

Research Design
PS 9501a / MRPE 9100
University of Western Ontario
Fall 2020

Class Information:

Thursday 9:30am-12:30pm
Online (link will be posted on OWL)

Instructor Information:

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Office Hours: Thursday 1-3pm or by appointment

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Course Description:

The objective of this course is to provide graduate students with an understanding of the fundamental principles of research design. By the end of the course students will be able to recognize the value of different approaches, and will be able to critically evaluate the theories, empirical strategies, causal claims and validity of other research. The course will not cover *every* method or *every* approach, but by the end of the course each student will be better readers of research and will also have a better understanding of how to conduct an original research project.

Because both PS and RPE students are taking this class, the majority of the readings will reference political science. However, the principles of research design are almost universal across the social sciences, and therefore applicable across many different research projects.

The course will contain both **asynchronous** and **synchronous** components. There will be weekly recorded lectures for students to watch. These lectures will help to clarify the reading materials. The **synchronous** component of the course will take place during the assigned class time. After the first week, students will be divided into cohorts and assigned to a specific block of time for discussion about the course materials.

Note:

One's choice of approach, method and analysis can be controversial. Many supporters of specific methods are unsympathetic to others. This course endeavours to present an overview of the various approaches taken in social science, and in particular political science. Thoughtful critiques of *all* methods will be encouraged. No one method is perfect; in fact, not all methods are equally appropriate, depending on the research question at hand.

Learning Objectives:

- This course will help you to understand the scientific method, why social science is a "science", and also why many may object to that characterization.
- By the end of this course, you should be able to identify and assess the positive and negative qualities of major approaches to the study of social and political problems.
- Through the topics covered, you will gain an appreciation of major issues related to research design.

Course Materials:

Required Books [*both are available through the library electronically*]

- John Gerring, 2012, *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*, 2nd ed., New York: Cambridge University Press. [referred to as Gerring below]
- Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, 1994, *Designing Social Inquiry*, Princeton: Princeton University Press. [referred to as KKV below]

Note: Readings not included in these books will be available electronically, either on the course OWL site or through one of the library's databases. A search for the journal title on the main library site will usually turn up the electronic site.

Assignments:

Participation – 20%

Short Assignments – 40%

1/ Research Element Identification – 10%

2/ Approach Defense Paper - 10%

3/ Article Theory Identification – 10%

4/ Causal Design Paper – 10%

Article Comparison (PS students) or Research Design (RPE students) – 40%

1/ Outline – 5%

2/ Comparison Report or Research Design – 35%

Participation

All students are expected to be active participants in the class. This means being prepared by finishing the assigned readings, watching the recorded lecture, and **preparing two discussion questions for the week's discussion (questions are to be posted to the online discussion board by 12pm (noon) Wednesday before each class)**. Beyond that, I encourage all students to engage with the instructor and other students through real-time discussion and the online discussion boards.

Short Assignments

Approach Defense Paper:

Students are expected to choose an approach covered in Week 2 and argue why they believe it is superior to the other approaches discussed that week for addressing their research interests. Students are required to discuss at least two alternative approaches to the one they prefer. This is intended to be a thoughtful reflection on what the student believes are the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches discussed through the lens of the student's own research interests, drawing upon the course readings. The assignment should be at least 3 and no more than 5 pages in length (double-spaced). **Papers are due on September 24.**

Research Element Identification:

A vital part of any analysis is learning what research has already been conducted. Part of the challenge when reading existing work done by others is understanding the main parts of the project. In this assignment, students are required to choose an article of interest from a scholarly journal (for example, *Social Science Quarterly*; *Canadian Journal of Political Science*; *Canadian Review of Sociology*; *Electoral Studies*; *International Organization*; *Journal of Politics*; if you are unsure please ask the instructor) and identify its key parts – research question; hypothesis(es); data source; methodological approach; key findings. Students are required to use Adobe Acrobat to highlight and comment on these elements of the paper in the document, and then submit the marked-up document to OWL. **The assignment is due on October 8.**

Article Theory Identification:

Students are expected to find an article in a peer-reviewed, scholarly journal and analyze the theory design put forth by the author. As will be discussed in class, theories are made up of hypothesized relationships between components that lead to specific outcomes. Part of critically reading research is being able to understand the underlying theoretical structure. The assignment should take the form of a diagram that identifies the key parts in the theoretical model, as well as a description of each part. **Paper are due on October 29.**

Causal Design Paper:

