting Manuscripts</td>
<td>Exam 1 Due (10 points)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Oct 5 Conceptualization and Measurement</td>
<td>Readings</td>
<td>Research Brainstorm (5 points)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Oct 12 Case Studies and Small-N Analysis</td>
<td>Readings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Oct 19 Observational and Large-N Analysis</td>
<td>Readings</td>
<td>Introductory Section (10 points)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Oct 26 Interview and Survey Methods</td>
<td>Readings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Nov 2 In-Class Lab: Managing Data in Stata</td>
<td>Exam 2 Due (10 points)</td>
<td>Theory Section (10 points)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Nov 9 Laboratory and Field Experiments</td>
<td>Readings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Nov 16 Game Theory, Social Choice, and ABM</td>
<td>Readings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Nov 30 Reading and Evaluating Published Work</td>
<td>Readings</td>
<td>Data Section (10 points)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Dec 7 In-Class Lab: Replicating Published Work</td>
<td>Exam 3 Due (15 points)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec 9</td>
<td>No Class Meeting</td>
<td>Final Paper Draft (10 points)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Week 1 / Aug 24 / Subfields: Scope and Content

No written work is due this week.


Week 2 / Aug 31 / Epistemology of Social Science

No written work is due this week.


Week 3 / Sept 14 / Theories, Causality, and Mechanisms

No written work is due this week. Note: heavy reading load, two weeks to prepare.


Week 4 / Sept 21 / Topics, Questions, and Ethics

No written work is due this week. Circulate Take Home Exam 1.

Powner, Leanne C. Chapter 1 in Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student’s Practical Guide. 2015. CQ Press.


Week 5 / Sept 28 / In-Class Lab: Formatting Manuscripts

Take Home Exam 1 Due.


Hitt, Matthew and Benjamin Jones. 2011. “PRISM Introduction to \LaTeX.” The Ohio State University.

Cottrell, Allin. 1995. “A Short Introduction to \LaTeX.”


Chang, Winston. 2014. “\LaTeXe Cheat Sheet.”


Week 6 / Oct 5 / Conceptualization and Measurement

Research Brainstorm Due.


Week 7 / Oct 12 / Case Studies and Small-\(N\) Analysis

No written work is due this week.


Week 8 / Oct 19 / Observational and Large-\(N\) Analysis

Introductory Section Due.


Week 9 / Oct 26 / Interview and Survey Methods

No written work is due this week. Circulate Take Home Exam 2.


Week 10 / Nov 2 / In-Class Lab: Managing Data in Stata

Take Home Exam 2 Due.


Rodríguez, Germán. 2015. “Stata Tutorial: Data Management.” *Princeton University*.


Week 11 / Nov 9 / Laboratory and Field Experiments

Theory Section Due.


Week 12 / Nov 16 / Game Theory, Social Choice, and ABM

No written work is due this week.


Week 13 / Nov 30 / Reading and Evaluating Published Work

Data Section Due. Circulate Take Home Exam 3.


Week 14 / Dec 7 / In-Class Lab: Replicating Published Work

Take Home Exam 3 Due.


December 9 at 3:00 PM: Final Paper Drafts Due