Students must design a comparative study or experiment to identify causality in the theory put forth in the article used for the Article Theory Identification assignment. (If the article is not appropriate, the student should consult with the instructor.) If the article already has a comparative or experimental design, the student is expected to design a different study. The paper should identify the cases or subjects to be studied, the variables that will be isolated and how that will be done, and how causality will be evaluated. Papers are expected to be at least 3 and no more than 5 pages in length. **Papers are due on November 12.**

Final Assignments

Article Comparison (PS students):

The purpose of this assignment is to consider how approaches and methodology can affect research findings. Students must choose two academic articles from peer-reviewed publications that address the same research topic. Students must submit an outline that identifies the research topic and the two articles for approval on **November 19**. The full assignment is due on **December 10**. The assignment will have two parts. In the first part, students are expected to outline the methodological approaches used by the authors and compare and contrast their findings. In the second part, students are expected to use information learned in the course to consider how the methodological choices contributed to the similarities or differences in findings. Students are expected to reference readings from class to justify their arguments. Papers should be at least 15 and no more than 17 pages, double-spaced; use Chicago style for referencing (<https://www.lib.uwo.ca/files/styleguides/ChicagoStyleAuthorDate.pdf>); footnotes instead of endnotes; 12-pt font and one-inch margins; and include a reference list.

Research Proposal (RPE students):

Students are expected to prepare a research proposal applying the knowledge they gained throughout the course to design a study that can inform policy development. The specific research topic should be of personal interest to the student. Students must submit a brief outline that identifies the research topic and approach for approval on **November 19**. The full assignment is due on **December 10**. The proposal should identify the topic, provide a literature review and indicate what information is unknown, state the research question and specific hypotheses to be examined, develop the concepts, and outline the procedures (operationalization, measurement, data) to be used. Students are not expected to provide explicit details about their data gathering techniques (i.e., experiments, surveys or interviews), but a clear discussion of the type of data that is required to address the research question should be provided. Students are expected to reference readings from class to justify their choices. Papers should be at least 15 and no more than 17 pages, double-spaced; use Chicago style for referencing (<https://www.lib.uwo.ca/files/styleguides/ChicagoStyleAuthorDate.pdf>); footnotes instead of endnotes; 12-pt font and one-inch margins; and include a reference list.

Topics and Readings

September 10

Introduction: Social Science as Science

- KKV, ch. 1.
- Gerring, ch. 1.
- A.F. Chalmers, *What is this thing called Science?* 3rd ed., Hackett. Ch. 1.
https://ebookppsunp.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/alan_chalmers_what_is_this_thing_called_sciencebookfi-org.pdf

September 17

Approaches

- David Marsh and Paul Furlong, 2002, "A Skin not a Sweater: Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science," in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, 2nd edition, ed. David Marsh and Gerry Stoker (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).
- James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, 2008, "Elaborating the "New Institutionalism"," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, ed. Sarah A. Binder, R.A.W. Rhodes and Bert A. Rockman (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
<https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199548460.01.0001/oxfordhb-9780199548460-e-1>
- Simon Hug, 2014, "Further Twenty Years of Pathologies? Is Rational Choice better than it used to be?" *Swiss Political Science Review* 20(3): 486–497.
- Frank Fischer, 2005, "Beyond Empiricism: Policy Inquiry in Post positivist Perspective," *Policy Studies Journal* 27(1): 129-46.
- Dvora Yanow, 2003, "Interpretive Empirical Political Science: What Makes This Not a Subfield of Qualitative Methods," *Qualitative Methods*, Fall.
- Keith Dowding, 2016, "Analytic Political Philosophy," *The Philosophy and Methods of Political Science* (London: Palgrave), ch. 9 (pp. 213-242).

September 24

Research Questions and Theories *Approach Defense Paper Due*

- Gerring, chs. 2-4
- Karl Gustafson and Linus Hagström, 2017, "What is the point? Teaching graduate students how to construct political science research puzzles." *European Political Science* 17(4): 634-648.

October 1

Literature Reviews

- Jeffrey W. Knopf, 2006, "Doing a Literature Review," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 39(1): 127-132.
- Justus Randolph, 2009, "A Guide to Writing the Dissertation Literature Review," *Practical Assessment, Research, and Evaluation* 14, Article 13. Available at:
<https://scholarworks.umass.edu/pare/vol14/iss1/13>
- Andreas Jungherr, 2016, "Twitter use in election campaigns: A systematic literature review," *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 13(1): 72-91, DOI:10.1080/19331681.2015.1132401

October 8

Description and Conceptualization *Research Element Identification*

- Gerring, chs. 5, 6
- KKV, ch. 2
- Siddhartha Baviskar and Mary Frane T. Malone, 2004, "What Democracy Means to Citizens – and Why It Matters," *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 76: 3-23.

October 15

Measurement

- Gerring, ch. 7
- KKV, ch. 5
- Amanda Bittner and Elizabeth Goodyear-Grant, 2017, "Sex Isn't Gender: Reforming Concepts and Measurements in the Study of Public Opinion," *Political*

Behavior 39(4): 1019–41.

October 22

Causality

- Gerring, chs. 8, 9
- KKV, ch. 3
- Tulia G. Falletti and Julia F. Lynch, 2009, "Context and Causal Mechanisms in Political Analysis." *Comparative Political Studies* 42(9): 1143-66.
- Nils Holtug, 2017, "Identity, causality and social cohesion," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43(7): 1084-1100.

October 29

**Comparative Method
and Experiments**

Article Theory

Identification Due

- Gerring, ch. 10
- Arend Lijphart, 1975, "The Comparable-Cases Strategy in Comparative Research," *Comparative Political Studies* 8(2): 158-177.
- Charles Ragin, 1987, *The Comparative Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press), ch. 6
- James N. Druckman, Donald P. Green, James H. Kuklinski and Arthur Lupia, 2006, "The Growth and Development of Experimental Research in Political Science," *American Political Science Review* 100(4): 627-635.
- Cindy D. Kam and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister, 2013, "Name Recognition and Candidate Support," *American Journal of Political Science* 57(4): 971-986.

November 5

FALL BREAK – NO CLASS

November 12

**Process Tracing and
Studying Cases**

Causal Design Paper Due

- John Gerring, 2004, "What is a Case Study and What is it Good for?" *American Political Science Review* 98(2): 341-354.
- Jason Seawright and John Gerring, 2008, "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options." *Political Research Quarterly* 61(2): 294-308.
- David Collier, 2011, "Understanding Process Tracing," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44(4): 823-30.
- Henry E. Brady, 2010, "Data-Set Observations versus Causal-Process Observations: The 2000 U.S. Presidential Election," in *Rethinking Social Inquiry*, 2nd ed., ed. Henry E. Brady and David Collier (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield).
- Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of Silver Blaze." Originally published in *Strand Magazine* Vol. 4 (December 24, 1892): 645–60.

November 19

Qualitative

Observational Data

- Elisabeth Jean Wood, 2007, "Field Research," in *The Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (New York: Oxford University Press), ch. 5 (pp. 123-146).
- Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, 1995, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (Sage 1995), ch. 5.
- Various authors, 2002, "Symposium: Interview Methods in Political Science," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35(4):663-688. ****make sure to read all of the pages****
- Layna Mosley, 2013, "'Just Talk to People'? Interviews in Contemporary Political Science," in *Interview Research*, ed. Layna Mosley (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), pp. 1-28.
- Katherine J. Cramer, 2016, *The Politics of Resentment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), ch. 2.

November 26

Quantitative

- Chava Frankfort-Nachmias and David Nachmias, 2008, *Research Methods in the Social Sciences* (Worth Publishers), ch. 8.

Observational Data

- Nora Cate Schaeffer and Stanley Presser, 2003, "The Science of Asking Questions," *Annual Review of Sociology* 29: 65-88.
- Richard Johnston, 2008, "Survey Methodology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, ed. Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady and David Collier (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Henry E. Brady, "Contributions of Survey Research to Political Science," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 33(1): 47-57.
- Shane P. Singh and Judd R. Thornton, 2019, "Elections Activate Partisanship across Countries," *American Political Science Review* 113(1): 248–253.

**December 3
Ethics**

- Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, ch. 1 (Ethics Framework). <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/Default/>
- Tony Porter, 2008, "Research Ethics Governance and Political Science in Canada," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 4(3): 495-499.
- Christie Aschwanden and Maggie Koerth-Baker, 2016, "How Two Grad Students Uncovered An Apparent Fraud - And A Way To Change Opinions On Transgender Rights." <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-two-grad-students-uncovered-michael-lacour-fraud-and-a-way-to-change-opinions-on-transgender-rights/>
- Arthur Lupia and Colin Elman, 2014, "Openness in Political Science: Data Access and Research Transparency." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 47(1): 19-42.
- Jessica Ball and Pauline Janyst, 2008, "Enacting Research Ethics in Partnerships with Indigenous Communities in Canada: 'Do It in a Good Way'," *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics* 3(2):33-51.
- Zachary M. Schrag, 2011, "The case against ethics review in the social sciences," *Research Ethics* 7(4): 120-131.

**December 8
* NOTE SPECIAL DAY *
Proposal Workshop**

- Students will act as the audience while PhD students present their research proposals and receive prepared feedback from their discussant. Time for open discussion and questions from students will be set aside for each paper.
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